

*The Writing Center & Reading/Study Skills Lab presents:*  
**Tip Sheet on: Persuasive Essays**

*Adapted from Evergreen Sixth Edition by Fawcett/Sandberg*

*To persuade is to convince someone that a particular opinion or point of view is the correct one. Commercials on television are a form of persuasion. Advertisers attempt to persuade viewers that the product they sell is the best one to purchase.*

*You will often have to persuade in writing. If you want a raise in your job you may have to write a persuasive memo to convince your employer that you deserve one. You will have to back up, or support, your request with proof, listing important projects, you have completed, noting new responsibilities you have taken upon yourself, or showing how you have increased sales.*

**Persuasive or Argumentative Thesis**

The writer begins a persuasive essay by stating clearly what he or she is arguing for or against. Words like **should**, **ought**, and **must** are especially effective in the thesis statement of a persuasive essay.

Possible thesis:

Passengers **should** refuse to ride in any vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking.

Pet animals should be allowed in children's hospital rooms because they speed healing.

Most people should get at least one hour of vigorous exercise three times a week.

Companies should not be allowed to conduct random drug testing on employees.

The federal government should (should not) prohibit the sale of handguns through the mail.

**EXAMPLE**

Passengers **should** refuse to ride in any vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking. First and most important, such a refusal could save lives. The National Council on Alcoholism reports that drunk driving causes 25,000 deaths and 50 percent of all traffic accidents each year. Not only the drivers but the passengers who agree to travel with them are responsible. Second, riders might tell themselves that some people drive well even after a few drinks, but this is just not true. Dr. Burton Belloc of the local Alcoholism Treatment Center explains that even one drink can lengthen the reflex time and weaken the judgment needed for safe driving. Other riders might feel foolish to ruin a social occasion or inconvenience themselves or others by speaking up, but risking their lives is even more foolish. Finally, by refusing to ride with a drinker, one passenger could influence other passengers or the driver. Marie Furillo, a student at Central High School, is an example. When three friends who had obviously been drinking offered her a ride home from school, she refused, despite the driver's teasing. Hearing Marie's refusal, two of her friends got out of the car. Until the laws are changed and a vast re-education takes place, the bloodshed on American highways will probably continue. But there is one thing people can do: They can refuse to risk their lives for the sake of a party.

- *The first reason in the argument **predicts the consequence**. If passengers refuse to ride with drinkers, lives could be saved.*
- *The writer also supports this reason with **facts**: **Drunk driving causes 25,000 deaths...each year**.*
- *The second reason in the argument is really an **answer to the opposition**. The writer answers the point that some people believe they drive well even after having a few drinks.*
- *The writer supports this reason by **referring to an authority**. That is, the writer gives the opinion of someone who can provide unbiased and valuable information about the subject. "Dr. Burton Belloc...."*
- *The third reason in the argument is that **risking your life is foolish**.*
- *The final reason in the argument is that **one passenger could influence others**.*
- ***Persuasive paragraphs either can begin with the most important reason and then continue with less important ones, or they can begin with the least important reasons, saving the most important for last.***

### EXAMPLE

This state **should** offer free parenting classes, taught by experts, to anyone who wishes to become a parent. First and most important, such parenting classes could save children's lives. Every year, over two million American children are hurt, maimed, or killed by their own parents, according to the National Physicians Association. Some of these tragedies could be prevented by showing parents how to recognize and deal with their frustration and anger. Next, good parenting skills do not come naturally, but must be learned. Dr. Phillip Graham, chairman of England's National Children's Bureau, says that most parents have "no good role models" and simply parent the way they were parented. The courses would not only improve parenting skills but might also identify people at high risk of abusing their children. Third, critics might argue that the state has no business getting involved in parenting, which is a private responsibility. However, the state already makes decisions about who is a fit parent-in the courts, child-protection services, and adoption agencies-but often this is too late for the well-being of the child. Finally, if we do nothing, the hidden epidemic of child abuse and neglect will continue. We train our children's teachers, doctors, day-care workers, and bus drivers. We must also educate parents.

### Methods of Persuasion

**Facts:** They should appeal to the reader's mind, not just his emotions. The source of the facts should be clear. Avoid vague statements like "everyone knows that" or "they all say."

**Referring to an authority:** An authority is an expert, someone who can be relied on to give unbiased facts and information.

**Examples:** Avoid examples that are not typical enough to support your general statement. That your friend was once bitten by a dog does not adequately prove that all dogs are dangerous pets.

**Predicting the consequence:** helps the reader visualize what will occur *if something does or does not happen*. Avoid exaggerating the consequence. For instance, telling the reader, "If you don't eat fresh fruit every day, you will never be truly healthy," exaggerates the consequences of not eating fresh fruit and makes the reader suspicious.

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