

FRIENDLY PERSUASION:

Persuasive writing for business
and academic purposes

WORKBOOK 3: Academic Writing

Colin Neville
Effective Learning Service

Persuasive Writing for Business and Academic Purposes

This workbook has been written to accompany the first of three linked effective learning workshops at the School of Management on the topic of persuasive writing for both business and academic purposes. Each workbook will be supplied at the start of the relevant workshop.

- Workbook 1 (and effective learning workshop 1) offers a general introduction to the topic.
- Workbook 2 (and effective learning workshop 2) looks in more detail at writing for business purposes, including correspondence and marketing information.
- **Workbook 3** (and effective learning workshop 3) discusses persuasion in academic writing, and predominantly for essays and reports.

The ethics of persuasion

"To be persuasive, we must be believable. To be believable, we must be credible. To be credible, we must be truthful" (Hellmut Walters).

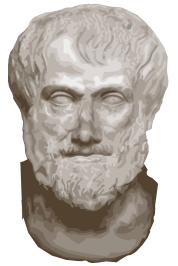
Persuasion has been defined as a "*...process in which the communicator seeks to elicit a desired response*" (Anderson 1971).

The power of persuasive writing can, of course, be used for manipulative purposes. But as Hellmut Walters argues (above), and which certainly applies in a business context, you will lose credibility in the long term with your customers if you abuse this power and manipulate them to respond in a way that you know is not in their best and real interests.

The persuasive but untruthful CV; the persuasive but dishonest advertisement; the persuasive but plagiarized essay, may score you a victory in the short term. But it is a hollow one, and likely to bring you personal, if not public, shame or disrepute in the longer term.

To be genuinely persuasive, you must be always honest to and with yourself, and with others.

Workbook 3: Academic Writing



Old but still fresh

Over 2,000 years ago, the persuasive impact of words was discussed by Aristotle. He presented an analysis of rhetorical strategies, which included three elements: ***logos, pathos and ethos***:

<i>Logos</i>	<i>Pathos</i>	<i>Ethos</i>
<p>Logos are appeals to reason and an attempt to persuade the audience (or reader) through sound reasoning.</p> <p>This will be done by the presentation of reliable evidence, usually in the form of facts, definitions, statistics and other data that has an appeal to the logic and intelligence of the audience.</p>	<p>Pathos is concerned with an appeal to the emotions.</p> <p>The speaker or writer will attempt to induce a particular response which can include anger, understanding, sympathy, tolerance; it will tap into the sentiment or feelings of the audience or readership.</p>	<p>Ethos is the appeal of the speaker or writer to the audience or readership, in terms of his or her credibility and experience.</p> <p>The writer or speaker will present, directly or indirectly, a profile that sets a stamp of authority on the words used.</p>

Aristotle's ideas were originally concerned with oratory (public speaking) and still are an excellent foundation for students wanting to improve their presentation skills.

However, his ideas have been adapted to the contemporary study of all forms of persuasive writing.

Exercise 1

'Emotion' is not normally a term associated with essay. What images and associative words do you associate with essay writing?

Example:

Objective

(What else?)

Essays

Essays are a traditional form of assessment in higher education in Britain and elsewhere. Essays offer you an opportunity to learn more about a subject and to develop the skills of measured and structured writing. This disciplined form of writing is a skill required by many professions today.

Essay writing also encourages you to research a subject, analyse arguments, and formulate a considered response to the essay question.

There are typical five stages of writing in an essay:

1. Introduction
2. Background to the topic
3. Presentation of main issues
4. Discussion and analysis of main issues
5. Conclusion.

Tutors expect students to be particularly careful at stages three and four in the presentation of referenced evidence to support ideas presented and discussed. This includes the selection and use of words to convey an idea precisely and accurately. This serves two purposes.

First, it conveys a good impression of the writer: as a thinking person; a person who does not just unleash unsubstantiated opinions, but has tried to seek reliable evidence to support points made.

Second, it respects the reader by presenting viewpoints built on the foundations of valid evidence, rather than attempting to manipulate the reader by simply playing on his or her emotions.

The measured style of writing in essays is part of this process of respecting the reader. We recognise the way the tabloid press can inflame opinion by the use of emotive headlines. But essays are different, have different aims, and require a different writing style.

Over the years, a range of conventions and expectations have been established on essay writing. One such convention is about writing in the third person and avoid using the word 'I' in assignments. So, instead of saying 'I think', you substitute this for 'It can be argued...', or other similar term.

Like most conventions, however, this one is subject to the winds of change and some academics have challenged the assumptions behind the practice of writing in the third person. They believe that first person style of writing encourages students to take 'ownership' of their own ideas, and this can discourage plagiarism.

But there is still a strong sense of continuity among many academics and support for the view that students should attempt to step back from a topic and present an objective view of it. Hence the first-person term 'I' is discouraged as it is often regarded as a symbol of a subjective element in writing.

At the same time, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, academics will expect students to present, or even champion, a particular view, or support a particular position in an essay. However, they usually stipulate that this should only be done through the presentation of carefully referenced arguments. They expect students to research a topic, explore and present a range of perspectives, and then arrive at a conclusion or position based on their interpretation of the evidence presented.

'Emotion' and related words



- **Emotion:** in this context is a generic term for describing a range of feelings. These may be hidden and private, or open and obvious to others. Emotions are also closely related to the five **senses**, as these can provoke the emotions.

- **Emotional:** this term is often used to express the **outward** displays of emotions, particularly those concerned with the expression of sadness, love, joy or anger. The term 'over-emotional' can have negative connotations in that it suggests that a particular emotional display has moved across some hidden cultural or societal boundary, from 'normal' to 'excess'.



- **Emotive:** this term is often used to label actions that are designed to, or have the effect of, inflaming strong emotional responses in others, for example, "he used emotive language".

Pick out the emotive elements in both of the following essay extracts. The first is taken from an essay submitted by a past student at the School of Management, and the second is adapted from Sheila Cottrell's book 'Critical Thinking Skills' (2005, pp.216-218).

Example 1

There can be no doubting that people's ability to write is going downhill. The society of today seem so image conscious and has to have the latest technology as this gives off "hip" vibes. But it is not just the adolescent teenagers who are suffering this plight of developing and using these new languages; it is spreading to the "adult" world too. The increased use of 'txt spk' is just laziness, although it could also be seen as a more efficient way of communicating as people do still understand it.

Example 1 above also contains a cliché, a tautology (redundant word), and an apparent contradiction. Can you identify these?

Example 2

This argument must really stick in the throat of developed countries. Having watched developed countries growing rich by burning vast amounts of fossil fuel through industry, this behaviour suddenly becomes unacceptable at the point at which they are finally poised to get in on the action. As Dr Mwandoya, chair of the developing countries' caucus on climate change, points out, many developing countries cannot even afford a basic standard of living for their citizens, let alone put resources into environmental programmes. As he suggests, why should developing countries modify their behaviour whilst developed countries continue with a wasteful lifestyle?

Developing countries will always want to follow in the footsteps of more developed countries. Developed countries are like parents who smoke 60 cigarettes a day but get angry if their little children then threaten to take up the habit themselves.

Example 2 above also contains emotive writing, plus a false analogy and a stereotyping assumption. Can you identify these?

Rationalist perspective

This academic perspective in higher education connects with a **rationalist** perspective in traditional philosophy. This presents the view that rational argument should exclude considerations that can appeal to the irrational side of human nature.

Within this viewpoint, only valid evidence is worthy of consideration and all ideas presented must have a solid base of evidence before they are worthy of consideration.

Emotion in argument is distrusted on the grounds that these are often weak, and that they rouse the sentiments and prejudices of readers, rather than appeal to their reason.

However, this distrust is often particularly directed at the following types of emotional argument:

1. **Arguments that appeal to popular sentiment.** These can also be called 'appeals to the gallery' and are aimed at appeal to mass enthusiasms or popular sentiment; ideas that aim to please or appease a mass of people, or appeal to a common practice that may, nevertheless, be a dubious one.
2. **Appeals to pity.** These are arguments that are deliberately aimed at arousing pity, sympathy or compassion in the reader, whilst not presenting the full picture of a situation.
3. **Appeals to threat, force or fear.** This can be where the appeal is directed at overt or covert fears in an attempt to persuade the readership to accept a particular argument. This can be quite legitimate if the threat is real and proven, but dubious if the causes of such fears are based on tenuous evidence.
4. **Appeals to authority.** These can involve an argument that rests its sole case on respect for authority or input or analysis from an 'expert'; or where the wrong inferences or conclusions are drawn from the expert advice given; or where an expert authority is misrepresented to silence an adversary, or to quell other legitimate opinions.

Whilst citing evidence from expert and reliable sources is at the heart of academic enquiry and writing, the evidence must be from valid and reliable sources - and is **never** above criticism.

What type of emotional argument do you find in the following extract?

Everyone is selfish; everyone is doing what he believes will make himself happier. The recognition of that can take most of the sting out of accusations that you're being "selfish." Why should you feel guilty for seeking your own happiness when that's what everyone else is doing, too?

Source: Harry Browne (1973). 'The Unselfishness Trap', from *How I Found Freedom in an Unfree World*. NY: MacMillan.

Fallacious and non-fallacious arguments

However, a distinction must be made between fallacious and non-fallacious arguments, and between 'emotions' and 'emotional', as defined earlier.

Fallacious arguments are those that are not valid because the supporting evidence is weak or non-existent, whilst non-fallacious arguments are built on more valid and reliable sources.

Walton (1992) argues that appeals to the emotions that are used simply to support and bolster flawed and weak arguments are not justified morally, and do not have a place in academic writing.

But if an argument **is** valid, because the evidence supporting it is reliable, then balanced appeals to the emotions and humanity of the target readership can be justified:

Any good theory of argument must recognise that emotional appeals and responses need to be balanced against cognitive considerations. But on the other hand, in most of the important decisions in life, sensitivity to emotions and feelings of one's own, as well as others, is extremely important (Walton 1992, p.69).

Walton argues that appeals to emotion in academic writing can be negative if they reinforce the biases of the writer who will not compromise an ingrained position, and who deliberately uses emotional arguments to persuade others to accept an invalid viewpoint.

However, he argues that appeals to emotion in writing can be useful if it opens up "*new and valuable lines of argumentation, prompting critical questioning and steers the argument in a constructive direction*" (p.28).

Connecting with the emotions (and particularly through the five senses) can also make ideas more accessible, understandable and relevant to a reader.

The problem with an entirely rationalist approach is that it can inadvertently encourage a style of writing that appears removed from the concerns of people outside the academic world (and sometimes within it).

This style of writing can give the term 'academic writing' a bad name.

Garfinkel argues that the relationship between the act of representation and represented object is dialectical not unidirectional. The character of the representation changes in the attempt to explain the perceived nature of underlying reality while the object 'changes', in turn, to accommodate the language employed to represent it. Representation, in other words, is a dynamic, interactive process in which the 'actor', and the form of representation, that is language, 'constructs' some at least of the reality under investigation (Garfinkel 1967).

It over-complicates the subject and uses language that mystifies most people, including many other academics!

The Plain English Campaign website regularly lampoons examples of this type of convoluted writing: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>

Emotive and Emotion

So, when writing essays **emotive** language should be avoided. However, if you are presenting reliable and valid evidence, and you are strongly influenced by this to support a particular position, you can justifiably use all your powers of persuasion to convince your reader of the justice and validity of your arguments.

How to do this? Remind yourself of Aristotle's three elements of persuasion on page 2. The emphasis in essays should be on the logical (logos) elements, but the emotion (pathos) and credibility (ethos) related elements can also be present.

Three vital elements in academic writing:

Logos	Pathos	Ethos
<p>You check facts carefully before including them in essays.</p> <p>You demonstrate your knowledge of relevant theories, models, ideas and practices.</p> <p>You give reasons and evidence to back-up statements. This evidence will be referenced accurately.</p> <p>You demonstrate your knowledge of a range of arguments.</p>	<p>You give examples to illustrate the theories and ideas you present. This helps to connect these concepts with people's everyday experiences.</p> <p>You use words that have real meaning to people: that connect with their senses and reality of their lives.</p> <p>The aim to address the reader in an intelligent manner in a careful and precise, yet clear and accessible way.</p> <p>See also page 13.</p>	<p>You build credibility in the minds of your reader if:</p> <p>There is a clear structure to your writing (this presents a positive impression of you as someone who has carefully organised their ideas before writing).</p> <p>Your writing is succinct and focused; this serves to reinforce the point made above.</p> <p>There are no spelling or grammatical errors in your text. This demonstrates your command of English, which reinforces a desired positive impression of you.</p> <p>You demonstrate your reading on the essay topic.</p>

Good example of effective academic writing

This is the introduction from an essay; *The Benefits of Good Writing: Or why does it matter that students write well?* by Rukhsana Ahmad and Katharine McMahon, and is taken from a report published by the Royal Literary Fund.

Introduction

At its most beautiful and complex, excellent writing crystallises into art. The lyrical poem, unforgettable play, haunting novel, powerful essay or compelling film are all collections of words. Even when writing neither seeks nor attains artistic status, for many of us it is the familiar and preferred route to self-expression and action. We use the written word to affirm and connect, to protest and defend, demand and proclaim, inform and persuade. Through writing we can explore, understand and formulate elusive and complex ideas, share information and engage in debate. This process does as much to elucidate our own thoughts as it does to communicate them to others.

But the most functional and elementary role of good writing is antecedent to its creative and expressive forms and modes. This resides in good writing's capacity to transmit, interpret and extend our inheritance of learning over the ages, passing it on to future generations with as much clarity and exactitude as possible. This aspect of writing is the most pertinent to teaching and learning within an academic context. It is, therefore, imperative that our universities and institutions of higher education enable students to achieve the highest possible standard of writing.

This chapter will first explore the term 'good writing' and its qualities, and then establish the benefits to the student, the university and the wider community of ensuring that students at all levels can write well. The shadow side will also be explored. What happens to students who lack the confidence, motivation and skills to write effectively – and what are the implications for their degree course, their personal development and for those who teach or study with them?

(Ahmad and McMahon 2006)

This is an effective introduction. Pick out elements from this extract that you feel contribute to the effective writing. Use the space below for your comments.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their comments on the effective writing elements mentioned in the text above. The box is currently blank.

Some specific techniques in essay writing

Essay writing allows students an opportunity to step back from a subject, look at it, and write about it, in a cool and dispassionate way.

However, the essay can still connect with the *pathos* element: the emotions and senses of the reader. Here are a few ways this can be done:

Quotations

These can have an impact on the reader, particularly if the language of the person quoted is significantly different from the essayist. A quotation in a colloquial writing style can provide a welcome contrast to your own necessarily more formal style of writing for the essay: the reader can see and internally hear the difference.

A quotation by a well-known commentator can also add gravitas and interest to the work. However, don't overdo the inclusion of quotations; they should be included very selectively, and always ensure the quotation adds to, or complements, the points you are making.

Words that explicitly connect with actions, senses, and memories

You can select words that connect that convey a sense of action, connect with our senses, or have other emotional resonances. In the extract on page 11, for example, there were adjectives such as 'lyrical', 'unforgettable', 'haunting', and terms like 'shadow side'. These add a qualitative dimension to the writing. Note too, the use of the word 'crystallises'. The authors could have simply said 'changes'. But the word 'crystallises' is a more precise – and elegant – term to use, as it conveys the idea of separate and disparate elements fusing into one attractive, unified form.

Rhetorical questions

You must be careful with these, as your role is to answer the question, not pose them! However, if you both pose the question and attempt to answer it, then this can make for interesting reading, and is a technique that is effective both in writing and in formal presentations; notice how the extract on page 11 ends.

Strive for variety

Strive for variety in your writing. Sentences can be a mixture of lengths to keep the reader's interest. Lengthy sentences of 30 words or more are always risky, as you may lose a grip of the sentence if you include too many clauses and sub-clauses. But if done well, and followed occasionally with short, punchy sentences, this can add variety to writing. You can also include a mixture of active and passive writing to keep the interest of your

reader. If you are not sure what is meant by 'active' and 'passive' writing, read the Effective Learning Service booklet 'Effective Writing' that will describe and illustrate these terms.

Suggested reading on this topic:

Walton, D. (1992). *The Place of Emotion in Argument*. USA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

References

Ahmad, R. and McMahon, K. (2006). The Benefits of Good Writing: Or Why does it matter that Students Write Well? In *Writing Matters*. Royal Literary Fund. Available at <http://www.rlf.org.uk/fellowshipscheme/research.cfm> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2007].

Andersen, K. (1971). *Persuasion Theory and Practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.