**Classroom Strategies**

**Persuasive Writing**

Persuasive writing is a form of nonfiction writing that encourages careful word choice, the development of logical arguments, and a cohesive summary. Young children can be guided through a series of simple steps in an effort to develop their persuasive writing skills.

Here are some ways you can help your students master persuasive writing:

* Have students listen to and analyze various persuasive speeches and writings in the media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, and the Internet), looking for words, phrases, and techniques (e.g., reasons, repetition, counterarguments, comparisons) that are designed to persuade. This improves critical reading and thinking skills. The [Persuasive Strategies PowerPoint](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson56/persuasive_strategies.pps#256,1) offers some of the more common techniques.
* Break down the elements of a persuasive speech or piece of writing: an introduction that states the position clearly, at least three pieces of evidence to support the position, and a conclusion that restates the topic and summarizes the main points. The interactive [Persuasion Map](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/persuasion_map/) provides a framework to help students organize their ideas before writing.
* Challenge students to address what people currently believe about the issue so that they can convince them to change through counterarguments. Have them interview 5–10 people (with varying perspectives) about their current beliefs on an issue and create a graph to see patterns in people’s arguments. Students can mention these different beliefs toward the beginning of their writing piece before they make their own argument.
* Find authentic opportunities for students to write persuasive letters to family or community, speeches, classified advertisements, and other persuasive pieces. After a unit on recycling, for example, students could write a persuasive letter to their families to convince them to recycle more. Or students might write to their school librarian and try to convince him or her to purchase something in particular for the library. The [Speechwriting Website](http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/speech/index.htm) offers a student tutorial, tips from the pros, and audio samples of other students’ writing.
* Incorporate peer review techniques so students analyze and improve each other’s persuasive arguments (oral or written). See [Teaching Writing: Peer Review](http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/peer-review-30145.html) for further guidance. Use the [Peer Review Guidelines for Persuasive Letters](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson945/PeerReview.pdf) to guide students’ review of persuasive letters.
* Challenge students to differentiate fact and opinion from an article. Start by discussing short examples to see if students understand the difference. Use the [Fact vs. Opinion](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/LP/LP_PDF%20Word/LA_Fact_vs_Opinion_Packet.pdf) handout from Education Oasis to reinforce this concept.
* Show students examples of how community discussion on an issue can lead to alternative positions that take different people’s needs into account, perhaps by looking in the editorial section of the local newspaper. Issues such as adding bike paths or improving parks might be interesting for the students to follow. You might encourage them to participate by having them write a letter to the editor.
* Encourage students to participate in online role-play, respond to YouTube videos or blogs, or create their own websites as ways for students to debate a real issue with a broader audience.

Vary the types of assignments you give to meet the different learning needs, styles, and interests of your students. If students sense that voicing their opinions may lead to change, it can motivate them to formulate effective arguments for their positions and propose possible solutions.

## How to teach persuasive writing

1. Have students listen to or read examples of persuasive writing. Together, listen and look for words, phrases and techniques that helped the writer persuade the listener.
2. Brainstorm something that is important to an individual child or the group. Is it extra recess? Another chapter of the read aloud? The potential closing of a library? The more authentic the issue, the more passionately your students will write.
3. Once the important privilege is chosen, have the child (or class) start to list reasons why they should be allowed this privilege. "Just because," and "because I like it" should not be considered valid reasons. Students can work together to generate at least three good reasons to support an argument. [This list of persuasive words](http://www.readingrockets.org/content/pdfs/persuasivewordsphrases.pdf) (44K PDF)\* and phrases from the site Teaching Ideas may help get students started.
4. Have students do some research to gather facts or examples that support their reasons.
5. Have students summarize their position.

**Lesson Planning Suggestions**

**Week One**

**Introduction to the Unit & Mini-Lesson (1 day)**

**Introduction:**   
Begin the unit with a discussion of persuasive writing and its many uses. Explain that persuasive writing is a tool for getting others to understand a particular point of view. If possible, provide adequate examples of persuasive writing students may have already encountered without even being aware of the fact.

Be sure to explain that persuasive writing relies heavily on facts- not opinions. That means students will be doing a little research before they actually begin writing.

Next, discuss the overall scope and sequence of the workshop. If your class isn't already familiar with the steps of the writing process, review the steps and activities involved with each step. Be sure to include how much class time and homework will be involved with this project.

**Mini-Lesson**   
The [mini-lessons](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/writing/minilessons.asp?topic=Persuasive) that accompany this unit, using transitional words and supporting examples align nicely with the type of writing required to create a persuasive essay.

Start by explaining the importance of transitional words and phrases. Discuss how these skills make it easier to compare and contrast viewpoints- an important skill in persuasive writing. Allow time for students to experience the online activities.

End the day with a lesson on supporting details and their relevance in persuasive writing. Explain that the supporting details must be facts, not opinions and that these details will be obtained through research.

If possible, bring in examples of persuasive writing and ask the students to locate supporting details included by the author and then make a list of transitional words and phrases the author used.

**Pre-Writing (3–4 days)**   
The pre-writing activities actually fall under four different headings:

* [Choose an Issue](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/writing/tguide/index.asp#locate)
* [Research It](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/writing/tguide/index.asp#prepare)
* [Make Your Case](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/writing/tguide/index.asp#conduct)

**Choose an Issue**   
The first, and most important step for writing a persuasive essay is deciding what a student wants persuade someone to believe. Is there a compelling social issue they'd like to correct, a situation within the school that they'd like to change, an issue from history that needs to be addressed, or maybe even a political condition they'd like to explore- the possibilities are endless!

**Research It**   
Once students have decided on an issue they'd like to explore, give ample time for the research process. Explain that good research is critical to a successful persuasive essay. It is essential that they have content to back up their claims. Remind students to take detailed notes as they record information that documents both sides of their issue. They will be referring to these notes as they begin to draft their paper.

Encourage the use of a variety of different resources: encyclopedias, newspapers, magazines, textbooks, online interviews, public documents, and face-to-face interviews with experts.

**Week Two**

**Make Your Case**

**List the arguments (2–3 days)**  
Discuss the importance of relevant arguments in persuasive writing. Distribute the Arguments For and Arguments Against worksheet. Examine the fact that it is impossible to persuade someone to believe one's viewpoint without also considering the viewpoint of those who may disagree with him or her.

Brainstorm as many examples as possible. Have students review their research and then use the worksheet to create a list of arguments for and arguments against their issue.

Finally, explain that ultimately they will be choosing their three best arguments to include in their writing.

**Plan the Structure (1–2 days)**  
Explain that all persuasive essays should contain the following elements:

* Opening/Introduction: In this area students will introduce their readers to the topic and give a little background information. Tell students that it works well to state the topic in the form of a question- Is the Iditarod an example of cruelty to animals or a sporting event? They must be sure to state their position on the issue within the last sentence of the paragraph. In the opening, they should pull the reader in and give them a reason to keep reading.
* Body: Explain that the body of their essay should contain at least three paragraphs. Each paragraph must state a different viewpoint on their topic, examine the opposition to that viewpoint and provide a defense of that viewpoint. Many of the best examples of persuasive writing save the most compelling viewpoint for third body paragraph leaving the reader with the strongest point before closing. The defense must be supported with evidence documented through research. Remind students not to forget the reason for examining an opposing viewpoint- they're trying to prove, through the use of factual information-why their opinion is better.
* Within each paragraph students must be sure to use powerful transitional words and phrases as you compare each point.
* Closing/Conclusion: Explain that the conclusion should always restate the issue and then quickly tie in the three viewpoints examined in the body paragraphs. Students should never introduce new information in the closing. Tell them to simply summarize the arguments and then close with a powerful statement relating to their originally stated issue.

**Week Three**

Week three is when the real writing begins. Students should write their drafts and make revisions to content.

**Drafting (2–3 days)**  
  
Once students have chosen their topic, done the research, and decided on the structure of their paper, it's time to begin working on their rough draft.

A rough draft allows students to begin the process of organizing their work and getting their thoughts down on paper. As they begin this phase of the work, remind students to focus on the content and allow their ideas to flow freely. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation will be corrected in later steps of the writing process.

Next, send the students to their desks and have them read through research and review their structural planing sheet. Require students to spend an adequate amount of time students thinking about ways to open their reports - a great "hook" to keep the reader interested.

Finally, allow students at least one class period and additional time at home to complete this part of the process. Remind students that this is simply a time to get their thoughts on paper- get content down now, and go back later to make corrections.

**Revising (2–3 days)**   
When everyone has completed his or her first draft, it's time to begin the revision process. Spend time discussing what actually happens during a revision.

* Add additional information
* Rearrange events or information
* Remove unneeded information
* Replace existing text with new text that better describes or adds additional insight. Remind students that they do not need to correct grammar, punctuation, or spelling during this phase of the writing process.

Tip for Students: A great way to check flow, content, and sentence structure is to read a paper out loud.

**Week Four**

**Editing (1–2 days)**   
Once students have drafted and revised their work, it's time to check for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, subject/verb agreement, and spelling.

**Reviewing (1-2 days)**   
The essays are almost ready for their debut. The reviewing process comes next. This step is painful to some students, so be sure to offer a variety of options for review.

* Teacher Conference
* Peer Review
* Self-Assessment

Tell students to think of the Reviewing process as a dress rehearsal—one last time to "get it right" before the rest of the world gets to see their report.

**Publishing (1–2 days)**   
In some schools, this step is called "Celebrate". In many aspects, publishing is a form of celebration. It's a time for students to share their work with others and in this case, the world. There are many great ways to publish a persuasive essay. One great way is to share it with the world by posting it on the Internet. Other great publishing ideas include:

* Using their persuasive writing as the base, have each student create a 60-second videotaped commercial designed to convince others of their views.
* Actually mail the students' papers to the person or organization they're trying to persuade. Be sure to have them request a formal response to their letter.
* Have students use a multimedia software program to create an interactive version of their writing complete with graphics, photos, and recordings that help state their argument.
* Host a debate on the issues. Ask fellow students to take the opposing viewpoints, research their side, and then host a debate.
* See if you can get your school or local paper to publish the students' persuasive writing attempts.