When you read an article, it’s important to clarify the issue being debated. When you’re identifying the issue, phrasing something as a question can often help clearly state what is being argued over.

- Should teens have the right to private medical appointments?

- Should euthanasia be legalised?

- Should fox poisoning be banned?

- Should heroin be decriminalised?

**IDENTIFYING THE CONTENTION**

Contention is simply another word for point-of-view or opinion. Read the piece of persuasive writing carefully. What does the writer believe? Starting a sentence with the word ‘that’ can help you identify the writer’s contention.

- That reality television is a waste of time.

- That teens should have access to private medical appointments

- That fox baiting should be banned.

**IDENTIFYING TONE**

Tone refers to the overall feeling of a piece of writing. Here are some useful words to help you describe tone.

**Logical:** rational, reasonable, analytical, cogent.

**Neutral:** impartial, balanced, objective, unbiased.

**Informed:** knowledgeable, well-read.

**Passionate:** emotional, emotive, ardent, vehement.

**Witty:** humorous, satirical, lighthearted, tongue-in-cheek.

**PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES**

Writers can use a range of techniques to persuade. When you’re reading persuasive writing—or writing persuasively yourself—you need to think carefully about how techniques like these are used to position the reader to accept a particular point of view.

**Adjective.**Describing words, often used to make the reader feel a particular way about an issue.

e.g. “Reality shows allow us to feel a bland, artificial version of that incredible thrill you get from having a crack and chasing your ambitions.”

**Adverbs.**Adverbs are words that modify adjectives or verbs. Like adjectives, they are selected to make a reader think or feel about something in a particular way.

e.g. “In a recent article, I wrote about my dogs, a kelpie and a blue heeler, dying from 1080 fox bait. They had eaten it during a weekend trip to the high country and died horribly.”

**Alliteration.** The repetition of words starting with the same to create emphasis.

e.g. ”What must be remembered is this: like the abolition of torture in the free world, the cessation of cruelty to animals is paramount.”

**Appeals.**Writers often appeal to different emotions, such as a reader’s sense of fairness, justice or patriotism.

**Anecdotes.** Short, personal stories that help to illustrate a point.

e.g. “For my three most recent books, on motherhood, cancer and nursing, I interviewed more than 300 people about the nuts and bolts of what our incredibly short time on this planet is really about – life, death, family and love. If there is one thing I can guarantee, it’s that there will never be a person who lies on their deathbed, shaking with rage, sobbing, ‘Dear God, I wish I’d spent more time watching MasterChef.’”

**Everyday language.** Writers will often use everyday language, sometimes called colloquial language, to make themselves seem down-to-earth.

e.g. “Fairness is the cornerstone of our constitution and our national identity. But as we head into an election year, I think we need to ask ourselves whether we really believe in a fair go for all.”

**Cliches.** An overused expression. Although they should be avoided, cliches give writers an opportunity to express an idea to their readers quickly.

Here are some examples of cliches:

• Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

• Alls well that ends well.

• As light as a feather.

• Time will tell.

**Connotations.** All words have connotations or associations. Some words, for example, may have the same literal meaning but very different connotations. Connotations may be negative or positive. Think about the word ‘thin’. There are lots of words that share this meaning—slender, lithe, slim, skinny, lean, slight, lanky, undernourished, wasted, gangly, rake-like, anorexic, spindly. If someone was describing your body, you would probably prefer to be called ‘slender’ or ‘slim’ rather than ‘lanky’ or ‘anorexic’. When people are writing an argument, they think very carefully about the words that they select and the impact these words will have on their audience.

**Emotive words.** Words that provoke an emotional reaction from the audience.

e.g. “But no, people from the bush were saying it is cruel to kill foxes with a poison that causes a slow, agonising death.”

**Exaggeration.** Writers often exaggerate or overstate something to help persuade readers of their point of view.

e.g. “Our experts will tell you a million reasons why it can’t or shouldn’t be done here. They have turned excuse-making into an art form.”

**Evidence.** Writers will often use evidence – which might take the form of facts, figures, quotes or graphs – to help support their argument.

e.g. “According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, males are 400 per cent more likely to commit an offence intended to cause injury than are females.”

**Expert opinion.** Sometimes writers will use the opinion of experts to give further weight to their argument.

e.g. “A new research report by Victorian doctors illustrates why: because when kids are worried their parents will be told their private medical details, they simply don’t go to the doctor.”

**Inclusive language.** Inclusive language – using the words ‘we’ or ‘us’ – is often used to get a reader onside.

e.g. “We might not like it, but our kids’ right to confidential medical advice should take precedence over our right to know about it.”

**Imagery.** Descriptive writing can be a powerful persuasive technique. Describing something vividly can persuade readers.

**Logic.** A logical, well-structured argument can be very persuasive.

**Metaphor.** Metaphors, when one thing is described as another, help to persuade by describing.

e.g. “I’ve been dying of it all week and can hardly type this column because of the Niagra of snot pouring down my face and the painful fires of a thousand suns burning in my joints and muscles, which being manly muscles are able to carry a much heavier load of pain than lady muscles.”

**Pun.** A play on words often relying on homophones, homonyms or rhymes.

e.g. “It’s been a trying year for rugby league, what with betting scandals, controversies over players’ alleged off-field behaviour and an unseemly on-field brawl that marred the sport’s reputation on approach to the finals.”

e.g. “Racism is no black and white issue”.

**Repetition.** The repetition of words, phrases and ideas can be used to reinforce an argument and drive home the message to a reader.

e.g “It has been well established here and overseas that if teenagers think they can see a doctor in confidence, they are more likely to do so, more likely to go back for repeat visits, and more likely to disclose sensitive information.”

**Rhetorical question.**A question where the answer is obvious, can help lead readers to a particular conclusion.

e.g. “It has been well established here and overseas that if teenagers think they can see a doctor in confidence, they are more likely to do so, more likely to go back for repeat visits, and more likely to disclose sensitive information. And isn’t this the outcome we want? ”

**Sarcasm.**A mocking tone.

e.g. “Not all of us can write Max Walker’s How to Hypnotise Chooks, you know – for many years the biggest-selling title in Australian literary history.”

**Simile.**Similes, when one thing is compared to another, can help to persuade by describing.

e.g. “…as dumb as a sack of hammers…”

**Tone.** The tone of an article or speech refers to its overall feeling. Is it passionate? Logical? Reasonable? Mocking? Humorous?

**THINKING ABOUT PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE**

The best way to understand how persuasive language can be used to convey a point of view is by reading examples of persuasive writing. Read the newspaper on a daily basis, particularly the editorials and opinion pages. This will not only help you keep abreast of current events, it will also help you develop the language skills necessary to do persuasive writing yourself.

Read the following articles and answer the questions below to help you develop an understanding of how writers persuade.

[They’re pests but cruelty is inexcusable](http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/theyre-pests-but-cruelty-is-inexcusable-20090426-ajck.html)

[Life’s too short for reality TV](http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/lifes-too-short-for-reality-tv-20110707-1h4or.html)

[Should teens have the right to see a doctor in private?](http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/seewhatsusiesays/index.php/heraldsun/comments/should_teens_have_the_right_to_see_a_doctor_in_private/)

**ANALYSIS QUESTIONS**

1. Identify the issue.

2. Identify the contention, otherwise known as the point of view, of the writer.

3. What is the tone of the article?

4. Identify five examples of persuasive language or persuasive techniques and explain how it is supposed to make the reader feel. Draw up a table like the one below to help you identify and explain the impact of these techniques.

**Example**

**Technique**

**Effect on reader**

“They had eaten it during a weekend trip to the high country and died horribly.”

Adverb

Makes the reader feel sorry for the animals who eat the bait and builds a case for a ban on the poison.

“cessation of cruelty”

Alliteration

Emphasises that the cruelty must be stopped.

“…stop foxes being culled in this barbaric manner. Use your voice, they said, spread the news and stop an inhumane practice.”

Adjectives/Connotations

The word “barbaric” makes the reader feel like this is uncivilized. The word “inhumane” has a powerful effect on the reader convincing them that it is cruel.

**DISCUSSING PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE**

In English, you will often be asked to write an essay about how writers or speakers have used language to persuade.

**Introduction:**Describe the issue generally. Mention the article’s title, it’s author and the author’s contention.

e.g. There has recently been considerable controversy over the use of 1080 fox bait to control Victoria’s fox population. In his article ‘They’re pests but cruelty is inexcusable’, writer Dmitri Kakmi puts forward a logical and, at times, emotive argument about how cruel and inhumane the use of this bait is.

**Body:** Identify a range of techniques and explain how they are used to persuade the audience. Always make reference to how different techniques make the reader feel or react.

e.g. Midway through his argument, Kakmi turns his attention to the foxes themselves. After describing the ‘cruel’ and ‘barbaric’ fox bait, he uses imagery to describe the foxes in very favourable terms which further helps to persuade the reader that this fox bait is reprehensible. He describes the foxes as ‘beauties of the animal kingdom’, describing how people are ‘wonderstruck’ by a ‘sudden flash of auburn bushy tail’. The phrase ‘wonderstruck’ helps to highlight how beautiful these animals are. Similarly, he describes their gaze like being watched by ‘an intelligence from another world’. This make the reader feel that they are aware, intelligent. Who would want to inflict cruelty on such an animal?

e.g. Although Kakmi describes the symptoms of the poison in a very detached, almost clinical manner, he explains that watching an animal die like this is ‘distressing beyond words’. This underscores the cruelty of this bait and encourages the reader to support his point of view. In the next paragraph, he uses graphic and disturbing imagery—’they were screaming and chewing off their lips’—to describe the death of his dogs. This highly emotive description encourages the readers to feel a sense of sympathy for these animals and encourages them to believe that the use of this bait is cruel and inhumane. Similarly, the image of a foxes who ‘chew their paws off to escape’ is equally upsetting.

How you should structure your body paragraphs:

1. Identify a technique.

2. Give examples of how it is used in the article.

3. Explain how it makes the reader feel and builds support for the writer’s argument.

**Conclusion:** Summarise the main techniques that the writer has used to persuade the reader.

e.g. Throughout this piece, Kakmi uses a range of rhetorical techniques to encourage the audience to have sympathy for the plight of foxes and oppose the continued use of 1080 fox bait.

* Posted On: 27th April 2013
* By: [Brett Lamb](http://lessonbucket.com/author/brett/)
* Under: [Persuasive Language](http://lessonbucket.com/category/english/year-9-english/persuasive-language/)