

To persuade is to convince someone that a particular opinion or point of view is the correct one.

Any time you argue with a friend, you are each trying to persuade, to convince, the other that your opinion is the right one. Commercials on television are another form of persuasion. Advertisers attempt to convince viewers that the product they sell—whether a deodorant, a soft drink, or an automobile—is the best one to purchase.

You will often have to persuade in writing. For instance, if you want a raise, you will 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.

Once you learn how to persuade logically and rationally, you will be less likely to accept the false, misleading, and emotional arguments that you hear and read every day. Persuasion is vital in daily life, in nearly all college courses, and in most careers.

Topic Sentence

Here is the topic sentence of a persuasive paragraph:

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

- The writer begins a persuasive paragraph by stating clearly what he or she is arguing for or against. What will this persuasive paragraph argue against?

- Words like *should*, *ought*, and *must* (and the negatives *should not*, *ought not*, and *must not*) are especially effective in the topic sentence of a persuasive paragraph.

- 2. Decide whether you will emphasize causes or effects. What information would be most interesting to your audience?
- 3. Compose a topic sentence that states the subject and indicates whether causes or effects will be discussed.
- 4. Now freewrite, brainstorm, or cluster to find at least three possible causes or effects. Do your mental detective work. At this stage, think of all possible causes; think of short- and long-term effects, as well as positive and negative effects.
- 5. Select the best causes or effects with which to develop your paragraph. Drop those that are not relevant.
- 6. Make a plan or an outline for your paragraph, numbering the causes or effects in the order in which you will present them.
- 7. Write a first draft of your cause and effect paragraph, explaining each point fully so that your reader understands just how X caused Y. Use transitional expressions to emphasize these relationships.
- 8. Revise as necessary, checking for good support, unity, logic, and coherence. Does your paragraph have an interesting opening sentence?
- 9. Proofread for errors in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, spelling, and mechanics. Especially watch for your personal error patterns.

Suggested Topics for Cause and Effect Paragraphs

1. Reasons why someone made an important decision
2. Reasons why some people cheat in college
3. Causes of an act of courage or cowardice
4. Causes of a marriage or divorce (friendship or end of a friendship)
5. Reasons for doing volunteer work
6. Causes or effects of membership in a group (choir, band, sports team, church, or gang)
7. Causes or effects of dropping out of school (or attending college)
8. Effects of email or a computer on a person's life
9. Effects of having a certain boss (or teacher, parent, or leader)
10. Effects of a superstition or prejudice
11. Effects of the death of a loved one
12. Effects (positive or negative) of a habit or practice
13. Effects of living in a repressive country or home
14. Effects of living in a rural (or urban, mountainous, flat, rich, poor, or ethnically diverse) place
15. Writer's choice: _____

Paragraph and Plan

Here is the entire paragraph:

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.

- 1 ■ The first reason in the argument predicts the consequence. If passengers refuse to ride with drinkers, what will the consequence be?

- 2 ■ The writer also supports this reason with facts. What are the facts?

- 3 ■ The second reason in the argument is really an answer to the opposition. That is, the writer anticipates the critics. What point is the writer answering?

- 4 ■ 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. Who is the authority and what does this person say?

- 5 ■ The third reason in the argument is that risking your life is foolish. This reason is really another answer to the opposition. What point is the writer answering?

- 6 ■ The final reason in the argument is that one passenger could influence others. What example does the writer supply to back up this reason?
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- 7 ■ 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.* This paragraph begins with what the author considers *most* important. How can you tell?
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Before composing this persuasive paragraph, the writer probably brainstormed or freewrote to gather ideas and then made an outline or a plan like this:

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

Reason 1: Refusal could save lives (predicting a consequence).
—statistics on deaths and accidents (facts)
—passengers are equally responsible

Reason 2: Riders might say some drinkers drive well—not true (answering the opposition).
—Dr. Belloc’s explanation (referring to authority)

Reason 3: Others might feel foolish speaking up, but risking lives is more foolish (answering the opposition).

Reason 4: One rider might influence other passengers.
—Marie Furillo (example)

Conclusion: Bloodshed will probably continue, but people can refuse to risk their lives.

- Note how each reason clearly supports the topic sentence.

Transitional Expressions

The following transitional expressions are helpful in persuasive paragraphs:

Transitional Expressions for Persuasion		
Give Reasons	Answer the Opposition	Draw Conclusions
first (second, third)	of course	therefore
another, next	some may say	thus
last, finally	nevertheless	hence
because, since, for	on the other hand	consequently
although		

* For work on order of importance, see Chapter 4, “Achieving Coherence,” Part A.

Methods of Persuasion

The drinking-and-driving example showed the basic kinds of support used in persuasive paragraphs: facts, referring to an authority, examples, predicting the consequences, and answering the opposition. Although you will rarely use all of them in one paragraph, you should be familiar with them all. Here are some more details:

1. **Facts:** Facts are simply statements of *what is*. They should appeal to the reader's mind, not just to the emotions. The source of your facts should be clear to the reader. If you wish to prove that children's eyesight should be checked every year by a doctor, you might look for supporting facts in appropriate books and magazines, or you might ask your eye doctor for information. Your paper might say, "Many people suffer serious visual impairment later in life because they received insufficient or inadequate eye care when they were children, according to an article in *Better Vision*."^{*}

Avoid the vague "everyone knows that" or "it is common knowledge that" or "they all say." Such statements will make your reader justifiably suspicious of your "facts."

2. **Referring to an authority:** An authority is an expert, someone who can be relied on to give unbiased facts and information. If you wish to convince your readers that asthma is a far more serious illness than most people realize, you might speak with an emergency-room physician about the numbers of patients treated for asthma attacks, or you might quote experts from the literature of national organizations like the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America or the American Lung Association. These are all excellent and knowledgeable authorities whose opinions on medical matters would be considered valid and unbiased.

Avoid appealing to "authorities" who are interesting or glamorous but who are not experts. A basketball player certainly knows about sports, but probably knows little about cameras or cookware.

3. **Examples:** An example should clearly relate to the argument and should be typical enough to support it.[†] If you wish to convince your reader that high schools should provide more funds than they do for women's sports, you might say, "Jefferson High School, for instance, has received inquiries from sixty female students who would be willing to join a women's basketball or baseball team if the school could provide the uniforms, the space, and a coach."

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.

4. **Predicting the consequence:** Predicting the consequence helps the reader visualize what will occur if *something does or does not happen*. To convince your readers that a college education should be free to all qualified students, you might say, "If bright but economically deprived students cannot attend college because they cannot afford it, our society will be robbed of their talents."

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 understandably suspicious.

^{*} For more work on summarizing and quoting outside sources, see Chapter 18.

[†] For more work on examples, see Chapter 5, "Illustration."

5. **Answering the opposition:** Answering possible critics shows that you are aware of the opposition's argument and are able to respond to it. If you wish to convince your readers that your candidate is the best on the ballot, you might say, "Some have criticized him for running a low-key campaign, but he feels that the issues and his stand on them should speak for themselves."

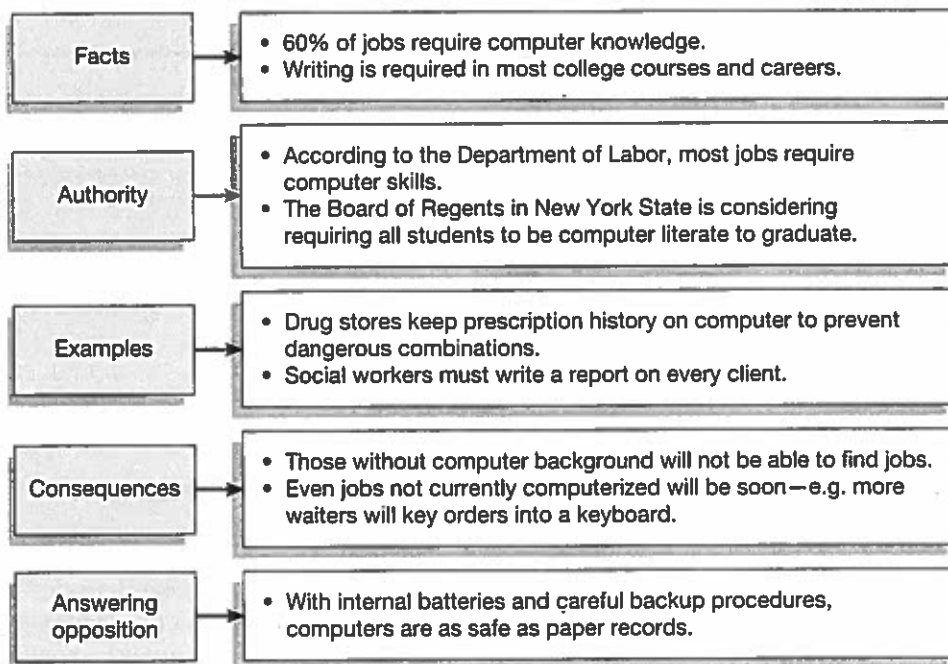
Avoid calling the opposition "fools" or "crooks." Attack their ideas, not their character.

Considering the Audience

In addition to providing adequate proof for your argument, pay special attention to the audience as you write persuasively. In general, we assume that our audience is much like us—reasonable people who wish to learn the truth. But because argument can evoke strong feelings, directing your persuasive paper toward a particular audience can be helpful. Consider just *what kind of evidence* this audience would respond to. For instance, if you were attempting to persuade parents to volunteer their time to establish a local Scout troop, you might explain to them the various ways in which their children would benefit from the troop. In other words, show these parents how the troop is important to *them*. You might also say that you realize how much time they already spend on family matters and how little spare time they have. By doing so, you let them know that you understand their resistance to the argument and that you are sympathetic to their doubts. When you take your audience into consideration, you will make your persuasive paragraph more convincing.*†

Building Blocks To Effective Persuasive Writing

Topic: *Students should acquire computer skills.*



* For more work on audience, see Chapter 1, "Exploring the Writing Process," Part B.

† For a complete essay developed by persuasion, see "Stopping Youth Violence: An Inside Job," Chapter 15, Part I.

PRACTICE 1 Read the following persuasive paragraph carefully and answer the questions.

American women should stop buying so-called women's magazines because these publications lower their self-esteem. First of all, publications like *Glamour* and *Cosmo* appeal to women's insecurities and make millions doing it. Topics like "Ten Days to Sexier Cleavage" and "How to Attract Mr. Right" lure women to buy seven million copies a month, reports Claire Ito in *The Tulsa Chronicle*, May 4, 2002. The message: women need to be improved. Second, although many people—especially magazine publishers—claim these periodicals build self-esteem, they really do the opposite. One expert in readers' reactions, Deborah Then, says that almost all women, regardless of age or education, feel worse about themselves after reading one of these magazines. Alice, one of the women I spoke with, is a good example: "I flip through pictures of world-class beauties and six-foot-tall skinny women, comparing myself to them. In more ways than one, I come up short." Finally, if women spent the money and time these magazines take on more self-loving activities—studying new subjects, developing mental or physical fitness, setting goals and daring to achieve them—they would really build self-worth. Sisters, seek wisdom, create what you envision, and above all, know that you can.

—Rochelle Revard (Student)

1. What is this paragraph arguing for or against? _____

2. What audience is the writer addressing? _____

3. Which reason is supported by facts? _____

What are the facts, and where did the writer get them? _____

4. Which reason answers the opposition? _____

5. Which reason is supported by an example? _____

What is the example? _____

6. Which reason appeals to an authority? _____

Who is the authority? _____

PRACTICE 2 Read the following paragraph carefully and answer the questions.

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.

1. What is this paragraph arguing for or against? _____

2. Which reason appeals to an authority for support? _____

Who is the authority? _____

3. Which reason answers the opposition? _____

4. Which reason includes facts? What is the source of these facts? _____

5. What consequence does the writer predict if parenting classes are not offered?

6. Does this writer convince you that parenting classes might make a difference? If you were writing a persuasion paragraph to oppose or support this writer,

what would your topic sentence be? _____

PRACTICE 3 So far you have learned five basic methods of persuasion: facts, referring to an authority, examples, predicting the consequence, and answering the opposition. Ten topic sentences for persuasive paragraphs follow. Write one reason in support of each topic sentence, using the method of persuasion indicated.

Facts

1. A stop sign should be placed at the busy intersection of Hoover and Palm streets.

Reason: _____

2. People should not get married until they are at least twenty-five years old.

Reason: _____

Referring to an Authority

(If you cannot think of an authority offhand, name the kind of person who would be an authority on the subject.)

3. These new Sluggo bats will definitely raise your batting average.

Reason: _____

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

Reason: _____

Examples

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

Reason: _____

6. Mace and pepper spray should be legalized because they can prevent crime without causing permanent injury.

Reason: _____

Predicting the Consequence

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

Reason: _____

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

Reason: _____

Answering the Opposition

(State the opposition's point of view and then refute it.)

9. This college should (should not) drop its required-attendance policy.

Reason: _____

10. Teenagers should (should not) be required to get their parents' permission before being allowed to have an abortion.

Reason: _____

PRACTICE 4 Each of the following sentences tells what you are trying to persuade someone to do. Beneath each sentence are four reasons that attempt to convince the reader that he or she should take this particular course of action. Circle the letter of the reason that seems *irrelevant*, *illogical*, or *untrue*.

1. If you wanted to persuade someone to do holiday shopping earlier, you might say that
 - a. shopping earlier saves time.
 - b. more gifts will be in stock.
 - c. stores will not be overly crowded.
 - d. Ja Rule shops early.
2. If you wanted to persuade someone to buy a particular brand of cereal, you might say that
 - a. it is inexpensive.
 - b. it contains vitamins and minerals.
 - c. it comes in an attractive box.
 - d. it makes a hearty breakfast.
3. If you wanted to persuade someone to move to your town, you might say that
 - a. two new companies have made jobs available.
 - b. by moving to this town, he or she will become the happiest person in the world.
 - c. there is a wide selection of housing.
 - d. the area is lovely and still unpolluted.
4. If you wanted to persuade someone to vote for a particular candidate, you might say that
 - a. she has always kept her promises to the voters.
 - b. she has lived in the district for thirty years.
 - c. she has substantial knowledge of the issues.
 - d. she dresses very fashionably.
5. If you wanted to persuade someone to learn to read and speak a foreign language, you might say that
 - a. knowledge of a foreign language can be helpful in the business world.
 - b. he or she may want to travel in the country where the language is spoken.
 - c. Enrique Iglesias sings in two languages.
 - d. being able to read great literature in the original is a rewarding experience.

- 6. If you wanted to persuade someone to quit smoking, you might say that
 - a. smoking is a major cause of lung cancer.
 - b. smoking stains teeth and softens gums.
 - c. ashtrays are often hard to find.
 - d. this bad habit has become increasingly expensive.

PRACTICE 5 As you write persuasive paragraphs, make sure that your reasons can withstand close examination. Here are some examples of *invalid* arguments. Read them carefully. Decide which method of persuasion is being used and explain why you think the argument is invalid. Refer to the list on pages 153–154.

- 1. Men make terrible drivers. That one just cut right in front of me without looking.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

- 2. Many people have become vegetarians during the past ten or fifteen years, but such people have lettuce for brains.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

- 3. Candy does not really harm children’s teeth. Tests made by scientists at the Goopy Candy Company have proved that candy does not cause tooth decay.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

- 4. Stealing pens and pads from the office is perfectly all right. Everyone does it.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

5. We don't want _____ in our neighborhood. We had a _____ family once, and they made a lot of noise.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

6. If our city doesn't build more playgrounds, a crime wave will destroy our homes and businesses.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

7. Studying has nothing to do with grades. My brother never studies and still gets A's all the time.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

8. Women bosses work their employees too hard. I had one once, and she never let me rest for a moment.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

9. The Big Deal Supermarket has the lowest prices in town. This must be true because the manager said on the radio last week, "We have the lowest prices in town."

Method of persuasion: _____

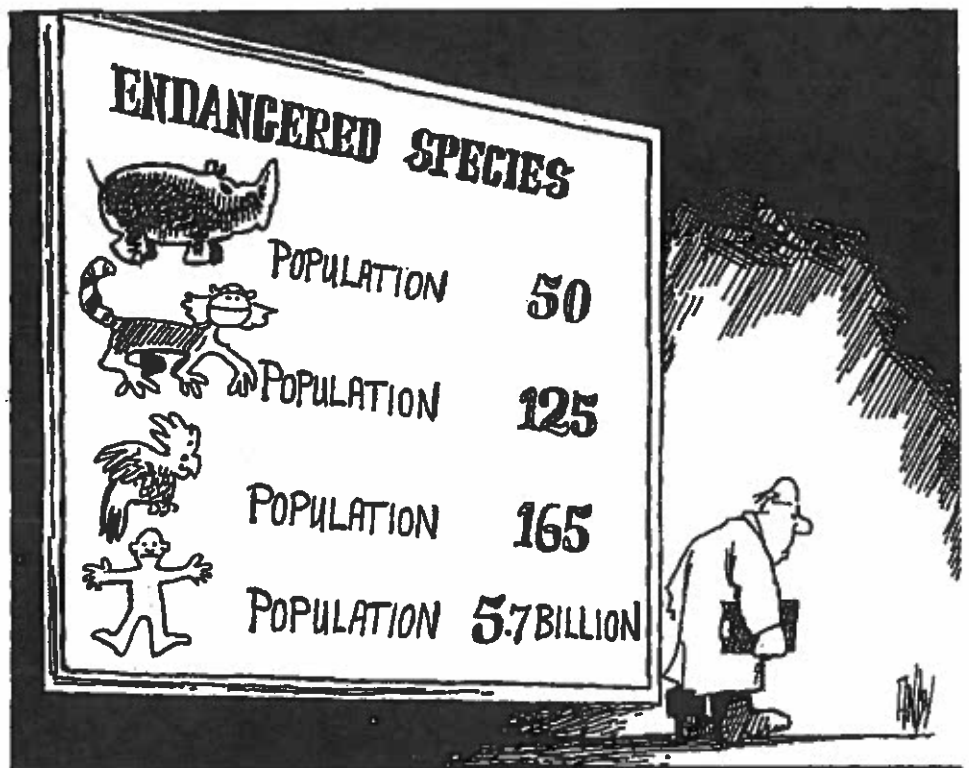
Invalid because _____

10. If little girls are allowed to play with cars and trucks, they will grow up wanting to be men.

Method of persuasion: _____

Invalid because _____

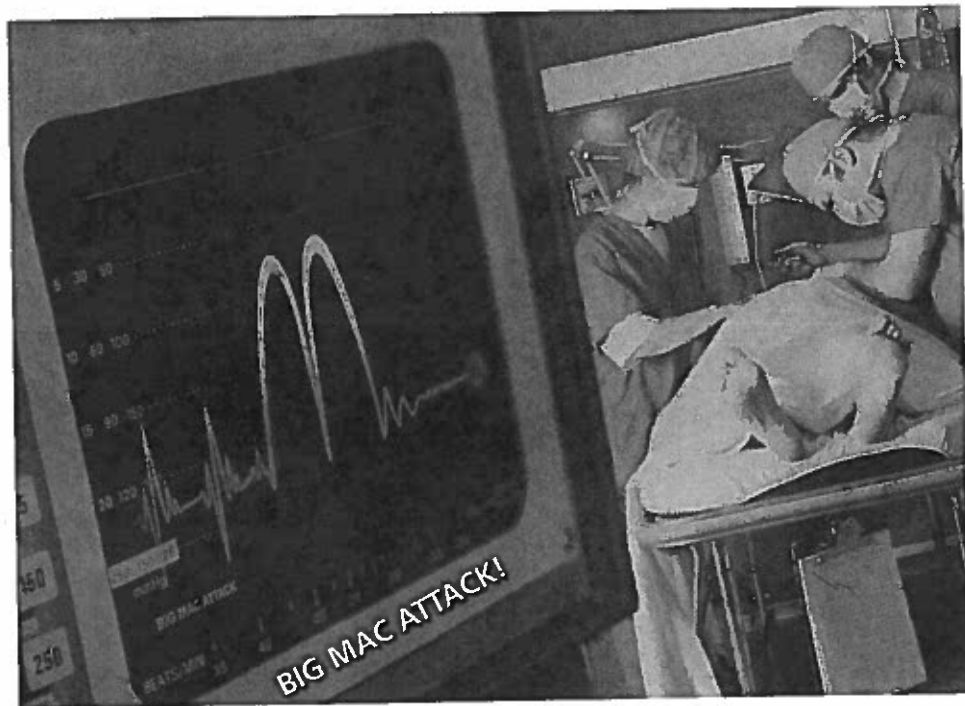
- PRACTICE 6** In a group of four or five classmates, discuss the meaning of this cartoon. Like many cartoons, this one expresses a strong point of view. What issue is this cartoonist commenting on? What point is he making? Working together, write down the cartoon's "topic sentence" and argument. How effective—how persuasive—is this cartoon? Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist?



PRACTICE 7 Thinking and Writing Together
Persuade Through Humor

Advertisements bombard us every day—through TV, newspapers, magazines, billboards, store windows, and the labels on people's clothing and possessions. The billions of dollars that Americans spend on brandname products tell us that ads are very persuasive, usually making their argument with a strong visual image and a few catchy words. To expose the great power of advertising, a group called Adbusters creates stylish spoof ads for real products. The goal is to expose the truth

that real-life ads often hide. In a group of four or five classmates, study the ad below and then answer the questions.



What hugely popular product is being “busted” by this Adbusters spoof? What is the persuasive message of this ad? Working together, write down the ad’s “topic sentence” and argument. How effective is Adbuster’s ad? Does it successfully answer the “opposition”—that is, McDonald’s worldwide campaign to convince us to buy more Big Macs?



Exploring Online

<http://www.adbusters.org/spoofads/> Study other Adbuster spoof ads, especially those for fashion, alcohol, and tobacco. Pick the funniest and write about its persuasive message. Or click “Create your own print ad.” In your group, create a persuasive ad, perhaps using the slogan, “Got _____?”



Writing Assignment

To help you take a stand for a persuasive paragraph of your own, try the following exercises on notebook paper:

1. List five things you would like to see changed at your college.
2. List five things you would like to see changed in your home or at your job.

3. List five things that annoy you or make you angry. What can be done about them?
4. Imagine yourself giving a speech on national television. What message would you like to convey?

From your lists, pick one topic you would like to write a persuasive paragraph about and write the topic sentence here:

Now make a plan or an outline for a paragraph on a separate sheet of paper. Use at least two of the five methods of persuasion. Arrange your reasons in a logical order, and write the most persuasive paragraph you can.

Checklist

The Process of Writing a Persuasive Paragraph

Refer to this checklist of steps as you write a persuasive paragraph of your own.

- 1. Narrow the topic in light of your audience and purpose. What do you wish to persuade your reader to believe or do?
- 2. Compose a topic sentence that clearly states your position for or against. Use *should*, *ought*, *must*, or their negatives.
- 3. Freewrite or brainstorm to generate all the reasons you can think of. (You may want to freewrite or brainstorm before you narrow the topic.)
- 4. Select the best three or four reasons and drop those that do not relate to your topic sentence.
- 5. If you use *facts*, be sure that they are accurate and that the source of your facts is clear. If you use an *example*, be sure that it is a valid one and adequately supports your argument. If you *refer to an authority*, be sure that he or she is really an authority and *not biased*. If one of your reasons *predicts the consequence*, be sure that the consequence flows logically from your statement. If one of your reasons *answers the opposition*, be sure to state the opposition's point of view fairly and refute it adequately.
- 6. Make a plan or an outline for the paragraph, numbering the reasons in the order in which you will present them.
- 7. Write a draft of your persuasive paragraph, using transitional expressions wherever they may be helpful.
- 8. Revise as necessary, checking for support, unity, logic, and coherence.
- 9. Proofread for errors in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, spelling, and mechanics.