**Persuasive Techniques**

Persuasive writing techniques are necessary when you write to convince the reader of something. Persuasive techniques might be used when writing an argumentative essay about a controversial topic, in a letter to the city council to express an opinion on a particular decision, or in an advertisement to promote a product. Below are a variety of persuasive techniques that writers use to convince readers of their arguments. Not all the techniques outlined are appropriate for all types of writing, so it is important to pick and choose which techniques are suitable for the text type.

**Personal pronouns**

Personal pronouns such as “I,” “you,” “we,” “he,” “she,” “them,” “they,” and “us” make writing much more human. By using “I,” the author commits themself to the point and argument that they are making. Likewise, by using the pronoun “you,” the author involves the reader and makes them accountable for what they are reading. Identification of specific people and groups makes the text much more personable and meaningful to the reader. For example, “*You* must take action to help these people” is more persuasive than “Action must be taken to help these people.” The use of the personal pronoun “you” makes the reader responsible for what they are reading; the reader feels a sense of obligation to the text. Keep in mind, however, that many professors do not like when students use “I” in academic papers; some believe that the use of “I” takes away the objectivity of the paper. Make sure to follow your professor’s guidelines.

**Appeal to the head**

Appealing to the head means that the writer appeals to the reader’s logic and common sense. It is important to explain ideas and points soundly so that the argument naturally makes sense to the reader and any other possible arguments can be easily proved wrong. The following statement is an appeal to the head: “Landfills are overflowing and we are running out of space to put our garbage. Communities and households need to cut back on consumption and waste.” This logic makes sense; cut backs in consumption will undoubtedly help with the problem of landfills being over filled.

**Appeal to the heart**

This involves creating feelings of fear, guilt, empathy, and altruism that will move the reader. For example, if you are writing a piece for a campaign to raise money for starving children, you might write something like, “These poor children don’t stand a chance. Without proper nourishment, they are vulnerable to disease and death. Your morning coffee costs $2. Surely you can give up that coffee and donate $2 a day so that a young child can have a decent breakfast.” The previous sentences cause the reader to feel sadness about the fact that young children are hungry and lack proper nourishment; they also make readers feel guilty that they are able to afford a luxury item—coffee—while others cannot even afford breakfast. Appealing to the heart is an effective way to persuade readers to take action.

**Hard evidence**

Hard evidence is facts, statistics, research, and the results of surveys. It is solid information and proof of your argument. Some people may not be persuaded by appeals to the heart, but it is more difficult for them to argue with real, genuine evidence that supports your point. Numbers, graphs, and charts are very persuasive and effective tools. Readers are more likely to believe a point that is supported by facts than just claims. For example, it is more persuasive to write “58% of university students are female” than “More females than males attend university.”

**Soft evidence**

Soft evidence involves the use of expert opinions, anecdotes, and examples to illustrate an argument. A paper about space exploration is much more credible if it includes quotations from an employee that works at NASA or from an astronomy professor who teaches at a university and is very knowledgeable about the subject. Anecdotes are another good way to persuade; an anecdote is a short account of a particular event. It is important to choose anecdotes that are relevant to the argument and which help to demonstrate the point being made. For instance, if you are trying to persuade a company to prohibit employees to use plastic water bottles in the office, you might provide examples of other companies that have put this policy into place and what the positive outcomes have been.

**Incentives**

This involves including rewards, offers, or coupons as reasons for buying a product or doing something in particular. This is a persuasive technique which is used in sales often and, clearly, is not suitable for all persuasive writing text types.Certainly, it is not appropriate to include coupons or rewards in academic writing! However, it is important to emphasize the benefits and positive points of your argument.

**Humour**

Humour—when used appropriately—is an effective persuasive technique. Humour disarms a reader or audience and makes them warm up to author and their arguments. Further, readers are generally drawn to texts that make them laugh because they are enjoyable; humour can divert the reader’s attention away from negative thoughts. It is, of course, important to be cautious when using humour so that strong arguments are not made in jokes and that serious items are not treated disrespectfully. Thus, humour is often used in advertisements but it is not usually used for advocacy messages as humour may undermine the organization’s message and credibility.

**Emotive language**

When writing persuasively, it may be necessary to express strong opinions using dramatic language. Keep in mind, however, that, depending on who the reader is, the language should be sophisticated so that the argument is more credible. For example, “Jay walking is highly dangerous and life threatening accidents can occur because of it” is much more persuasive and emotive than, “Jay walking is not safe and people can have accidents.”

**Rule of three**

Lists of three are commonly used to persuade because they are simple, snappy, easily repeatable and, therefore, easy to remember. You are more likely to remember that “He was short, fat, and ugly” than “He was of small height with a large protruding belly and many pimples on his face.”

**Poetic devices**

Poetic devices include using techniques such as alliteration, similes and metaphors, and onomatopoeia. Poetic devices such as this capture the reader’s attention; the reader is more likely to continue on reading a text if they are engaged and enjoying the reading. Likewise, the use of similes and metaphors create pictures in the reader’s mind which help to illustrate points. It is more powerful to describe a politician as a “bull in a china shop” than as “aggressive and unorganized.” However, writers should not overuse poetic devices as they may take away from the main point of the argument; it is also important to avoid clichés.

**Rhetorical questions**

Rhetorical questions are often used at the beginning of a text or pitch to get the reader or audience thinking about a particular topic or concept. Rhetorical questions should be thought provoking and are designed to get the reader to agree with the point that is being made. For example, readers are likely to answer the rhetorical question “Do you want to get out of debt?” with a resounding “YES!” Readers are likely to be interested in the topic written about want to continue reading.

**Imperatives**

As the writer gains the reader’s confidence about a topic, it is appropriate for the writer to use commands to drive points home. “We must stand up to the government and fight for our rights” is much more persuasive than “Well, if we’re all unhappy and we want a few things to change, maybe we should think about discussing this with the government.” Readers have confidence in writers that are sure-footed and strong. It may not be appropriate to include imperatives at the beginning of a text, but, once the reader’s trust is gained, imperatives are an effective way to ensure persuasion.