

PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Characteristics of a Persuasive Essay

- The purpose is to persuade readers to accept a certain view or to undertake a certain action.
- Hypothesis may be based on a value or a policy
 - Approval/disapproval of certain value or standards (ex: Conducting stem cell research is unethical.)
 - A call for adoption or change in a policy (ex: The US immigration policy must be changed in order to improve the economy.)
- Writer debates an issue
- Information is arranged by defining the issue, showing both sides of the argument, and taking a clear stand on the issue
- Written in 3rd person (using “it”, “he”, “she”, “they”), uses formal language to discuss someone or something
- Sample focus of the paper:
 - Discuss the value of being a vegetarian
 - Argue for or against the legalization of abortion

WARNING: If the purpose of your writing is not to persuade the reader or to argue a certain point, but rather to inform or to critique, it is possible you have wandered into the wrong essay. Please check our other handouts on the Narrative/Expository and Critical Essays to see which one is a better match for your writing purpose.

When writing any paper, you should follow these six steps. This handout takes you through all six steps in the process of writing a Persuasive Essay.

- Step 1. Organizing your Thoughts (Brainstorming)
- Step 2. Researching your Topic
- Step 3. Developing a Thesis Statement
- Step 4. Writing the Introduction
- Step 5. Writing the Body of the Essay
- Step 6. Writing the Conclusion

Step 1: Organizing your Thoughts (Brainstorming)

Believe it or not, there is almost no topic on which your mind will draw a complete blank. Even if you know very little about the subject matter, you are likely to respond based on something you have heard or read on the topic/subject, or even your basic values. It is imperative to take an inventory of what you know first. This kind of brainstorming can be done in a number of ways:

- **Free writing** – writing quickly, without stopping, editing, or self-correcting to become aware of what you *already* know, think, or feel on a topic
- **Subject tree** – related ideas, connecting outwards from the main topic, in a tree form
(See illustration 1)
- **List** – free flow of ideas on a topic (See illustration 2)
- **Clustering** – main topic is in the middle circle, all related associations are linked to the main topic (See illustration 3)

- **Outline** – framework of an essay, which includes main points, followed by the breakdown into sub-points (See illustration 4)

Below are visual illustrations of these brainstorming methods. When using them, simply rely on what you already know on the topic – facts, opinions, emotions, and/or concerns.

Subject Tree

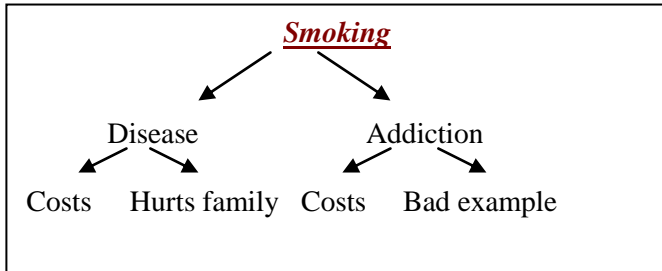


Illustration 1

List

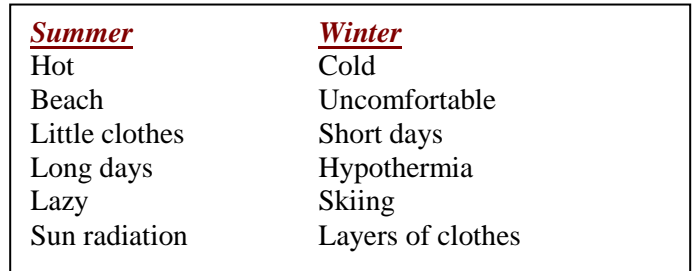


Illustration 2

Cluster

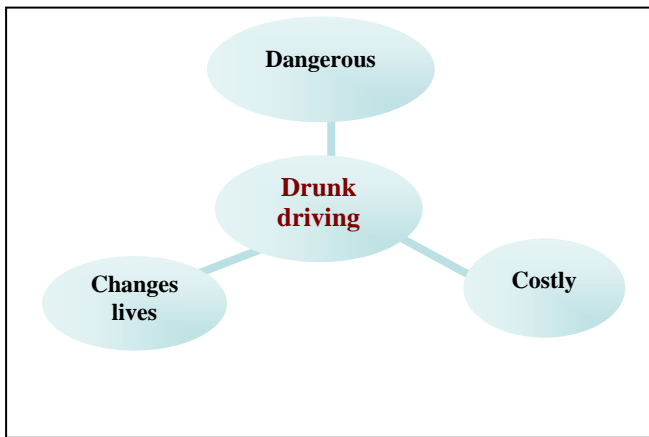


Illustration 3

Outline

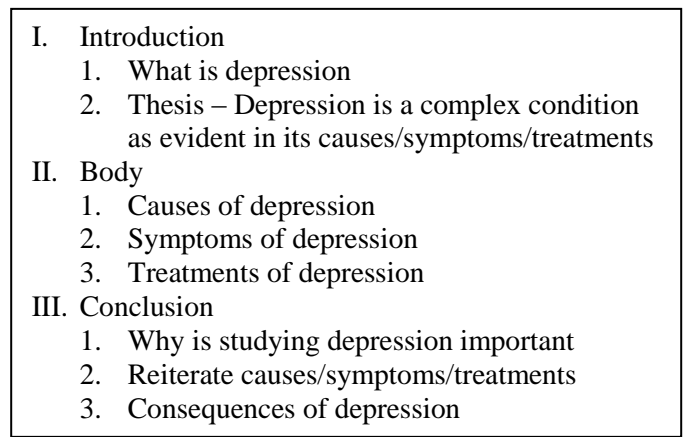


Illustration 4

This is not the time for evaluating your ideas; instead, it is the time for an *outpour* of ideas on all background knowledge you have on the topic. Once your thoughts are on paper, you can start organizing them by grouping ideas and identifying areas where more information is required.

Step 2: Researching your Topic

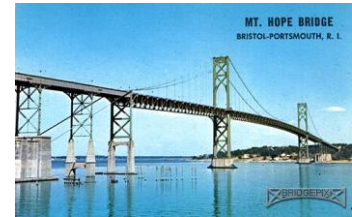
Research may require going to a library or searching online. All research should be current (check with your instructor for acceptable time frames). Acceptable sources are reference works, books, and scholarly articles by experts. Encyclopedias and popular magazines should not be used in academic writing.

When using information from a Web site, evaluate the site for timeliness and reputability. Also, consider the site’s purpose, the reliability of its sponsors, and credibility of the author. Make sure to collect all necessary reference information in order to give credit to the authors. Refer to our *Plagiarism* handout for tips on how to avoid plagiarism.

NOTE: The two steps – organization of thoughts and research of the topic – interrelate. In other words, organizing your thoughts may identify gaps in your knowledge, which may lead you to conduct necessary research. However, once you conduct research, you should re-organize your thoughts to evaluate the clarity of the topic.

Step 3: Developing a Thesis Statement

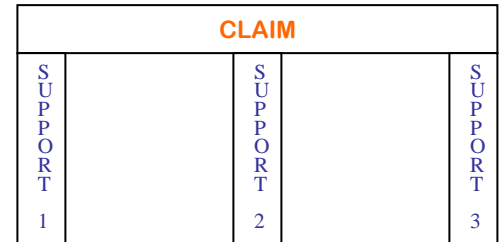
Developing a thesis is like building a bridge. In a bridge, the cross-beam (driveway) has to be held up by strong columns in order for the bridge to function. Similarly, **a thesis has two main components** – a claim and the supporting details that sustain it. In the bridge analogy, a cross-beam represents a claim, and the columns represent supporting details.



Claim

A claim is a one-sentence statement that

- Makes an assertion or takes a stance
- Is based on a generalization
- Is not a fact
- Is debatable
- Must be presented in the introduction of the essay



Example

When making a claim, ask yourself any of the following:

- What point am I trying to make?
- What am I trying to say?
- What am I getting at?

Students drink in college. (Weak because it is not debatable)

College binge drinking is a serious problem. (Stronger because it presents an assertion that needs to be supported with evidence)

Supporting Details

Supporting details provide the means for reinforcing the claim, and can be organized in different patterns –

1) problem/solution, 2) cause/effect, or 3) statement of reason.

Thesis Statement

To create a thesis statement, combine the claim and the supporting details in one sentence. The direction of your essay can change depending on the pattern in which you organize the supporting details.

Example

Supporting details organized into problem/solution:

College binge drinking is a serious problem that can be alleviated by addressing students’ psychological well-being, providing adequate academic support, and giving students opportunities to fully engage in college life.

Supporting details organized into cause/effect:

College binge drinking is a serious problem caused by the fact that students experience a tremendous amount of stress, and that drinking is viewed as a path to socialization and a way to avoid the demands of healthy relationships.

Supporting details organized into statement of reason:

College binge drinking is a serious problem because it can lead to devastating academic, social, and psychological consequences in students’ lives.

NOTE: Writing is a fluid process. As you complete your essay, you may realize that your thesis needs to be modified to reflect your position better.

Step 4: Writing the Introduction

The introduction is the most general part of the paper. It helps provide a roadmap for further discussion or analysis. This simplified formula offers components for a basic introduction:

- Definition:** Identify, define, and/or describe the topic, concept, or literary theme. What will you be talking about?
Relevance: Show the importance of your topic, concept or theme. How does it relate to or impact society?
Thesis: Copy the thesis statement you generated in the previous step.

Example

- Topic:** College binge drinking
Definition: Binge drinking is usually defined as five or more drinks consumed in a row.
Relevance: Over the years, binge drinking has become one of the prominent social activities of college students, far outpacing any other activities previously done for fun.
Thesis: College drinking is a serious problem as it can lead to devastating academic, social, and psychological consequences in students' lives.

Step 5: Writing the Body of the Essay

The body of the essay is the most detailed part. It involves addressing each supporting detail in a separate fully-developed paragraph. Make sure to include the necessary evidence from your research.

It is imperative that each supporting detail be announced or introduced within the text. This introduction is called a *topic sentence* and it is found at the beginning of a paragraph. The topic sentence is a statement you make about the supporting detail.

Example

- Topic sentence 1:** Binge drinking has a direct impact on students' ability to perform academic work.
Topic sentence 2: Drinking changes the way that students experience close relationships, since alcohol is used as a method of avoiding true intimacy.
Topic sentence 3: Finally, heavy drinking allows students to distance themselves from dealing with the real issues in their lives, thus exacerbating existing psychological difficulties.

Step 6: Writing the Conclusion

Conclusion brings the paper to a close. It should be similar to the introduction, but worded differently. It allows you to reiterate and summarize the main points of the essay. The following components comprise a conclusion:

- Relevance:** Repeat the importance of your topic.
Review: Reiterate the points you discussed.
Summary: Summarize your conclusions.

Example

- Relevance:** Today's college students engage in campus binge drinking in unprecedented numbers.
Preview: This paper focused on the impact of drinking on students' lives.
Summary: It is clear that if not properly addressed, binge drinking can have devastating consequences on the many generations of students.