

## PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES

Persuasive Technique	Definition	How It Persuades
Adjective	Describing words usually connected to a noun (naming word): e.g. The bright red house (bright and red = adjectives), (noun = house).	Adds emphasis.
Alliteration	Repeating and playing upon the same letter: e.g. A back-breaking job...	Adds emphasis and reinforces meaning, especially where an idea is repeated. Often used to create a highly emotive image.
Anecdote	A short account or story of an entertaining or interesting incident: e.g. "In my experience..."	Usually makes reader sympathetic and receptive to the point; can set up a character, then position reader to accept or reject that individual character.
Associations	Words that create meanings beyond the literal meaning of the word: e.g. Attractive, alluring, pleasing, charming.	Suggests or influences reader response in certain ways, often subconsciously. Implied meanings need to be identified.
Attacks/praise	The writer attacks or praises an opponent or idea. This is really an assertion of the writer's viewpoint: <b>e.g. Denigrating or humiliating the person</b> , discrediting opponents as unreliable, dishonest, suggesting unsatisfactory associations.	These methods are often effective in placing the reader in a position of agreement with the writer/speaker. This process works by forceful assertion through appropriate language and insistent claims that are not usually associated with evidence.
Bias	One-sidedness in presentation of view/opinion: e.g. Eminem's tour promoter obviously sees no danger in what Eminem says.	Can subjectively influence the reader by intentionally only presenting one side of the argument.
Clichés	Worn out, over used expressions: e.g. fit as a fiddle, turn over a new leaf, Pushing the envelope.	Are familiar, often colloquial, so can offer a shortcut to convey meaning.

Persuasive Technique	Definition	How It Persuades
Colourful words and descriptive language	Words that are heightened, vivid, lively, full of interest: e.g. Hot= “blistering, sultry, muggy, suffocating...”	Produce a picture and/or induce an emotion. Engage reader by gaining attention and often put a new slant on familiar events and issues.
Contention	The main line of argument in a text. A statement of the main idea being argued or debated. What the writer wants you to agree with. The contention focuses on WHAT is being argued.	The contention pinpoints the issue and the writer’s point of view on it. Your main task is to analyse how readers are being influenced and persuaded to agree with the main contention. Analyse language use and persuasive techniques, not the argument itself.
Emotional Appeals	Emotional appeals are often subtle; they play on people’s emotions such as fears, insecurities, hopes, desires and things that are valued. Can target: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of justice or injustice.</li> <li>• Family values.</li> <li>• Tradition or custom.</li> <li>• Patriotism.</li> <li>• Moral values.</li> </ul>	Writers of media texts frequently appeal to our emotions. Invariably, these appeals relate to our values and attitudes. Often, the appeals are relatively subtle, as we are unaware of the ways in which our own values shape our opinions. Be aware that writers often shrewdly know how to persuasively direct our opinions through their appeals.  Can manipulate reader to take notice of issues by triggering an emotional response.
Emotive Language	The deliberate use of strong emotive words to play on a reader’s feelings. Language that carries strong emotions: e.g. Powerful emotive words like “sleazy, slimy, vicious, disgusting, outrageous” – words that have a legitimate use in appropriate circumstances – are used in unusual contexts to describe an action or situation.	Evokes strong emotional response in order to coerce/force agreement from reader. Such language is intentionally used to stimulate strong emotional reactions that manipulate the reader’s responses.

Persuasive Technique	Definition	How It Persuades
Generalisation	A general statement that infers or claims that whatever is being asserted is true for most people or a majority because it is true in one or some cases.	<p>Can appeal to our general sense of what is true and so sound authoritative.</p> <p>May pick up on prevailing prejudices and stereotypes in the culture and so seem convincing because familiar.</p> <p>Can use a kind of emotional appeal to our agreed prejudices and untested opinions.</p> <p>Look closely at any generalisation to see how it works to make the reader agree.</p>
Inclusive Language	Includes reader/audience by assuming “we all agree or disagree”.	Engages reader and is often friendly – gains sympathy or persuades reader to reject an idea, individual.
Language Style	How the writer ‘says’ things. The kind of language used to suit the writer’s purpose: e.g. Formal, informal, colourful, plain, everyday, ornate, poetic, literary, reasoned, informative, and so on.	<p>Language style is deliberately chosen to influence the reader. For example, <b>formal</b> styles create an impression of authority and research that can impress readers with information, knowledge, the importance of writer. Readers can feel close to, or distant from, the writer depending on other techniques.</p> <p><b>Colloquial</b> styles are chatty, friendly, and inclusive because readers are treated more as equals. Language is accessible and familiar. You always need to consider style in the context of the entire article; do not assume particular styles will always have the same effect.</p>

<b>Persuasive Technique</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>How It Persuades</b>
Loaded Words (Labelling)	Words that are loaded with associations: e.g. Words like capitalist, communist, salesman, etc.	This is a shorthand way of belittling or discrediting someone by suggesting 'association with undesirables'. This tactic usually assumes the reader's agreement with the 'emotional baggage' that such words carry.  Loaded words can be powerful in swaying the reader to a point of view and are exploited by writers who know how to position the reader for various purposes.
Repetition	Repeated words, phrases, sentence patterns, ideas.	Gives emphasis and prominence to a point or idea; repeats ideas to reinforce point, makes reader remember point.
Rhetorical Questions	Questions that have the answer embedded in them; they often use irony.	Powerful device to manipulate the reader to agree because it assumes the answer is obvious. Can position the reader/audience in such a way that to disagree would be to dismiss some point that clearly commands agreement.
Tone	Refers to the voice of the writer; the writer's attitude both to the subject matter and the reader. Tone can be emotive (but identify the emotion): e.g. Angry, sympathetic, sarcastic, etc.	Reflects the writer's attitude, which can position the reader to agree or reject something. If the tone is very aggressive, the language itself can be forceful and persuasive; a calm tone often informs a reasoned piece of writing. Changes of tone are important too as they can signal a new direction.

## COMMON MISTAKES

### TECHNIQUE RATHER THAN ANALYSIS

One common mistake is for students (and some teachers) to identify and analyse the techniques used, and then state whether or not they were used successfully. In so doing, they are resurrecting some of the skills which were taught in 'clear thinking', but failing to apply them in the manner required.

Another common error, into which some students fall, is to engage in argument or rebuttal with the writer, showing where his or her approach is mistaken.

Rather, what you must do is to show how the writer is using (or attempting to use) language to persuade readers to his or her point of view.

#### EXAMPLE

##### Text:

Organised crime in this state is now raging out of control. Unless the Premier acts to clamp down on these thugs, women and children will not be safe on our streets.

##### Sample Analysis:

The writer is using hyperbole which is ineffectual. Because we are aware of this, she is discredited, and her subsequent arguments appear false.

#### EXERCISE

- What do you think is wrong, or right with this analysis? Has the student correctly identified some of the demands of the task?
- What could be done to make it fit the criteria relevant to this task? Try writing your own analysis.

#### ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS

In hyperbolic tones the writer describes the issue of organised crime as 'out of control' with 'thugs' threatening the safety of ordinary citizens. Such dire words imply a kind of anarchy, with the authorities powerless to act. Talk of children and their safety plays on the fears of many voters that that our city streets are not the safe places they once were, further heightening the community's sense of helplessness and alarm.

Can you see how this alternative analysis offers a more **sustained** exposition of likely audience impact?

## SUMMARY

This is the other major error made by many students when tackling this task. Instead of identifying the ways in which the writer has used language to persuade her readers, many students instead summarise what the writer has said. Be wary if you find yourself using phrases like:

- the writer states
- the writer says

### EXAMPLE

#### Text:

Typical of the failure of our state government is the way it has grovelled before the green lobby groups and banned grazing of cattle in the high country. This would never have happened in the days when farmers had a say in the parliament. Unlike ivory tower academics, they have real knowledge of life on the land and the true meaning of the word conservation.

#### Sample Analysis:

The writer is clearly very angry about the failure of state governments to accede to the demands of the mountain cattle men. In most aggrieved tones he accuses governments, past and present, of bowing down to the demands of conservation groups.

Can you see how this student has merely *summarised* the text and paraphrased the writer's words, doing little to analyse the **impact** of those words? Instead you need to use more of what I like to call *adjectival analysis*, which means that you need to analyse and describe the techniques that the writer has used to persuade. Read the example below:

### ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS

Appealing to the rural readers of the newspaper, the writer criticises both the state government and various 'green lobby groups'. The government, especially, is mocked for its weakness in having 'grovelled' to those groups. The implication of this attack is that all politicians are cowards who will give in to the demands of pressure groups. This appeal to his target audience – rural and disaffected – seems designed to play upon their suspicions about 'out-of-touch' politicians. In addition, the writer seeks to lump together 'green lobby groups' with 'academics' in a kind of mutual guilt-by-association. They are depicted as being woolly idealists, in contrast to the sturdy common sense of men and women on the land. Such a dismissive approach positions the writer as being on the side of 'sensible' rural folk, while marginalising the concerns of 'green' groups as irrelevant and unrealistic.

Can you see how the latter analysis pays close attention to **the target audience**? It does not use broad generalities such as 'the general public'.

# TECHNIQUES OF PERSUASION

## ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a succession of words beginning with the same sounds. It is a device much favoured by headline writers, offering a catchy summary of the story to follow. However, as a rhetorical device it can also be quite glib and misleading. The temptation is to fall for the easily remembered and readily digested summary, with little or no analysis required. Alliteration is much favoured by the tabloid media!

### EXAMPLE

***'Doctor Death: Friend to the Dying'***

- What do you think is the purpose of using such alliteration?
- What issue is about to be explored in the article to follow?
- What effect has been created by using this technique?
- How does it make the reader think?
- What other kind of persuasive device is being used here?

### SAMPLE ANALYSIS

The loaded language of the *Herald Sun* headline is a classic example of tabloid fearmongering. The catchy alliteration of 'Doctor Death' plays upon the readers' worst fears. Most of us would think of our doctors as caring and competent people. For such esteemed professionals to be linked to 'Death', rather than healing, is indeed disturbing. Moreover, there is the still more alarming reference to the doctor as a 'friend' to the 'dying'. Our worst fear - that the one who should bring us comfort in our last hours is an entirely different kind of 'friend' – is here confirmed.

## **ANALOGIES AND METAPHORS**

The most important thing to remember with analogies and metaphors is that they seek to paint a picture for us. As persuasive devices they can be quite effective, as human beings often respond to visual stimulus more than to the written word.

### **EXAMPLE**

A state without strong leadership is like a ship without a rudder.

### **SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Arguing that 'a state without leadership' is like a 'ship without a rudder', the Premier sought to play upon the fears of her audience concerning a change in government. The implication of her remark was that the leader of the opposition is too weak to be trusted.

## **ANECDOTES**

An anecdote is a story drawn from personal experience and can also be a highly effective rhetorical device. Much more than dry statistics, anecdotes tell us about human experience and have the flavour of plausibility about them.

### **EXAMPLE**

I know many people who enjoy the odd flutter at the pokies. Not one of them is addicted to gambling.

### **SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Addressing the parliamentary committee on problem gambling, a spokesperson for the hotel industry referred to the 'many people' she knew who enjoyed the 'odd flutter at the pokies'. The key words 'odd' and 'flutter' in her statement sought to defuse her audience's concerns about the proliferation of gambling in the state, implying a harmless bet taken on the odd occasion.

## **APPEALS TO TRADITION**

These appeals rely upon a sense of the past which is worth preserving. They can be very convincing, especially to an older, more conservative audience.

### **EXAMPLE**

The Union Jack has long had pride of place on the Australian flag. It would be a slap in the face to our forefathers if we were to abandon it now.

### **SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Addressing the RSL membership yesterday, State President Brian Luxton, drew on his understanding of history to argue in favour of retaining the Union Jack. This, combined with the rather emotive reference to our 'forefathers' and the 'slap in the face' to their memory, seem designed to appeal to the sentiments of his target audience. Their great deeds are effectively linked to a long military tradition, now seemingly under threat from this proposed change.

## **APPEALS TO PAROCHIAL BELIEFS AND VALUES**

Like appeals to tradition, this kind of rhetoric often implies a 'shared' set of values. They may pertain to members of a local or school community, a town, or any area restricted in size and number.

### **EXAMPLE**

Residents of our 'tidy town' can feel justifiably proud of its achievements, and need no advice from outsiders as to how we should run our festival.

### **SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Using the inclusive term 'our' in reference to her town and festival, the mayor denigrated those 'outsiders' who would offer her any advice. Thus she appealed to the parochial elements in her audience who would resent any suggestion that their organisation of the festival had been less than perfect.

## **APPEALS TO OUR SYMPATHY**

As the title suggests, such appeals are designed to win over an audience by appealing to its sympathetic side. They may often involve the use of emotive and exaggerated language to enhance their appeal.

### **EXAMPLE**

How can poor teachers, overworked and under-resourced, be expected to take on this latest curriculum initiative? It's simply heartless of the government even to propose such a scheme.

### **SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Brian Chalker, President of the Teachers' Association, appeals to the sympathies of the school board, arguing that 'overworked' teachers cannot possibly accept this latest curriculum 'initiative'. Contrasting the schemes of a 'heartless' government with the demands on 'poor' teachers, he seeks to highlight the victim status of his fellow professionals and spare them any extra workload.

## **APPEALS TO PATRIOTISM**

Such appeals rely upon a shared sense of values regarding one's country, its past, and the need to defend it at all costs. Politicians can use them in quite devious and manipulative ways to coerce their audience into agreeing with a certain policy.

### **EXAMPLE**

Freedom-loving Australians, those who truly support this country and its proud democratic traditions, will get behind this latest military initiative by the government.

### **SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Arguing in favour of recent military interventions by Australia, the Prime Minister made an unashamed appeal to all 'freedom-loving Australians', to those who 'truly support this country'. Such a blatant appeal - with its implication that those who oppose him are somehow unpatriotic - seems designed to play upon the patriotic instincts of his audience. What kind of person would not support such an initiative?

**NOTE:**

There are many other kinds of appeals with which you should be familiar. They include:

- Appeals to common sense ('the only sensible approach is to ..').
- Appeals to fair play ('our sense of compassion and decency demands that ...').
- Appeals to fear ('our traditional way of life is under threat if .....').
- Appeals to self-interest ('do the ratepayers wish to see their money spent in this fashion?').
- Appeals to guilt/shame ('how can we stand by and see young lives wasted ...?').
- Appeals to family values ('the traditional family unit has always protected ....').

**ATTACKING THE PERSON**

This kind of approach attacks the person, rather than seeking to address the argument. It is commonly employed by politicians and can be a quite successful diversionary tactic. By deriding the opposing person, rather than the argument, the unnamed politician is here seeking to avoid answering the question.

**EXAMPLE**

In opposing increased taxes, the leader of the opposition has been exposed as the vile opportunist we have long known him to be.

**SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

Yesterday, in Parliament, the Prime Minister chose to attack the leader of the opposition for his supposed lack of integrity. The personal nature of this attack sought to divert parliament's attention from the issue of taxes.