

Persuasive Prose: A brief Summary

A persuasive text is designed to influence the reader by either altering their behaviour or attitudes. Naturally, there are many different types of persuasive texts, but the three most important types, in terms of this course, are speeches, advertisements and articles, as they are the easiest forms of persuasive prose to examine in writing.

Study Unit 03 places an emphasis on analysing texts to figure out how and why they are persuasive. In other words, the **aim** of this sort of analysis is to **figure out** what the **author** of the text **wants the audience to experience, feel or do** in response to the text, based on how the **author** tries to **manipulate** the **audience**. To do this, your Study Guide suggests that you structure your essay according to five key questions: **What, When, Who, Why and How?** Obviously, you have already encountered three of these questions in Study Unit 01, but the other two are new. I will summarise all of these questions again for you here and provide certain tips about how you can use them in your analysis and how important they are, relative to each other:

What?

As always, **What** refers, firstly, to what type of text you are analysing. Look at it closely, as format matters more in persuasive prose than it does in the other sections, which are much more clearly differentiated from one another. Is it an image, a cartoon, an academic essay, a newspaper article, a speech, or an advertisement?

Be careful here, as some articles read like advertisements and vice versa. Always remember that advertisements are **selling something**. The behaviour they try to encourage in their audience is almost always to go out and purchase something, so you can normally identify an advertisement by the fact that it will include a **product, brand or company name**.

While **What** focuses more on format than in the other sections of your Study Guide, don't forget to ask yourself **what** the text is about, as content is obviously still important!

When?

Sometimes **When** a text was written becomes an important question, as social and global concerns change with time and the ways in which texts such as advertisements manipulate readers also change with time. Thus answering this question becomes an important stepping stone to understand **Why** the text was written. That having been said, however, do not get *too* caught up on trying to answer this question as a part of your essay, as the focus should always be **Why** and **How?**

Remember that most texts contain clues as to when they were written, if you look closely enough, so look out for publication dates at the bottom of advertisements and articles!

Who?

Again, asking yourself **Who** the intended audience is can often provide insights into the most important questions of **How** and **Why**, as the author of a persuasive text is usually trying to influence

a specific type of reader, so identifying the audience becomes an important aspect of identifying the message.

Often the language and punctuation used in a text, along with any images used, will provide a clue as to who the text is directed at, if you have not found any other indication of the target audience.

Why?

As always, **Why** the text was written is the most important question you have to answer in your analysis, as it is the reason we conduct analyses in the first place. Obviously, this is point at which you need to figure out what the text is trying to do.

In other words, when examining the text, ask yourself if you are able to isolate the text's function. As always, content and format can provide clues as to function, so answering **What** the text is can often give you clues about **Why** it was written.

Ask yourself if the text is trying to **inform** you about something or to **persuade** you to change your mind about something or if it is trying to **sell** you a particular product, as these are the **three most common functions of persuasive texts** (for example, an academic essay is meant to inform and present ideas within a structured argument).

Is the text meant to **inform** or **persuade**? **Can it both inform and persuade**? Once you think you have a basic idea of what the text is trying to do, see if you can dig a bit deeper and identify if the text is very subtly trying to do something else or something more, as **many persuasive texts, especially articles** (that are supposed to be objective, but all too often aren't) **can be incredibly subtle in their attempts to influence their audiences!**

Once you understand **Why** a text was written, you can examine **How** the use of language, art, punctuation, tone, diction and style are used to actually influence the reader.

How?

So now we come to the point where you need to identify **How** the author attempts to persuade or inform the target audience. You should begin your analysis by **examining any headlines, headings or titles** apparent on the text. Ask yourself **how** the text **draws attention to itself** and its topic. **Articles** often do this with **headlines**, while **advertisements** usually do this with **catch-phrases, slogans or pictures**. **Articles** normally provide the **topic** in their **titles** and **speeches** usually identify the **topic** in the **introduction**.

Once you have looked at the title of the text, consider any **visual elements** that may have been employed to supplement the written content. Look at **how** the **author uses images** (being careful **not to overlook** the effects of any **colour** or **lighting techniques** that may be evident), along with any **key phrases** which may be present.

Ask yourself **what type of image is used** (a photograph, a drawing, a painting, or a comic) and why it has been used. **Ask yourself how colour and lighting are used how their use affects you**. Don't forget to **also examine** the **format** of the **written text itself**. How are the **elements** of the **text**

positioned? Where is the picture? Where is the copy? Is the headline/title at the top of the text? How big is the text? Why?

Once you have examined all of these elements, it is time to move onto the **language**, which is the one element that every type of text you will study has in common. Ask yourself **how language is (linguistic devices and language features) used to structure the way in which the resulting ideas are presented and sold to the audience**. Try to identify any literary and linguistic techniques used within the text and how they are used to effectively **influence your emotions and opinions**.

Try to identify if the **language** used is **emotive** or **formal**, ask yourself **how punctuation is used** in the text, see if you can **identify any key words** or **repeated phrases** and make sure to look at **how tone and style are used to influence the reader**. Is the tone friendly? Conspiratorial? Patronising? Why? What does the author achieve through this use of tone?

Try to **identify** if there is any **ambiguity** within the text: Are you **unsure** as to the **topic** or **purpose** of the **text**? Does the **text argue an issue from multiple sides**? If this is the case, the text is ambiguous and you need to ask yourself why.

Always remember that **persuasive texts** are there to **convince** and **persuade** the audience of a **specific idea** or notion. There is an **intended goal** for the text and when you analyse the text you need to always ask yourself what this goal is when looking at the above questions. **The entire text is shaped around the goal** and in focusing on that goal you will be conscious of the **what, how, who** and **why** of the text.