



Four Steps to Your Persuasive Writing Project

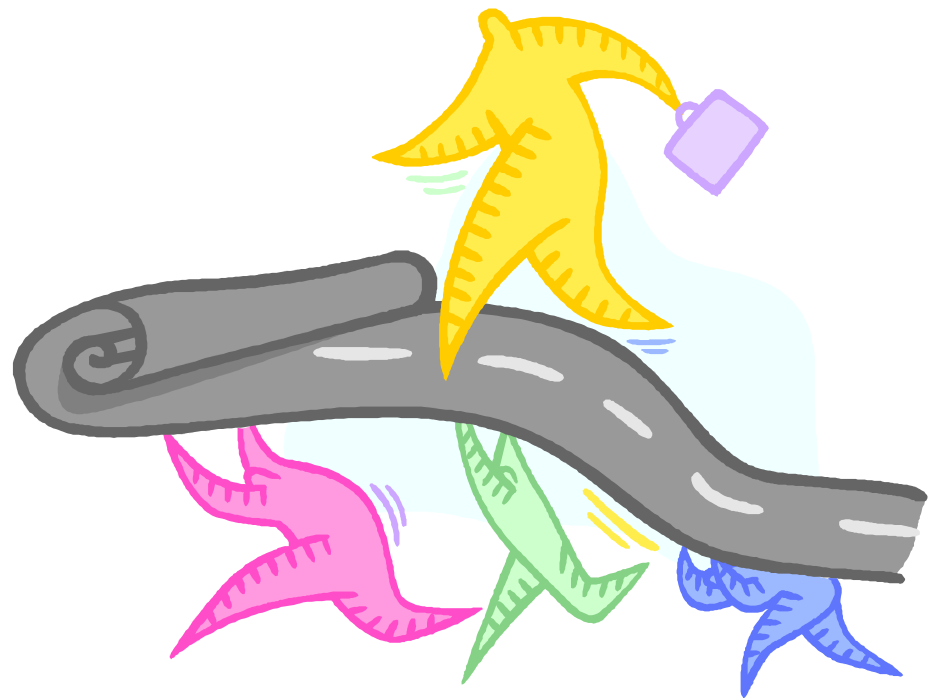
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Introduction

Whether you're planning a brochure, an advertisement, an annual report, or a corporate overview, your ultimate challenge is to persuade your readers to do something. It could be to buy your product. It could be to invest in your company. Or it could be to support your cause.

Whatever it is, you're facing naturally skeptical readers who will put up no small effort to refute your arguments. They may not do so outwardly, but their human nature will dictate that they remain in their tracks and not deviate to meet what they perceive are your needs, not their own. Confronting this human nature is difficult. Most writers fail at it, as evidenced by, say, a historic three percent response rate across the board (which marketers actually have the nerve to say is good!), and the paper they've wasted would've better been used as packing or fire starters.



There is hope for your cause, though, if you plan well and execute effectively. Take the following steps to make your document more convincing and attractive in the minds of your readers. The job of the written product is to make one or more arguments that the subject matter is important, that it will affect the reader, and that the reader needs to take steps (buy, invest, support).

**In this paper we'll discuss
four basic steps to a
winning paper:**

- **Setting goals**
- **Outlining**
- **Drafting**
- **Revising**

Step One Setting Your Goals

Before you begin your outline and draft, consider some specific goals for your project. Not only will the draft be easier to write once you have established some goals, but your message is also likely to be more convincing.

Use the following questions to help set your goals. You may find it useful to return to them while you are drafting, for they are designed to help you focus on specific elements of an essay on a subject that will affect your readers.



- How can I present myself so that my readers will consider me informed and authoritative?

The Beginning

- What opening would make my readers take this subject seriously and really want to think about its connection to them?
- Should I personalize it? Should I begin with a case, or by citing statistics?

Presentation of the Subject

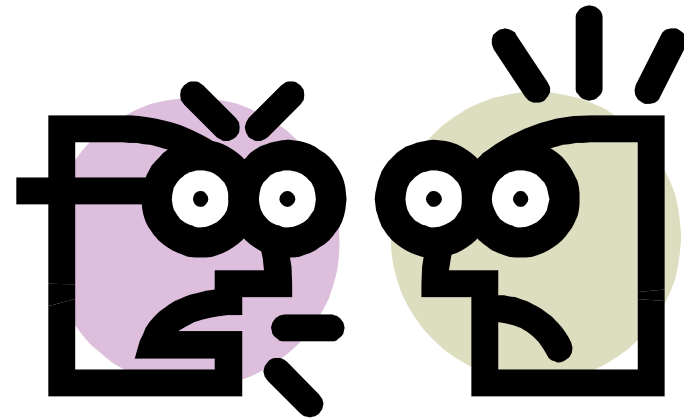
- Do I need to demonstrate that my subject really exists?
- If I am analyzing a trend, do I need to demonstrate that it is not just a fluctuation or a fad?
- How much and what kind of evidence do I need for these points?

Your Readers

- What are my readers likely to know about the subject?
- How can I interest them in knowing more about the subject?

The This-Will-Affect-You Argument

- How many arguments should I proffer? Should I mention or give evidence for minor arguments?
- How can I present my proposed arguments in the most effective order?
- Should I arrange them from most important to least important or vice versa? From most obvious to least obvious or vice versa? From immediate to remote or vice versa?
- Do I need to make other distinctions among arguments, such as between an argument that starts a trend and one that keeps it going?
- How much and what kind of support do I need to offer to make each argument plausible to readers?
- Are any arguments so obvious that support is unnecessary?
- Do I need to demonstrate to readers that all of my arguments existed before the phenomenon or trend began?



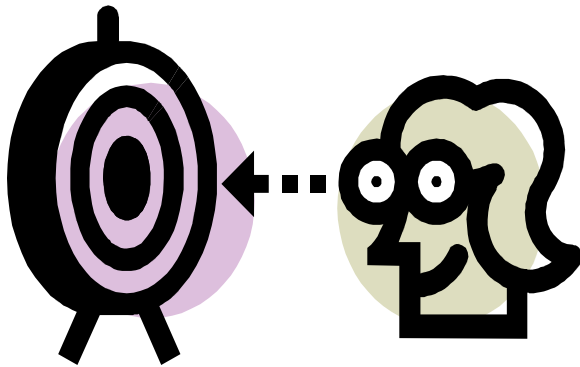
- How can I refute readers' objections to my arguments?
- How can I refute alternative arguments readers might propose?

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The Ending

- How should I end my piece?
- Should I frame it by referring to the beginning?
- Do I need to summarize my arguments?
- Should I conclude with a conjecture about larger implications?

Step Two The Outline



Once you are clear on your goals, create an outline to follow as you move slowly toward the finished product.

the ones you are proposing, you could begin by describing the subject and indicating its importance or interest. Then, state your first proposed argument, supporting it convincingly and accommodating or refuting readers' likely questions and objections. Follow the same pattern for any other arguments you propose. Your conclusion could then mention—and elucidate—the lack of other explanations of your subject.

The argument you make to support your position and convince your readers may contain as many as four basic parts:

1. A presentation of the subject
2. A presentation of proposed arguments and support for them
3. A consideration of readers' objections, questions, or reservations
4. A consideration and refutation of alternative arguments

These parts can be organized in various ways. If your readers are not likely to think of any arguments other than

- Presentation of the subject
- First proposed argument with support and refutation of objections, if any
- Second proposed argument with support and refutation of objections, if any (etc.)
- Conclusion

If you need to account for alternative arguments that are likely to occur to readers, you could discuss them first and give your reasons for rejecting them before offering your own proposed arguments. Many writers save their own arguments for last, hoping readers will remember them best.

Step Two The Outline

continued

- Presentation of the subject
- Alternative causes and reasons for rejecting them
- Proposed arguments with support and refutation of objections, if any
- Conclusion

Another option is to put your own causes first, followed by alternatives. This pattern helps you to show the relative likelihood of your arguments over the others. You might then end with a restatement of your arguments.

- Presentation of the subject
- Proposed arguments with support and refutation of objections, if any
- Alternative arguments compared with your arguments
- Concluding restatement of your proposed arguments

There are, of course, many other possible ways to organize your effort to persuade, but these outlines should help you start planning your own convincing paper.



Step Three The Draft

Now it's time for the first draft. Professional writers keep the following practical points in mind as they begin their first draft.

Choose a Time and Place Carefully.

Sure, you can write almost anywhere: on a train, in front of the TV (but it won't be good), or waiting your turn on the Jeopardy set. But drafting will go more smoothly if you choose a time and place ideally suited for sustained and thoughtful work. It's best to set aside a few hours in a place where there are no interruptions and distractions. Close the door to your office. If you're in a cubicle, go camp out in an empty conference room. If you have a laptop, set up on a quiet park bench. Writers often find one place where they write the best, and they return there whenever they have to write. Find your own place today.

Make It Easy.

Everybody today uses some kind of word processing software. But some people actually like doing things the



old-fashioned way. You might be surprised by how well you write with paper and pencil. After all, the greats of yesteryear did! If you feel like imitating Mark Twain, leave wide margins. Write on every other line. It'll be easier to insert and delete this way. You'll see!



Set Goals for the Writing Task Itself.

Divide the writing task into portions. If the entire document is daunting, set a goal of completing just a short section or two—or even a paragraph or two. Build on this and make progress in short steps.

Easy Does It.

This is a draft. This is only a draft. It does not have to be perfect, so give your critical nature a break for the moment. Approach the draft as an experiment or an exercise. Try different phrasing. Digress. Revisions come later.

Easy Is Good.

Don't fret over the start of your document. Just write. If you have trouble with the introduction, write an anecdote or example or assertion first. Start with the information you know best. Just don't put off starting. If you do, your work will be rushed and the argument you make will appear compressed. But start early and you'll find joy in there being no time pressure.

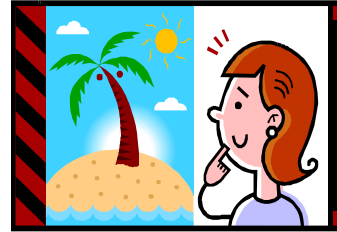
Guess at Words, Spelling, and Facts.

Don't go into idle mode over just the right word, or how something is spelled, or some factual detail. Just blurt it out in the document. When you later revise, you can hone your words and facts. Of course, leave it to ProofreadNOW.com to fix your spelling and grammar errors while you move on to your next lucrative project!



Write Quickly.

Your reasonably set goals and your good outline should enable you to write your draft quickly. Say what you want to say and move on.



Take Short Breaks and Reward Yourself.

Don't lose momentum, but do reward yourself with a quick break after you've completed a section or paragraph. Set those goals small at first and reward yourself regularly. We don't recommend a TV or e-mail break, but rather something that frees the mind to a creative outlet instead. Engage in nature, do some daydreaming, or prepare a meal. These kinds of activities do not engage your critical literary faculties, so you won't be distracted from the writing task at hand.

Step Four The Revision Process

With solid goals, a good outline, and a nifty draft, you'll be all set to write that winning white paper, compelling report, or engaging analysis. The final task is revising.



To identify problems in your draft, you need to get an objective overview of it, analyze its basic features in detail, and assess any critical comments on it made by other readers.

1. Reread your draft. If at all possible, put the draft aside for a day or two so it can “age” on the shelf. Get involved in other, unrelated tasks. This will reset your thinking when you come back to the draft. When you do return, start by reconsidering your audience and the purpose of your writing. Read the draft straight through, trying to see it the way your intended readers will see it.
2. Outline the draft. Make a draft outline of the draft, based on your rereading of it, and chart its development of the theme. Words and phrases will do as long as they identify the subject and any important details, the argument(s) made, any objections you hope to respond to, and alternative arguments you intend to refute. As an exercise in consistency, lightly compare this outline to the one you created before you wrote your draft and see how close they are. Perhaps some adjustments can be made in the text.

Step Four The Revision Process

continued

Once you have an overview of the draft, use a double-column chart to track specific problems you need to solve. In the left column, list the seven basic features of an essay that makes a point (or an argument). As you analyze your draft and study any comments you have received from others, use the right column to note any problems with each feature. Here is a starting form:

Basic Features	Problems to Solve
Presentation of the subject	<hr/>
Presentation of arguments	<hr/>
Presentation of support	<hr/>
Response to objections	<hr/>
Response to questions	<hr/>
Response to alternative arguments	<hr/>
Organization	<hr/>

Step Four The Revision Process

continued



At this point, your draft should get a critical reading...by you and by at least one other thoughtful person. This process is to identify problems in the draft. Ask your readers to take notes for the seven points in the list above. Your readers should read the draft at least twice - first to get a general impression and then to analyze its basic features.

Ask them also to make the following notes:

1. What is your first impression of the draft? Did it hold your interest? What did you like best? What could be cut? Were there any surprises?
2. How well is the subject presented? Does it give enough information to make the reader care about the subject? Where might additional details, facts, or statistics help?

3. Are readers' likely objections addressed? Can you see other ways of either accommodating or refuting readers' objections?
4. Is the organization effective? Will the beginning engage readers? Does the document conclude decisively and memorably?

Lay aside your tendency to become defensive as you review comments from your critical readers. Their information can be terrifically useful in improving your draft. Add to the chart any comments your readers provide.

Now set about creating your final document, using your draft, your final outline, and the notes gathered from your readers. You should have plenty of useful information to make your document compelling!



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