

The A+ Writing Template

Subject: _____

Topic: _____

Due Date: _____

Sitting down to write a persuasive essay can be a daunting process. Writer's block is the killer of creativity. But as with any task, the simplest way to tackle a problem is to chunk it down into the sum of its parts.

Step 1 – Organize

The first step to any problem is to keep things organized. Now I am sure you have a great phone app to keep track of things, but we are going to go a little old school for this step. It's called pen and paper :)

Print this guide and write at the top of this page what subject you are writing for. For example, this might be the paper for your Introduction To Economic Theory class. If it helps you prioritize, write how much this assignment is worth and the word-count minimum.

Next, write down the topic you want to discuss and when the assignment should be finished. Put the deadline you want the essay by so you can plan your week.

Step 2 - Break The Essay Down

At it's core, a persuasive essay consists on 6 components -

1. Title
2. Thesis
3. Paragraph 1 with supporting facts.
4. Paragraph 2 with supporting facts.
5. Paragraph 3 with supporting facts.

6. Conclusion and summary with call to action.

You have the thesis, or introduction, 3 discussion paragraphs to persuade your reader and the conclusion. This gives a total of 5 elements and is where the persuasive essay gets its other name – the 5 paragraph essay.

The first step in starting your essay is the thesis. In the boxes below, write down the idea you are trying to convince your audience about. Why they should believe you? What benefit do you they get from siding with you?

What am I trying to convince my audience about?

Why should they believe you?

What benefit do you they get from siding with you?

It won't form part of your template (and leave it out when I ask you to bring all your parts together at the end) but it is useful to understand why you someone won't be persuaded by you.

What could stop them from being persuaded by you? What else could they believe?

Step 3 – Give Me A Reason

You have already written down what you are trying to convince your audience about. Now give me a reason why they should believe you. Now list 2 or 3 facts that support your first reason.

Reason 1 -

Facts -

Now give me reason 2 -

Reason 2 -

Facts -

And finally, reason 3 -

Reason 3 -

Facts -

If you are still stuck on this step, list a feature of your topic and then a benefit to thinking this way. It's a classic sales technique. Sell people on what they will get out of a situation, not the situation itself.

Step 4 – Finish It Off

Time to finish it off. More often than not, the conclusion is the weaker cousin to the introduction. If the essay is not going the way you want it, you just want the pain to end. This leads to a weak conclusion as you rush through it.

Want to know how to write a great conclusion? Tie your points together and give a call to action.

If you have worked in sales or marketing, you know exactly what this means. If not, go clothes shopping and listen to the sales person and the sales pitch (i.e the persuasion). You might hear “these are our hot new season's line we just got in”. That's the opening statement and is what she is trying to convince you about (i.e you are a fashionable shopper and this is hot right now).

Next, she might say “that color would look great on you”. This is a feature (the color) and the corresponding benefit (it will look good on you).

Last comes the call to action when she says “would you like to try it on”. She is not asking you to buy it, she is just asking you to take action. Trying the clothes on is the key step in getting you to buy and creates an emotional attachment to the product .

So why persuade this way? People love to buy but hate being sold. A call to action does not ask for the sale directly, but simply requests a commitment step that will lead to a purchase. The same applies in your essay – give people a commitment step to agree with you.

Call to action -

Step 5 – Create The Outline

Put down your pen for the moment and take a look at what you have done.

One goal, three reasons, 2 or 3 facts per reason.

It might not be art, but it is an outline. What you are trying to convince people of is your thesis statement. Each of the reasons are the subjects for your supporting paragraphs. And each supporting paragraph already has some facts you can use to create authority with your readers.

Even if you were just scribbling down some rough notes, you are probably going to have 150 words to get you going. Not a bad start. And as a nice little bonus, you just completed the hardest part of your paper, and that is figuring out what to write.

Step 6 – Let It Rest

Congratulations, the hard part is over. Now put it down and do something different.

All good writing benefits from sleeping on it. When you are writing it, you tend to read what you thought you wrote, not what you actually wrote. Put the project down for a day or so and let the ideas mature in your mind. You don't have to do this, but it will improve your writing if you do. You can either be a writer or you can be an editor in one sit down

session, but you can't do both.

So What Happens Next?

You've just created a killer outline, so what comes next? The answer is simple, sit down and write your essay. You have already created the framework. Now fill in the gaps. Here's a tip though - no one expects you to sit down and write perfectly crafted prose on your first attempt. So don't try. Putting that expectation on yourself straight up is a sure fire way to bring on writer's block. I find the easiest way to let my creativity of the leash is to free write my first draft.

What is free writing? Put simply – you sit down, you relax and you write. Write whatever comes into your mind about your chosen topic. Don't stop to edit. Don't even bother creating whole sentences or separate paragraphs if you don't want to. Just keep writing.

You can set a time limit if you want, for example, 20 minutes. After your initial spurt of activity, read through what you have written for ideas to develop further.

Your free writing might end up as points to develop further. It might even be complete paragraphs you can use in your final composition. If you sit down and free write for even just 10 minutes, you will often end up with 300 or 400 words of good material.

Your Eight Most Important Words

You have taken your outline and written a brilliant essay. It is witty and thought provoking. Now it's time for the last step. It's time to write the title. That's right – the first words your reader will read are the last words you will write.

Setting a title, especially a bad title, early on can restrict your creativity. Tell people what they are going to read after you have finished creating it. If you have a great title in mind, go with that. If you are stuck, here is a simple formula -

1. Write down your article topic in one or two words.
2. Put a hyphen.

3. Write down what insight into the topic you are trying to give.

An example of this might be -

Election Rigging – Do Electronic Voting Machines Really Work?

Environment Vandalism – Are Oil Spills The Price Of Industrial Development?

Asking a question in a title is a power tool to get your reader thinking from the opening words. And dare to be a little controversial.

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Reason 1 -

Facts -

Reason 2 -

Facts -

Reason 3 -

Facts -

Call to action -