

English 101 Persuasive essay #1 – first-hand experiences and observations

assignment:

Write a persuasive essay that uses first-hand experiences and observations to illustrate your points (instead of relying on information gathered through research). The goal of the essay is to convince a general audience to perceive and/or act on a specific situation or widespread problem as you suggest they do. So while your essay can take a problem/solution approach, depending on what you write about, a solution may not be necessary.

practical applications:

Argumentation is one of the chief forms of discourse, and writing persuasive essays helps students develop the skills necessary to advance their own arguments, analyze arguments they're bombarded with on a daily basis, and better resolve arguments with themselves.

an overview:

The writing skills students develop by putting together the narrative and descriptive essays will also help make their persuasive essays effective. If the writer can captivate readers with effective details, such as brief narratives to illustrate the perspective offered, readers will be more willing to accept the writer's perspective, especially if it is clear and reasonable and the language precise.

I have found that writing persuasive essays is difficult for many students. They need to figure out what to focus on, how to support their perspectives with their own experiences and observations, and so on. Whereas it may be easy to find narratives and subjects to write about for the first two essay assignments, many students have trouble finding a position to argue and sticking with it. Perhaps these individuals are used to having others tell them what to think. Perhaps they feel they have little to contribute to a public discussion because they believe they lack life experience. Whatever the roadblock, they can find much to write about that they can support with evidence from first-hand experience.

Consider taking a position on one of the following specific situations or widespread problems: an interesting practice or issue in your community, our fast-paced culture, our sports culture, pollution, lack of positive role models, ineffective education, teenagers spending too much time focusing on their romantic relationships, poor health of Americans, misplaced priorities, people's inability to appreciate simple pleasures anymore, poor parenting skills, trivial news coverage, alienation from nature, or fear of risk.

After thinking about various choices, students need to figure out how to best present their positions to a general audience. If a writer were to focus on the value of students in high school participating in extracurricular activities, she should keep in mind that most classmates who would read the essay have already graduated from high school, so discussing the benefits with readers who might be parents now, future parents, and possibly siblings of younger students yet to graduate high school would be more appropriate for this assignment. Establishing a proper tone and maintaining credibility are also important in argumentation. Writers certainly do not want to offend the audience. The goal is "to convince a general audience to perceive and/or act on a specific situation or widespread problem as [the writer suggests] they do." Let's say a writer decides to try to convince readers that abortion is a bad and should be illegal. (I ask that students not focus this persuasive essay on advocating certain public policies

that would require information gathered through research to be effective.) If the writer of the anti-abortion essay somehow appears to attack those who condone the practice, he could lose his credibility with the very people he is attempting to sway to his point of view. Offending the audience somehow, appearing selfish, being mean-spirited, exaggerating, and using poor reasoning will not help the writer maintain the credibility needed to get most readers' votes. Keeping in mind how the audience would be able to help change such laws also needs to be taken into account.

In addition, writers of persuasive essays should consider utilizing comparisons and/or contrasts to make their perspectives interesting and memorable. A writer focusing on pollution and people's thoughts about it could compare the way some individuals think about the garbage they dispose of with the way a child might clean his room, hiding the mess under his bed or in a closet. Or if a writer is focusing on children's need for proper discipline, she might contrast how different parents discipline their children in similar situations and the results of the methods of discipline used. And so on. Persuasive essays don't have to be boring. If they are, they won't be effective.