Organizing the Persuasive Essay

Although an academic argument may be developed in a number of ways, the following elements are essential to any persuasive essay:

1. **A clear, persuasive claim.** The thesis statement must take an arguable position on the issue.

2. **An establishment of the problem.** Although a persuasive essay usually will not require a large amount of space to inform the audience about the history and background of an issue, a persuasive essay must establish an awareness of a legitimate controversy, the seriousness of the problem at hand, and the resulting urgency of the issue.

3. **Necessary background.** Again, persuasive essays don’t spend as much time informing the audience as an informative essay does, but even persuasive essays must take into account whether the audience needs to understand particular laws, definitions, or processes in order to follow the argument and grasp the seriousness and complexities of the issue.

4. **A thoroughly and logically reasoned discussion of reasons to support the thesis claim.** Readers should be able to easily pick out the main points of support for the thesis statement and see how those points relate to one another and prove the thesis. For each main point given to prove the thesis, the audience should also see significant research and discussion to illustrate and prove those claims.

5. **An address of counterarguments or opposing viewpoints.** Fair and balanced arguments cannot ignore objections to our claims and research. Ignoring opposing claims and difficult evidence will only leave the audience with room to object and to ask, “Yeah, but what about A, B, or C?” or to think, “But wait! This argument doesn’t even consider X, Y, or Z.” By addressing counterarguments and acknowledging opposing views, authors demonstrate that they have thought through the controversy from all angles and that their argument can stand up against opposition. They also anticipate audience objections and address those objections before the audience has a chance to make them.

6. **A conclusion reiterating your point.** To close the essay, you will need to show how all of your claims and rebuttals tie together to make a strong case in support the essay’s thesis. You may wish to leave your audience with a sense of urgency or with a call to action. You will certainly want to end on a well-worded, persuasive note.

Even with this instruction on persuasive structure, the most common mistake students make when developing the Persuasive Essay is that they structure it too similarly to the Research Essay and fail to develop an argument structure. Students often wonder, “If I’m supposed to present opposing views, and I’m supposed to present my views, how is this essay so different from the research essay?”
Probably the most fundamental difference from the first essay is that in this essay, you will only be briefly explaining opposing views so that you can, in turn, respond to those views. You will not be thoroughly overviewing each counterargument in the same way you did in the first essay. Although you will seek to fairly represent each opposing view without oversimplifying the issue, you will not need to spend as much space doing so, and you’ll immediately follow the discussion with a rebuttal which picks apart and concedes or rebuts the counterargument.

To help encourage a persuasive stance throughout the essay, you will be asked to use classical argument structure to develop the Persuasive Essay:

**Classical Argument Structure: Option 1**

I. Introduction
II. Background
III. Presentation of author’s claims
   i. Claim 1 to support the thesis
   ii. Claim 2 to support the thesis
   iii. Claim 3 to support the thesis, etc.
IV. Presentation of and response to opposing viewpoints
   i. Opponents’ first objection (counterargument) to thesis claim
      1. Your persuasive response
   ii. Opponents’ second objection (counterargument) to thesis claim
      1. Your persuasive response
   iii. Opponents’ third objection (counterargument) to thesis claim
      1. Your persuasive response
V. Conclusion

**Classical Argument Structure: Option 2**

If you feel it makes your argument more logical and persuasive, you can present and respond to opposing viewpoints before presenting your own claims:

I. Introduction
II. Background
III. Presentation of and response to opposing viewpoints (counterarguments)
IV. Presentation of author’s claims
V. Conclusion
A Third Option: Refutative Design

In the rare case that all of your claims must be presented as responses to opposing viewpoints, you may need to use a refutative design to develop the argument. In that case, you would present at least six objections (or counterarguments) opponents would make to the thesis and persuasively respond to each counterargument in order to persuade the audience.

I. Introduction
II. Background
III. Presentation and response to opposing viewpoints (counterarguments)
IV. Conclusion

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