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Using language to persuade Persuasive techniques

IN THIS CHAPTER

- A range of persuasive techniques with examples
- How the techniques persuade
- Examples and analysis of persuasive techniques
- An activity for each technique

Persuasive language techniques are deliberately chosen to influence and persuade readers and viewers.

This chapter considers a range of persuasive techniques that writers and creators use to persuade a reader, listener or viewer to accept a particular point of view. Use the examples and explanations that follow as a reference for developing the knowledge and skills necessary to identify, discuss and analyse persuasive techniques.

PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

You will be asked to **analyse** how language is used to persuade readers (or viewers) to share a particular viewpoint. Analysis of persuasive language and techniques is not just a matter of finding examples and listing them in your written pieces or oral presentations. You will need to show **how** they actually work by explaining how they influence, persuade or manipulate readers. You will be expected to use three or four well-chosen examples in your language analysis.

Don't just list persuasive techniques, explain HOW they persuade.

In order to develop the knowledge and skills of language analysis, this chapter:

- ✱ describes and defines a range of persuasive language and techniques
- ✱ explains how each example persuades
- ✱ suggests how to write about them
- ✱ provides examples for you to practise on.

Before you deal with persuasive techniques in a media text, you have to identify the main contention.

Main contention

The main contention pinpoints the issue and presents the writer's point of view on it. To show that you have understood the main contention, aim to express it in a single sentence. After this, you analyse how readers are being influenced and persuaded to agree with the main contention.

How it persuades

The main contention should be expressed in a single sentence in the introductory paragraph or opening remarks. It is a clear, concise and strong statement of the writer's overall position. Once the point of view is established, the following paragraphs discuss ways in which the reader is positioned to share the point of view.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Alternative therapies for cancer patients should not be undertaken in preference to conventional treatments.

Can you find a main contention? Is it clearly expressed? Do you understand what the writer is trying to say? The answers to these questions will help you to start your discussion in a language analysis.

- ◆ Express the contention in your own words: *Alternative therapies for cancer patients should not be favoured over conventional treatments.*
- ◆ State how the writer is presenting it: *The writer claims in an assertive tone that alternative therapies for cancer patients should not be favoured over conventional treatments.*

ACTIVITY

Identify the main contention, state it in your own words, then say how the writer is presenting it.

Technology has turned the traditional image of the bully waiting at the school gates on its head. Now a 24-hour, wireless, faceless version 2.0 of the school bully hides behind text messages, MySpace, YouTube and social networking sites.

Larissa Dubecki, *The Age* 28 October 2006, News p.6

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of a consonant at the beginning of words. The repeated sound will recur several times within a sentence or a headline.

How it persuades

Alliteration grabs the reader's attention. However, alliteration most commonly works with other persuasive language techniques, such as repetition, tone and puns, to attract attention and add emphasis, especially in headlines.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Mobiles make me mad! I don't have mini-fingers and my eyesight is going. Makers of mobiles, this is a plea. Please create models for people like me.

In the first sentence, the writer uses alliteration to emphasise anger and frustration with mobile phones. With the repetition of the letter 'm' and the use of short words such as the colloquial 'mad', each word is stressed. This expresses and emphasises the writer's negative feelings about mobile phones. However, the anger is not sustained in the plea for help in the second sentence. A more playful tone is introduced with use of the letter 'p' and rhyme to generate a feeling of amusement. Overall, the effect of the repetition of letters and words and the use of rhyme positions the reader to feel sympathy for the writer.

ACTIVITY

Identify the use of alliteration in the following examples of headlines and explain whether or not they are effective.

Births up but babies still put a bump in women's career paths

The Age October 2006

Suffer not: the stutter stops here

(*Education Age*, October 2006 – an article on a solution for children with a speech difficulty)

Attacks

Attacks denigrate an opponent. They employ various strategies such as undermining, belittling, insulting, dismissing or embarrassing the person, political party or institution.

How they persuade

Writers use attacks to position readers to agree by attacking the individual, group, association or government party. The reader is usually influenced by the use of very forceful attacks that generate strong emotional responses

such as rage and feelings of betrayal. The reader is then easily swayed and manipulated to agree. In reality, the real issue has not been discussed or examined because attacks work through stirring up dissatisfaction, discontent, indignation, anger, shock and outrage in the reader.

Attacks often take the form of an accusation, such as 'X is untrustworthy, ignorant or incompetent'. They can also strip a person of credibility by pointing to very poor past performance or the claim that someone is associated with allegedly disreputable groups.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

This failing, uncaring Premier has once again shown his contempt for problem gamblers.

The writer uses the words 'failing' and 'uncaring' to make a direct attack on the Premier and by association on the government. Because it is claimed that the 'Premier has ... shown his contempt for problem gamblers' we are positioned to think that he is doing nothing at all for this group; in fact, the writer suggests with the words 'once again' that this is a recurring pattern. This is a 'blame-and-shame' approach. The word 'contempt' prompts the reader to think that the Premier considers problem gamblers beneath his dignity. This positions the reader to dismiss the Premier and to see the 'problem gamblers' as rejected and neglected by the government and deserving of sympathy.

ACTIVITY

Identify the attack and then discuss how it positions the reader.

It is absolutely shameful and disgraceful that politicians everywhere have continued to ignore, deny and even discredit the scientific evidence linking greenhouse gas emissions with climate change until now.

Clichés

A cliché is an overused and worn-out expression that was once an original thought.

How it persuades

Clichés help readers to feel familiar with the material presented, and convey meaning quickly. They are often used cleverly in headlines. When used in place of well-constructed language, though, their impact is negative.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Good doctors are as scarce as hens' teeth.

This writer is making a point quickly and directly. The cliché 'as scarce as hens' teeth' immediately informs us of the writer's concern about the difficulties of finding a good doctor. The use of a slightly quirky cliché gives a humorous edge to an extremely serious claim. However, if the reader doesn't know that hens don't have teeth, the cliché's impact is lost. As a headline this would attract readers to continue with the article in order to see how the writer backs up this claim.

ACTIVITY

Identify the cliché in the following headline, and explain its meaning.

The judge didn't mince words with the repeat drink-driving offender.

Colour

Colour can be used to attract attention, create mood and arouse emotions; it is important in creating particular visual effects for non-print texts. Colour is an element that combines with other techniques to influence or persuade us.

A touch of colour, for example red in a black-and-white photograph, creates emotion. Red can remind us of red roses to represent love; alternatively, when red is used in relation to contentious issues it can influence the audience to share the writer's anger. As colour can be used to attract attention, it is used extensively in advertising. Much market research has established that shoppers are attracted to primary colours – check the shelves on your next trip to the supermarket.

In television images, colour can be used for all of the purposes mentioned in the opening sentence. In live presentations, much care is taken with the colours and style of presenters' clothing as these generate an image and a distinctive style. Colours can be important in creating credibility – news is serious and must be authentic, whereas sports programs present an entirely different image. Colour is one important element positioning viewers to respond positively or negatively to a presenter's point of view.

How it persuades

Different colours, and shades of colour, create different effects. In newspapers an article in full colour stands out from the general grey overtones. The association colour has with particular emotions impacts on the audience's reaction to the image.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

It's a black day for all of us when hospitals are bombed in times of war.

'A black day' is one to remember as worse than most others – a landmark day. In this metaphorical use of black – as if the day is actually black and all light has been lost – the tone of dismay reinforces the sense that something terrible has happened. The inclusive 'all of us' positions the reader to share the view that bombing hospitals is another blow for innocent people during war.

ANALYSIS

Analyse the use of colour in the flyer 'the body as data' on the CD-ROM (Chapter 11, Future Worlds).

- ◆ What is the purpose of the flyer? What point of view are you being invited to share? How does the use of colour influence the reader?
- ◆ Find an advertisement that uses colour to make a point.
- ◆ Explain the point being made. While looking for an advertisement, identify any colours that appear to be favourites of advertisers. In pairs, discuss why this might be so.

Connotations

Connotations are the implied meanings of words. These may be positive or negative.

How it persuades

Writers choose their words to create a particular impact. Words similar in meaning but with different connotations can have entirely different impacts on the reader. For example, the appearance of someone who is casually dressed could be described as *shabby*, *bohemian*, *unkempt*, *cool* or *something the cat dragged in*; similarly, a more formally dressed person could be described as *well-heeled*, *neat*, *elegant*, *ostentatious* or *sophisticated*.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

The emergence this year of pastel colours combined with classic tailoring signals a return to elegance and femininity in the world of women's fashions.

The writer uses words such as 'classic tailoring', 'return to elegance' and 'femininity' to convey a positive view of the forthcoming fashions.

continued ...

ACTIVITY

Identify how the connotations of several words in the following example impact on the reader. How would these words influence the reader to agree that climate change requires urgent attention?

An icecap melts and carves lakes in a once frozen terrain, majestic glacial mountains crumble to earth and the planet warms at an unprecedented rate. This is the terrifying image at the heart of calls for action on climate change.

Editorial, *The Age* 28 October 2006

Find a range of connotations for each word

Explain the difference between the following words, all related to 'tiny' but with slightly different connotations: petite, little, miniscule, miniature, insignificant and infinitesimal.

- ◆ Working in small groups, find as many words with different connotations as possible for *active*, *happy* and *tragic*.

Emotional appeals

Emotional appeals play on people's feelings – they appeal to feelings rather than to people's reasoned/logical responses. Many emotional appeals play on human vulnerability – insecurity and fear, for example – and threaten to deprive individuals of highly valued things like freedom, individual rights or justice. Writers can use emotional appeals in an overt or subtle way to influence the reader's opinions. The five emotional appeals considered in this section show the range of subjects and emotions that can be addressed by this persuasive technique.

Appeal to family values

This appeal is based on the belief that the traditional family of 'Mum, Dad and the kids' provides the best way to build a cohesive society with well-adjusted people sharing similar values. It assumes that the nuclear family is the typical family, or claims that it should be, and that that kind of family provides the best environment in which to bring up children. This appeal assumes that parents will practise and pass on 'sound values' to their children. Appeals to family values often link problem children and teenagers with marriage breakdown; they ignore the power of other social factors and possible causes of problems for families.

How it persuades

Traditional family life is promoted as the best way to provide a healthy, nurturing environment for children, ensuring that they become socially responsible, caring and morally sound citizens. It often presents a very idealised picture of happy family life. This is also an appeal to people's desire for security, protection and certainty. Appeals of this kind are extremely powerful, as threats to family values are often equated with threats to society itself.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Families are the best way to bring up kids. A mother or father should stay home with the kids before they start school.

This appeal assumes that (most or all) families consist of two parents and children and that this is the 'best' way to bring up children. The writer appeals to the reader's sense of family values to insist that child-rearing is a family's responsibility. One parent at home with young children is claimed to be the best arrangement to provide security and happiness for children and parents. The words 'mother or father' indicate that the writer does recognise that the child-rearing role applies to either parent but basically within a traditional family. The word 'should', presented in a very assertive tone, positions the reader to feel that, whatever people actually do, this is what they ought to do. This appeal plays on guilt and an individual's sense of what is 'right' in order to manipulate their feelings and position them to agree.

ACTIVITY

Explain the appeal to family values in the following example.

When I was a little girl my mother always collected me from school. I was extremely happy to see her. As we walked home hand in hand, I told her about my big adventures for the day.

Appeal to a sense of fear

This appeal plays on people's fears and can be very effective because people tend to respond emotionally when their security, safety, country or those close to them are under threat. This appeal is widely used by politicians in times of crisis when strict security measures or defence strategies are deemed necessary.

How it persuades

None of us likes to feel fear. Not only do we feel it individually, we feel it for others. Appeals to fear usually work by presenting an extreme-case scenario as highly probable. This triggers the feeling that it is imperative to find solutions. In these situations, people's attitudes can be easily manipulated because of their need to feel safe from dangerous situations.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

The police have issued a warning to all those travelling on trains at night. This is in response to a spate of bashings on lines across the suburban network

continued ...

This appeal to fear uses the authority of the police to influence the audience. The word 'warning' draws us in and sets up a fear about travelling by public transport at night. The threat of physical violence is abhorrent; the appeal to fear thus positions us to feel that we have to take effective action in order to remain safe.

ACTIVITY

Identify the appeal to fear in the following headline. How does it play on people's fears?

Hordes of illegal immigrants continue to arrive on our shores.

Appeal to the hip-pocket nerve

Appeals to the hip-pocket nerve make readers feel concerned for their financial wellbeing.

How it persuades

This appeal works in two ways – positive and negative. It relates to consumers and the daily cost of living. Writers use it to cause happiness and relieve tension when financial gain is around the corner. Language such as 'tax relief' has a positive impact on the reader. In contrast, 'user pays' or 'tax burden' can cause anger and anxiety. Hip-pocket-nerve appeals are common in issues such as tollways, parking fees, bank fees and mobile phones. Those wanting to charge or increase fees attempt to persuade the public to agree by using expressions such as 'we must all share the cost' and 'user pays' to justify the extra expense. If consumers feel their funds or taxes have been misused, they are likely to erupt in anger or outrage.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

What an outrageous rip-off. The Federal Government spent \$208 million 'blowing its own trumpet' on media campaigns like WorkChoices, welfare to work and defence force recruiting in 2006. This is a \$70 million jump in advertising costs. Was it really an oversight to leave this figure out of the annual report?

Adapted from AM report, October 2006

This appeal to the hip-pocket nerve begins with a clear declaration of the writer's viewpoint – that federal government spending on advertising its own reforms is excessive. Linking the large sum of \$208 million with the derogatory term 'blowing its own trumpet' adds impact to the claim that this is an 'outrageous rip-off'. The writer's scornful tone and sceptical attitude to the omission of this figure from the annual report suggests this was a cover-up, not an oversight. The reader is positioned to agree as the taxpayers have not only paid dearly; they may have been denied their right to know where their dollars have been spent.

continued ...

ACTIVITY

Identify the appeal to the hip-pocket nerve. How is it used to persuade the reader to agree?

All countries will have to spend 1 per cent of their annual gross domestic product to fight global warming. Doing nothing could cost 20 times more.

Appeal to patriotism

Patriotism is a love of one's country – the country we were born in, or perhaps (for migrants) the adopted country.

How it persuades

This appeal is to our feelings of attachment and loyalty to the values and culture of our country. In Australia, it often uses well-known national symbols such as kangaroos, meat pies, the green and gold, Aussie Rules, the Holden car and vegemite. When anything that is ours is threatened, then so are we. Patriotism appeals to our desire to defend anything that is ours, even if we don't like it. It stirs passionate responses.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

The Australians fought valiantly despite the odds, typifying our Aussie spirit.

In this appeal to patriotism the writer describes Australians as valiant fighters. Their enduring spirit keeps them going, no matter how bad the situation. Words such as 'valiantly' and 'Aussie spirit' appeal to our sense of patriotism by positioning the reader to share the writer's pride in these Australian qualities. The use of 'our' ensures the reader feels included as a patriotic Australian (see 'Inclusive language' below).

ACTIVITY

Explain how the following example appeals to a sense of patriotism.

The Prime Minister said that farmers should not be run off the land. 'They are part of the psyche of this country ... It's part of the essence of Australia to have a rural community.'

Herald Sun 17 October 2006

Appeal to a desire for tradition and custom

This is an appeal to retain our traditions and customs. It is, for example, about keeping Nativity plays at Christmas; marking our special occasions such as weddings; continuing with ANZAC parades; and supporting royalty.

How it persuades

Appeals to tradition and custom play on a desire to retain links with the past, and to value history and heritage. Appeals to tradition and custom include the protection of rituals associated with special occasions. Underlying this appeal is the concern that if traditions change we will lose our links with the past. This will lead to a breakdown in our existing structures. It implies that change is negative.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

It's exciting that a beautiful young Australian is now Princess Mary of Denmark. We all think of her as our very own member of royalty with pride and happiness and look forward to the day when she will become Queen.

This is a direct appeal to tradition based on the writer's love of royalty. The writer's enthusiasm positions us to agree by claiming, in tones of great pleasure and satisfaction, that 'we all' think of the 'beautiful young' Princess Mary as our 'very own member of royalty'. The inclusive 'we all' and 'our very own' place the reader in a position of agreement that is reinforced with the positive words, 'pride and happiness'. The writer assumes that members of royalty and the idea of royalty are not only highly regarded, but deeply desired and supported. We are positioned to believe, through the strong positive emotions and inclusive language, that Mary becoming a Queen is a much awaited event for all Australians.

ACTIVITY

How does the following appeal to custom position the reader to agree?

Let us see the spirit of Christmas – peace on earth and good will to all – extended to other groups in Australia with special gatherings over the end-of-year holiday period. This will be a positive way to bring us all closer together.

Emotive language

Emotive language is the deliberate use of strong words to play on the reader's feelings. Such words can be used to evoke strong emotional responses in order to pressure, even coerce, readers to agree.

Some examples of emotive words are:

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| ✱ vicious | ✱ vile | ✱ horrifying |
| ✱ disgusting | ✱ heartbreaking | ✱ exorbitant |
| ✱ marvellous | ✱ spectacular | ✱ exhilarating |
| ✱ fervent | | |

How it persuades

When writers and speakers use stronger words than normal to draw attention to an issue, they bring into play an element of exaggeration.

A helpful strategy to understand the full impact of very strong words is to substitute strongly emotive words with other words, then to look at how that changes the impact of the language. For example, 'Swearing is a vile habit' changes if we say 'Swearing is a bad habit'. The former is clearly condemnatory while the latter is critical without expressing overtones of disgust.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

It is ludicrous and appalling to imagine that after so many years of loss experienced by the Noongar people, the Western Australian Premier has appealed against granting them native title.

The writer expresses a concern that the Noongar people might lose their right to native title in Western Australia. The use of emotive language, 'ludicrous' and 'appalling', highlights the seriousness of the issue. 'Ludicrous' ridicules the Premier's action while 'appalling' expresses the consternation and horror of the writer. These powerful words help to position the reader to agree that the writer's support for the Noongar and disgust at the Premier are justified.

ACTIVITY

Identify examples of emotive language and explain ways in which they are persuasive.

Police blitz on car crime. Thieves in city frenzy.

Professional thieves have been blamed for a wave of smash and grab car crimes on parked cars in central Melbourne.

Herald Sun 15 October 2006

Evidence

Evidence can be presented as information, facts or statements used to support a belief, opinion, or point of view. Evidence positions the reader, adds weight to the writer's point of view and often seems objective and irrefutable. Check for **omissions**, as sometimes only part of the picture is being presented in order to make a particular point more persuasive. The writer's own professional position is also often used as a device to lend credibility and relevance to their participation in the debate.

Evidence can come in many forms:

- ✦ statistics
- ✦ expert advice
- ✦ quotation/d statements
- ✦ research
- ✦ facts
- ✦ recorded sound and images.
- ✦ expert opinion
- ✦ testimony

Anecdotal evidence – a brief story used to support a point of view – can also be used, although it usually carries less weight than facts and figures.

How it persuades

Evidence positions the reader to share a point of view because it is objective and appears difficult to challenge. However, evidence can be misused and questioned. When using statistics, for example, the sample used to generate the statistical data may be so small that any conclusions would be questionable.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Graphic video images of detectives beating and kicking a suspect in an interview room have rocked the inquiry into the Victoria Police's disbanded armed offenders squad.

Jamie Berry, 'Beatings by police caught on secret film', *The Age* 20 September 2006

Jamie Berry introduces his front-page article with evidence from 'graphic video images'. Doing so creates a dramatic impact. The phrase 'rocked the inquiry' affirms the value of evidence, and positions the reader against the armed offenders squad, who should be protecting people from violence, not perpetrating it.

ACTIVITY

Explain the impact of the evidence in the following quotation.

According to OzTam figures, a staggering peak audience of more than 1 million Melburnians watched the Storm – nearly 100,000 ahead of the Sydney peak (872,000).

Jake Niall and Dan Ziffer, 'Melburnians in a league of their own watching sport', *The Age* 3 October 2006

Generalisation

A generalisation is a sweeping statement claiming or asserting that something is true for most or all people because it is true in one or some cases.

How it persuades

Generalisations are expressed in statements such as 'The youth of today are anxious and worried about the future' or 'Cities are not as safe now as they used to be'. Both of these assume that 'All young people are ...' or 'All cities everywhere are unsafe'. Generalisations can be very persuasive because they appeal to our general sense of what seems true. They also tap into social stereotypes and racial prejudices which are familiar. This familiarity can lull the reader into accepting the claim. The power of generalisations lies in their ability to appeal emotionally to untested opinion and group prejudices. All generalisations need to be closely analysed and questioned.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Air travel these days just isn't safe.

This writer is reacting to incidents such as the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. While there is reasoning behind the statement, the writer attempts to persuade by making an observation about all air travel. Further, the writer doesn't modify their statement with words such as 'some', 'can be', 'in some instances' or 'a proportion of' which would make the statement more believable.

continued ...

ACTIVITY

Identify the generalisation and show how it is used to present a point of view.

Young people have low reading and writing skills today because of text messaging.

Inclusive language

Inclusive language commonly uses phrases such as 'We all agree that ...' or 'We all feel that ...', 'Our local community ...' or 'It's commonly known that ...'. This kind of language invites the reader, listener or viewer to agree with the point of view being expressed by including them in the same group as the writer or speaker.

How it persuades

Inclusive language is usually combined with appeals to community, family or patriotism to fuel the audience's feelings of social responsibility or the common good. Inclusive language is a direct invitation for an audience to join in and work towards a common goal. Inclusive language can also be used to dissuade people from a course of action by playing on their sense of belonging and wanting to be included.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

The whales are beaching as we speak. If we all get down to the beach now, we'll at least be able to save some of them. Any later and we'll be too late.

The speaker is making a direct appeal to the audience. The use of the inclusive 'we' four times in three sentences ensures that the audience feels engaged with the issue. It also gives the audience the sense that the speaker is merely expressing their own shared beliefs.

ACTIVITY

Identify and explain how inclusive language is used to persuade in the statement below.

We are all going to experience serious effects of severe water shortages.

Metaphor

A metaphor is a comparison that describes one thing in terms of another.

How it persuades

A metaphor is a figure of speech that goes one step further than a simile. A simile describes one thing as being *like* another, while the metaphor implies that one thing actually *is* another. It aims to create an image in the reader's mind that helps to make the point in a way that is visual, striking and more easily understood.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Prime Minister John Howard has named Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II as the 'three towering figures' of the late 20th century.

The Age 4 October 2006

(Ronald Reagan was a US President; Margaret Thatcher was a British Prime Minister; Pope John Paul II died in 2005)

John Howard's metaphor 'three towering figures' creates a strong visual image. We imagine the prominent figures towering over the land and its people. It conveys a sense of their power and dominance. As there is an underlying positive message about the work and impact of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II, the reader can be influenced to share John Howard's respect and admiration for each.

ACTIVITY

Identify the metaphors in the examples below and discuss why they are effective

A CSIRO scientist said it was time that the Government stopped drip-feeding farmers who were eking out a living on unviable land.

Herald Sun 17 October 2006

Russia seeks slice of our yellowcake

[A reference to Russia's state-owned nuclear fuel maker meeting Australian executives in an attempt to import uranium from Australia.] Headline, *Business Age* 18 October 2006

Overstatement/exaggeration/hyperbole

This persuasive technique exaggerates a situation or idea in order to produce a stronger response from the reader.

How it persuades

Writers use the technique to create a dramatic impact. The language can be colourful, forceful and highly emotive. While the technique draws attention to the issue, the issue may appear more significant than it really is.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS**AWD WAR ON**

At last Holden is into the AWD battle ... Finally Captiva has arrived and GM Holden is rolling into the all-wheel-drive battlefield with its sights on everything from the compact Toyota RAV4 to the prestige BMW X5.

Paul Gover, *Herald Sun Cars Guide* 13 October 2006 p.14

This dramatic headline exaggerates the challenge of a new contender in the all-wheel-drive car market. The competition between car companies jostling for market share is based on a very effective metaphor of a war, which is sustained in the references to 'battlefield' and 'its sights on everything'. The overstatement carries force and energy that grabs the readers' attention and persuades them that the newcomer will not only be a powerful competitor but a major player. It implies that competition is so fierce that casualties are likely.

ACTIVITY

Identify the exaggeration in the following statement, and explain how it persuades.

It is outrageous that children are being taught that movie posters, websites and CD covers are the literary equivalent of novels and plays.

Herald Sun October 2006

Puns

A pun is a play on a word. It suggests more than one meaning in a key word.

How it persuades

Puns are clever, and often humorous. When used in headlines they are an effective means of drawing in the reader to find out more. They are often used with alliteration.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS**Demand puts nappy recycler in the poo**

The Age 20 September 2006, p.6

The writer uses a play on the word 'poo' in the headline to capture the reader's attention. The purpose is to draw the reader into the article. The pun lies in the double meaning of being in trouble, and being 'in the poo' from babies' nappies. These words indicate difficulties with recycling nappies, and link to the underlying problem of disposable nappies becoming part of household waste.

ACTIVITY

Identify the pun in this editorial headline.

Junking the fatty foods

Herald Sun October 2006

Reason and logic

Reasoning is a powerful tool. To *reason* is to think or argue in a logical way. Each point presented is supported with evidence, and leads logically to the next point/s through to a conclusion.

To be *logical* is to use correct (based on fact) or sound sequencing of the ideas presented in support of an argument.

How it persuades

Reasoning is a powerful (and often neglected!) tool. A well-reasoned, logically sequenced argument takes into account the opposing viewpoint to help establish the strength of one side. The position being argued is clearly stated in the main contention. The argument is then supported by points, each of which is explained and/or justified with evidence in various forms. Each point is clearly defined in relation to the main contention. When a writer explores a broad issue, both sides are often explored through a range of viewpoints. Sometimes readers are given substantial information with well-reasoned views and left to make up their own minds. Note that highly persuasive language can still be used to present well-reasoned views.

See Chapter 20 for more on the use of reason and logic to persuade, and for practice in writing a reasoned point of view.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

If the state and federal governments are going to rescue the agricultural industry because of the drought, it would be prudent to coincide rescue with reform, developing it into a sustainable state rather than just waiting for the next drought.

Adapted from a letter to the editor, *The Age* 19 October 2006

The writer, in a considered and reasonable tone, suggests that government money going to the agricultural sector as drought relief should be used to develop long-term reforms to prevent these situations from recurring. The phrase 'it would be prudent to coincide rescue with reform' is the first careful statement recommending that wisely using the money for reforms may be able to make the industry 'sustainable'. This idea positions the reader to agree as it could prevent the need for expensive rescue packages in the future.

ACTIVITY

This example presents three reasons supporting the point of view that short-haired dogs are better than long-haired dogs.

Find one piece of supporting evidence for each of the three reasons given.

Reasons

- Short-haired dogs don't need to be trimmed.
- Short-haired dogs are better for people with allergies.
- Grass seeds and prickles aren't a problem for short-haired dogs.

Repetition

This is the repeated use of words, phrases and ideas in a sentence or group of sentences. The repetition may be at the beginning of sentences following one another, or within a sentence.

How it persuades

Repetition is used to emphasise a point. Using the same sound more than once creates rhythm, which can produce a more forceful tone (see 'Tone' below) and work in headlines to attract attention. It is also a useful strategy to help a reader to remember a point.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Insufficient bed space! Insufficient staff! Insufficient funding! That's our hospital system!

Clearly this writer is angry. The repetition of 'insufficient' confirms this. The rhythm generated by the repetition also emphasises the key issues of 'bed space', 'staff' and 'funding'. Not only are words repeated, so is punctuation. The exclamation mark, a device used to draw attention to a point, is used successfully for that purpose. The inclusive 'we' helps to position the reader to accept that this is true of the hospital system.

ACTIVITY

Explain the impact of repetition in the following statement:

I've said it once, I've said it twice, and I'll say it three times. Get off that mobile phone and do your study.

Rhetorical questions

A rhetorical question requires no answer – it is used purely for effect. It is intended to engage the reader in thought and reflection about the issue through the emphasis of a point. As a result it can manipulate the reader in subtle ways.

How it persuades

The rhetorical question is a favourite of politicians. While it implies an answer, it also doesn't give an answer. The tone of the question usually positions the audience to accept the implied answer. It is also a useful tactic when wanting to leave the audience engaged but hanging.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Isn't it time we reviewed our education system to ensure equality for all our young people?

The writer poses a straightforward question that positions the audience to accept the implied answer. We can only answer 'Yes', otherwise we are guilty of supporting or endorsing inequality, particularly when those needing 'equality' are 'our' vulnerable 'young people'. The implication, combined with the clever use of the inclusive 'we' and 'our', is that we are all responsible for ensuring equality in the education system. It also links to the concept that education is a human right. The reader is manipulated into agreement as they are positioned to think 'Who can argue with that?'

ACTIVITY

Identify the rhetorical question and show how it positions the reader to agree.

Shouldn't the Government look to attract, retain and assimilate migrants who contribute in many ways?

From letter to the editor, *The Age* October 2006

Tone

Tone is the mood or feeling of a piece of writing. It combines with other persuasive techniques such as alliteration and repetition to express or reinforce the writer's feelings or attitudes. Tone reflects the writer's attitudes or emotions towards their subject matter or audience. If the tone is very aggressive, the language itself can be forceful and persuasive; a calm tone often informs a reasoned piece of writing. Changes of tone can signal a shift in attitude or feeling that affects the reader. Words for tone include:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| ✦ Accusing | ✦ Bemused | ✦ Mocking |
| ✦ Admonishing | ✦ Bitter | ✦ Optimistic |
| ✦ Aggressive | ✦ Calm | ✦ Outraged |
| ✦ Alarmist | ✦ Concerned | ✦ Pleading |
| ✦ Angry | ✦ Condescending | ✦ Reasonable |
| ✦ Antagonistic | ✦ Cynical | ✦ Respectful |
| ✦ Arrogant | ✦ Disappointed | ✦ Restrained |
| ✦ Assertive | ✦ Dismissive | ✦ Sarcastic |
| ✦ Authoritative | ✦ Guarded | ✦ Sympathetic. |

How it persuades

A writer uses a particular tone in order to generate a desired emotional response and to position the audience to share a point of view. It is particularly useful when 'calling people to action' for a cause.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Genetic testing is a serious subject, one requiring sound advice and effective processes.

The writer uses a calm and serious tone in addressing the issue of genetic testing. By recognising the issue as 'serious' the audience is positioned to listen attentively. 'Sound advice' and 'effective processes' further emphasise the seriousness of the issue, leading the audience to continue to engage closely as they anticipate more information and reasons to support this viewpoint.

ACTIVITY

Identify the tone used by the speaker below.

I don't care what you say, why should we wear uniforms in school? I'm sick of wearing it. It's cold in winter, and hot in summer, and it's too expensive.

Voice: active and passive

The active voice uses clear, lively and direct language in which the subject of the sentence does the action. The passive voice is more wordy and indirect; the subject of the sentence receives the action.

How it persuades

A writer using the active voice persuades through a quick delivery of the message or point of view. Short, direct sentences create a more abrupt impact. The writer deliberately using the passive voice is choosing to be more wordy and indirect in approach. This would be appropriate when the writer's intention is to play down the significance of the issue.

EXAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Active voice: The ranger destroyed the dingo.

Passive voice: The dingo was destroyed by the ranger.

By using more active, direct language, the writer in the first sentence creates immediacy and a strong visual image. This can position the reader to be critical, especially if they feel that dingoes should not be destroyed. In the second sentence the use of the passive form 'was destroyed' blurs the image by distancing the subject (the ranger) from the action (destroying). This weakens the impact of the action and could position the reader to be less critical.

ACTIVITY

Identify the active and the passive voice in the sentences below. How are their impacts different?

Indigenous children were taken from their families by government representatives.
Government representatives took Indigenous children away from their families.