

CHAPTER 5: RHETORICAL MODES

***Communication Essentials for College* by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell**

- 5.1 – Comparison and Contrast
- 5.2 – Cause and Effect
- 5.3 – Persuasion
- 5.4 – Rhetorical Modes: Exercises

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interactive activities and ancillary resources.

5.1 - COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of comparison and contrast in writing.
- Explain organizational methods used when comparing and contrasting.
- Understand how to write a compare-and-contrast essay.

The Purpose of Comparison and Contrast in Writing

Comparison in writing discusses elements that are similar, while contrast in writing discusses elements that are different. A compare-and-contrast essay, then, analyzes two subjects by comparing them, contrasting them, or both.

The key to a good compare-and-contrast essay is to choose two or more subjects that connect in a meaningful way. The purpose of conducting the comparison or contrast is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities. For example, if you wanted to focus on contrasting two subjects you would not pick apples and oranges; rather, you might choose to compare and contrast two types of oranges or two types of apples to highlight subtle differences. For example, Red Delicious apples are sweet, while Granny Smiths are tart and acidic. Drawing distinctions between elements in a similar category will increase the audience's understanding of that category, which is the purpose of the compare-and-contrast essay.

Similarly, to focus on comparison, choose two subjects that seem at first to be unrelated. For a comparison essay, you likely would not choose two apples or two oranges because they share so many of the same properties already. Rather, you might try to compare how apples and oranges are quite similar. The more divergent the two subjects initially seem, the more interesting a comparison essay will be.

Writing at Work

Comparing and contrasting is also an evaluative tool. In order to make accurate evaluations about a given topic, you must first know the critical points of similarity and difference. Comparing and contrasting is a primary tool for many workplace assessments. You have likely compared and contrasted yourself to other colleagues. Employee advancements, pay raises, hiring, and firing are typically conducted using comparison and contrast. Comparison and contrast could be used to evaluate companies, departments, or individuals.

Exercise 1

Brainstorm an essay that leans toward contrast. Choose one of the following three categories. Pick two examples from each. Then come up with one similarity and three differences between the examples.

1. Romantic comedies
2. Cell phones
3. Social Media Platforms

Exercise 2

Brainstorm an essay that leans toward comparison. Choose one of the following three items. Then come up with one difference and three similarities.

1. Online and In-store shopping
2. Fast food chains and fine dining restaurants
3. Dogs and cats

The Structure of a Comparison and Contrast Essay

The compare-and-contrast essay starts with a thesis that clearly states the two subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both and the reason for doing so. The thesis could lean more toward comparing, contrasting, or both. Remember, the point of comparing and contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the following thesis as an example that leans more toward contrasting.

Thesis statement: Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny.

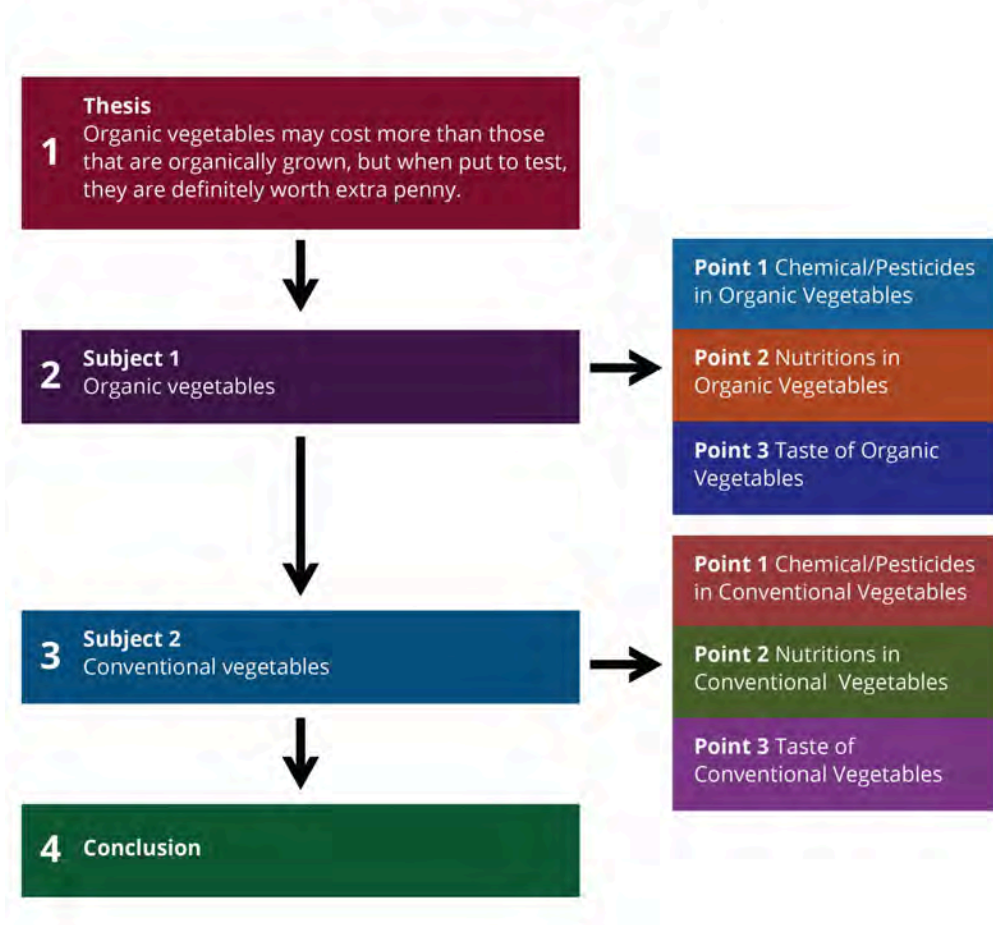
Here the thesis sets up the two subjects to be compared and contrasted (organic versus conventional vegetables), and it makes a claim about the results that might prove useful to the reader.

You may organize compare-and-contrast essays in one of the following two ways:

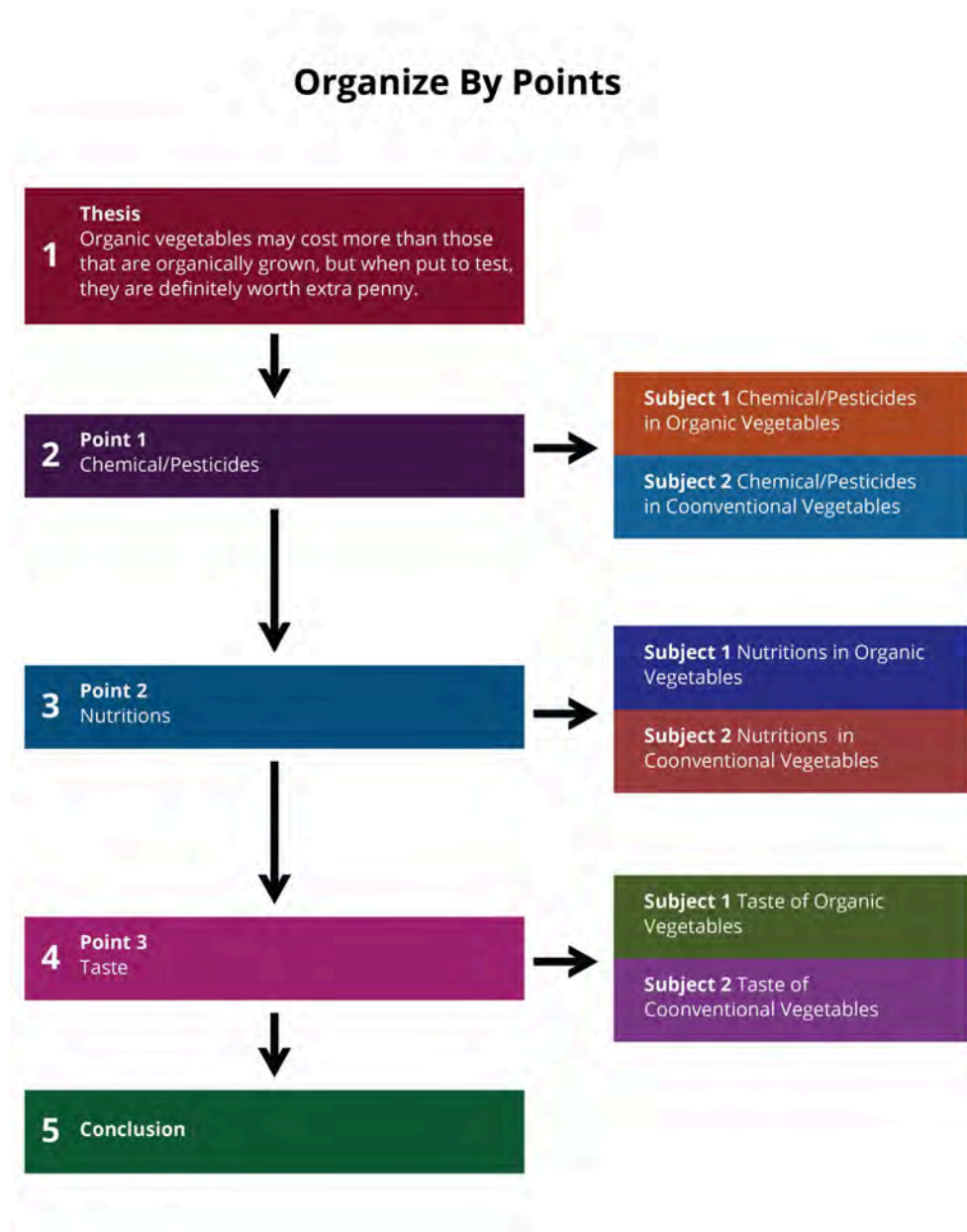
1. According to the subjects themselves, discussing one then the other
2. According to individual points, discussing each subject in relation to each point

See Figure 1 – “Comparison and Contrast Diagram”, which diagrams the ways to organize our organic versus conventional vegetables thesis.

Organize By Subject



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Source: Compare and contrast – organize by points by University of Minnesota is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA. / Colours adjusted/images remade by Shaima.

Figure 1 – Text version

Organize by subject:

1. Thesis (Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny).
2. Subject 1: Organic Vegetables
 - a. Chemicals/Pesticides

- b. Nutrition
- c. Taste
- 3. Subject 2: Conventional Vegetables
 - a. Chemicals/Pesticides
 - b. Nutrition
 - c. Taste
- 4. Conclusion

Organize by Point:

- 1. Thesis (Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny).
- 2. Chemicals/Pesticides
 - a. Organic
 - b. Conventional
- 3. Nutrition
 - a. Organic
 - b. Conventional
- 4. Taste
 - a. Organic
 - b. Conventional
- 5. Conclusion

The organizational structure you choose depends on the nature of the topic, your purpose, and your audience.

Given that compare-and-contrast essays analyze the relationship between two subjects, it is helpful to have some phrases on hand that will cue the reader to such analysis. See Table 1 “Phrases of Comparison and Contrast” for examples.

Table 1 gives examples of phrases you can use to compare and contrast.

Comparison	Contrast
one similarity	one difference
another similarity	another difference
both	conversely
like	in contrast
likewise	unlike
similarly	while
in a similar fashion	whereas

Exercise 3

Create an outline for each of the items you chose in “Exercise 1” and “Exercise 2” of this section. Use the point-by-point organizing strategy for one of them, and use the subject organizing strategy for the other.

Writing a Comparison and Contrast Essay

First choose whether you want to compare seemingly disparate subjects, contrast seemingly similar subjects, or compare and contrast subjects. Once you have decided on a topic, introduce it with an engaging opening paragraph. Your thesis should come at the end of the introduction, and it should establish the subjects you will compare, contrast, or both as well as state what can be learned from doing so.

The body of the essay can be organized in one of two ways: by subject or by individual points. The organizing strategy that you choose will depend on, as always, your audience and your purpose. You may also consider your particular approach to the subjects as well as the nature of the subjects themselves; some subjects might better lend themselves to one structure or the other. Make sure to use comparison and contrast phrases to cue the reader to the ways in which you are analyzing the relationship between the subjects.

After you finish analyzing the subjects, write a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay and reinforces your thesis. Below, you can read a sample compare-and-contrast essay.

Sample compare-and-contrast essay

Read Print vs. eBooks in plain text/HTML

Note: HTML/plain text & Pressbooks do not always display page layout or APA formatting such as page numbers, spacing, margins or indentation accurately. Please review APA formatting rules to ensure you meet APA guidelines with your own work. The text version is included here in HTML format for ease of reading/use. You may also want to View Print vs. eBooks in PDF format (<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/1984/2023/02/COMMESS-5-1-Print-eBook.pdf>).

Compare and Contrast: Print vs e-books

George-Anne Lerner

Reading print books and reading on screens are two different forms of reading that have unique advantages and disadvantages. While print books have been around for centuries and remain a popular choice for reading, digital reading on screens has become increasingly popular in recent years. Conventional print books offer the advantages of a tangible experience, convenience, and deeper learning, but e-books have large storage capacity and accessibility features; both versions carry a similar impact on the environment. Whether a reader chooses a Kindle, or an old-fashioned print book, there are many advantages to each option.

Traditional print books have several advantages, and are often the ones readers say they prefer, as they offer a tangible experience away from digital devices, deeper learning, and are convenient. Readers enjoy being able to hold physical copies of books, enjoying the feel of the texture of the pages. Several surveys show that print books are strongly preferred (Johnston & Salaz, 2019). When average screen time increased during the pandemic, many people saw print books as an opportunity to take a break from their digital devices (Wright, 2020). In addition to offering a rest from screens, print books boost reading comprehension. Several studies show that comprehension increases significantly for students who read printed materials compared to those who read digital texts (Mangen et al., 2013). Print is generally considered better for the learning and deep understanding of complex texts (Stoop et al., 2013). Also, print

books are convenient, and they do not need to be plugged in or connected to the internet, making them a more accessible option for those who do not have access to these resources. Furthermore, print books are often viewed as more reliable and less prone to technical problems, such as malfunctions or lost data. Overall, traditional print books have many advantages and offer several benefits over their digital counterparts.

On the other hand, reading on screens offers several advantages that reading print books does not, including the ability to store multiple books, to adjust accessibility settings, and to navigate easily. Digital reading allows the reader to access and store a large number of books on a single device, which is useful for travel or in small homes. Additionally, e-books often allow the reader to customize the font size, background colour, and other reading settings, such as text to speech, making them easier to read for those with visual impairments or who struggle with reading. Studies show that E-books with audio functions assisted in language learning (Hsieh & Huang, 2020), and digital books with pictures also improved retention of information for learners (Wang & Chiu, 2020). Many findings show that electronic screens are best for quick information gathering, communication, and navigation (Stoop et al., 2013). While print may be preferred by those who want a physical book in their hands, e-books offer several advantages to readers.

The environmental impact of e-books and print books is a complex issue and ultimately, neither format offers a clear advantage. E-books may have a lower impact in terms of production than paper books (Tahara et al., 2018), but the disposal of electronic devices has to be taken into account. While production of print books has a direct environmental impact, they can be recycled and repurposed. Overall, the environmental impact depends on how often the e-book reader is used, and current studies challenge the bias that e-books offer a more environmentally sustainable experience than printed books (Kang et al., 2021). Research indicates that the environmental impact of both printed and digital books seems to be about the same, showing no clear “winner” in environmental friendliness.

In conclusion, both print books and e-books have their own unique advantages and disadvantages. While print books offer a tangible and more immersive reading experience, digital reading is more convenient and can be more accessible. Neither one has been proven to be a superior option in terms of environmental impact. Ultimately, the best form of reading depends on individual preferences and the specific needs of the reader.

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Exercise 4

Choose one of the outlines you created in “Exercise 3”, and write a full compare-and-contrast essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, well-defined and detailed paragraphs, and a fitting conclusion that ties everything together.

Key Takeaways

- A compare-and-contrast essay analyzes two subjects by either comparing them, contrasting them, or both.
- The purpose of writing a comparison or contrast essay is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities between two subjects.
- The thesis should clearly state the subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both, and it should state what is to be learned from doing so.
- There are two main organizing strategies for compare-and-contrast essays.
 1. Organize by the subjects themselves, one then the other.
 2. Organize by individual points, in which you discuss each subject in relation to each point.
- Use phrases of comparison or phrases of contrast to signal to readers how exactly the two subjects are being analyzed.

Attribution & References

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5.2 - CAUSE AND EFFECT

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of cause and effect in writing.
- Understand how to write a cause-and-effect essay.

The Purpose of Cause and Effect in Writing

It is often considered human nature to ask, “why?” and “how?” We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future, or why our colleague received a pay raise because we want one as well. We want to know how much money we will save over the long term if we buy a hybrid car. These examples identify only a few of the relationships we think about in our lives, but each shows the importance of understanding cause and effect.

A cause is something that produces an event or condition; an effect is what results from an event or condition. The purpose of the cause-and-effect essay is to determine how various phenomena relate in terms of origins and results. Sometimes the connection between cause and effect is clear, but often determining the exact relationship between the two is very difficult. For example, the following effects of a cold may be easily identifiable: a sore throat, runny nose, and a cough. But determining the cause of the sickness can be far more difficult. A number of causes are possible, and to complicate matters, these possible causes could have combined to cause the sickness. That is, more than one cause may be responsible for any given effect. Therefore, cause-and-effect discussions are often complicated and frequently lead to debates and arguments.

Tip

Use the complex nature of cause and effect to your advantage. Often it is not necessary, or even possible, to find the exact cause of an event or to name the exact effect. So, when formulating a thesis, you can claim one of a number of causes or effects to be the primary, or main, cause or effect. As soon as you claim that one cause or one effect is more crucial than the others, you have developed a thesis.

Exercise 1

Consider the causes and effects in the following thesis statements. List a cause and effect for each one on your own sheet of paper.

1. The growing childhood obesity epidemic is a result of technology.
2. Much of the wildlife is dying because of the oil spill.
3. The town continued programs that it could no longer afford, so it went bankrupt.
4. More young people became politically active as use of the Internet spread throughout society.
5. While many experts believed the rise in violence was due to the poor economy, it was really due to the summer-long heat wave.

Exercise 2

Write three cause-and-effect thesis statements of your own for each of the following five broad topics.

1. Health and nutrition
2. Sports
3. Media
4. Politics
5. History

The Structure of a Cause-and-Effect Essay

The cause-and-effect essay opens with a general introduction to the topic, which then leads to a thesis that states the main cause, main effect, or various causes and effects of a condition or event.

The cause-and-effect essay can be organized in one of the following two primary ways:

1. Start with the cause and then talk about the effects.
2. Start with the effect and then talk about the causes.

For example, if your essay were on childhood obesity, you could start by talking about the effect of childhood obesity and then discuss the cause or you could start the same essay by talking about the cause of childhood obesity and then move to the effect.

Regardless of which structure you choose, be sure to explain each element of the essay fully and completely. Explaining complex relationships requires the full use of evidence, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and anecdotes.

Because cause-and-effect essays determine how phenomena are linked, they make frequent use of certain words and phrases that denote such linkage.

Phrases of causation – examples

- as a result

- because
- hence
- this
- consequently
- due to
- since
- therefore

The conclusion should wrap up the discussion and reinforce the thesis, leaving the reader with a clear understanding of the relationship that was analyzed.

Tip

Be careful of resorting to empty speculation. In writing, speculation amounts to unsubstantiated guessing. Writers are particularly prone to such trappings in cause-and-effect arguments due to the complex nature of finding links between phenomena. Be sure to have clear evidence to support the claims that you make.

Exercise 3

Look at some of the cause-and-effect relationships from Exercise 2. Outline the links you listed. Outline one using a cause-then-effect structure. Outline the other using the effect-then-cause structure.

Writing a Cause-and-Effect Essay

Choose an event or condition that you think has an interesting cause-and-effect relationship. Introduce your topic in an engaging way. End your introduction with a thesis that states the main cause, the main effect, or both.

Organize your essay by starting with either the cause-then-effect structure or the

effect-then-cause structure. Within each section, you should clearly explain and support the causes and effects using a full range of evidence. If you are writing about multiple causes or multiple effects, you may choose to sequence either in terms of order of importance. In other words, order the causes from least to most important (or vice versa), or order the effects from least important to most important (or vice versa).

Use the phrases of causation when trying to forge connections between various events or conditions. This will help organize your ideas and orient the reader. End your essay with a conclusion that summarizes your main points and reinforces your thesis. Below, you can read a sample cause-and-effect essay.

Sample cause-and-effect essay

Read Cause and Effect: The Impact of Sleep Deprivation on College Success in plain text/ HTML

Note: HTML/plain text & Pressbooks do not always display page layout or APA formatting such as page numbers, spacing, margins or indentation accurately. Please review APA formatting rules to ensure you meet APA guidelines with your own work. The text version is included here in HTML format for ease of reading/use. You may also want to View The Impact of Sleep Deprivation on College Success in PDF format (<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/1984/2023/02/COMMESS-5-2-SleepDeprivation.pdf>).

Cause and Effect: The Impact of Sleep Deprivation on College Success

George-Anne Lerner

Do you cram for tests and pull “all-nighters” for assignments, hoping to improve your grades? You’re not alone. The majority of college students say that they are sleep deprived, and more than 70% of them get less than the recommended 8 hours of rest (Hershner & Chervin, 2014). Unfortunately, by staying up late to study, students may be undermining their goals of improving their grades. Getting enough sleep is vital to a college student’s success; sleep deprivation creates challenges for a person’s physical, mental health, and learning.

Sleep and physical well-being have a close relationship, especially in regards to the immune system. Lack of sleep can lead to increased stress and inflammation, which can weaken the immune system and make a person likely to get sick (Morris, 2022). Additionally, Besedovsky et al. (2012) reports that sleep

deprivation can also disrupt hormones that regulate hunger and physical performance, leading to potential weight gain and decreased physical performance. Several studies indicate that “the shorter your sleep, the shorter your life span” (MacDonald, 2022, para.7). To ensure physical well-being, college students should try to get a good night’s sleep consistently.

Just as sleep deprivation undermines the physical body, a lack of sleep can have a major impact on mental health. Research has shown that good sleep quality is linked to lower rates of depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thinking (Morris, 2022). Taylor et al. (2011) note that this is especially true in college students, who are a population that is particularly susceptible to the onset of mental health disorders. Poor sleep can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including decreased energy levels, impaired memory and attention span, and a general feeling of grumpiness (MacDonald, 2022). There is also a complex relationship between sleep, mood disorders, and suicide, with insomnia and nightmares being potential risk factors for suicidal ideation (Hershner & Chervin, 2014). Additionally, long term difficulty in falling asleep is linked to feelings of loss of pleasure, punishment, and disliking oneself (Hershner & Chervin, 2014). Therefore, it is important to prioritize sleep in order to maintain good mental health.

In addition to supporting mental health, a good night’s sleep helps college students succeed academically. A study of college students showed that better sleep quality, quantity, and consistency over the last month was associated with improved grades (Morris, 2022). Studies also reveal that sleep deprivation impairs memory, attention and executive functioning, which are critical skills required for academic success (Okano et al., 2019). Consistent sleep patterns are shown to directly lead to higher test scores (Ho et al., 2022). Many studies highlight the impact that nighttime sleep habits have in predicting future academic performance. Better quality, longer duration, and greater consistency of sleep are strongly associated with success in college.

In conclusion, sleep is a vital aspect of a college student’s life that should not be overlooked. The benefits of a good night’s sleep extend far beyond just physical and mental health; it also has a positive impact on academic success. Lack of sleep can lead to many problems that diminish the quality and enjoyment of the overall college experience; in contrast, a healthy sleep routine will lead to better grades, improved memory and attention, and better academic performance. In order to achieve success in college and beyond, it is crucial for students to prioritize a good night’s sleep.

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Exercise 4

Choose one of the ideas you outlined in Exercise 3 and write a full cause-and-effect essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, strong evidence and examples, and a thoughtful conclusion.

Key Takeaways

- The purpose of the cause-and-effect essay is to determine how various phenomena are related.
- The thesis states what the writer sees as the main cause, main effect, or various causes and effects of a condition or event.
- The cause-and-effect essay can be organized in one of these two primary ways:
 1. Start with the cause and then talk about the effect.
 2. Start with the effect and then talk about the cause.
- Strong evidence is particularly important in the cause-and-effect essay due to the complexity of determining connections between phenomena.
- Phrases of causation are helpful in signaling links between various elements in the essay.

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5.3 - PERSUASION

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of persuasion in writing.
- Identify bias in writing.
- Assess various rhetorical devices.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Understand the importance of visuals to strengthen arguments.
- Write a persuasive essay.

The Purpose of Persuasive Writing

The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion. The act of trying to persuade automatically implies more than one opinion on the subject can be argued.

The idea of an argument often conjures up images of two people yelling and screaming in anger. In writing, however, an argument is very different. An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue in writing is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way. Written arguments often fail when they employ ranting rather than reasoning.

Tip

Most of us feel inclined to try to win the arguments we engage in. On some level, we all want to be right, and we want others to see the error of their ways. More times than not, however, arguments in which both sides try to win end up producing losers all around. The more productive approach is to persuade your audience to consider your opinion as a valid one, not simply the right one.

The Structure of a Persuasive Essay

The following five features make up the structure of a persuasive essay:

1. Introduction and thesis
2. Opposing and qualifying ideas
3. Strong evidence in support of claim
4. Style and tone of language
5. A compelling conclusion

Creating an Introduction and Thesis

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general topic. The thesis typically appears somewhere in the introduction and states the writer's point of view.

Tip

Avoid forming a thesis based on a negative claim. For example, "The hourly minimum wage is not high enough for the average worker to live on." This is probably a true statement, but persuasive arguments should make a positive case. That is, the thesis statement should focus on how the hourly minimum wage is low or insufficient.

Acknowledging Opposing Ideas and Limits to Your Argument

Because an argument implies differing points of view on the subject, you must be sure to acknowledge those opposing ideas. Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression that you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus it is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.

Try to address opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay. Rhetorically speaking, ordering your positive arguments last allows you to better address ideas that conflict with your own, so you can spend the rest of the essay countering those arguments. This way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else's. You have the last word.

Acknowledging points of view different from your own also has the effect of fostering more credibility between you and the audience. They know from the outset that you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space.

It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you are conceding early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward earning credibility and trust with an audience. Audience members will know from the beginning that you are a reasonable writer, and audience members will trust your argument as a result. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws, but she admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

Sample concessionary statement

Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence in our streets, such legislation alone cannot end these problems since guns are not the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcome by those who might disagree with this writer's

argument in the first place. To effectively persuade their readers, writers need to be modest in their goals and humble in their approach to get readers to listen to the ideas.

Sample phrases of concession

- although
- of course
- though
- granted that
- still
- yet

Exercise 1

Try to form a thesis for each of the following topics. Remember the more specific your thesis, the better.

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission
2. Television and advertising
3. Stereotypes and prejudice
4. Gender roles and the workplace
5. Driving and cell phones

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Choose the thesis statement that most interests you and discuss why.

Bias in Writing

Everyone has various biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward wearing black instead of brightly colored clothes or wearing jeans rather than formal wear. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the

morning, or working by deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These examples identify minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and a respectful and reasonable address of opposing sides.

The strength of a personal bias is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you are apt to put forth and the better the final product will be.

The weakness of bias is when the bias begins to take over the essay—when, for example, you neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using *I* too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you avoid them.

The Use of “I” in Writing

The use of *I* in writing is often a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences for all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects it can potentially have on your writing.

Be mindful of the use of *I* in your writing because it can make your argument sound overly biased. There are two primary reasons:

1. Excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader’s attention—and usually not in a good way. The use of *I* is no different.
2. The insertion of *I* into a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. *I* is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position. In the following example, the subject of the sentences is bolded:

1. **Smoking** is bad.
2. **I think** smoking is bad.

*Subjects: 1) Smoking 2) I think

In the first sentence, the rightful subject, *smoking*, is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of *I* and *think* replaces *smoking* as the subject, which draws attention to *I* and away from the topic that is supposed to be discussed. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate.

Developing Sound Arguments – Checklist

Does my essay contain the following elements?

- An engaging introduction
- A reasonable, specific thesis that is able to be supported by evidence
- A varied range of evidence from credible sources
- Respectful acknowledgement and explanation of opposing ideas
- A style and tone of language that is appropriate for the subject and audience
- Acknowledgement of the argument's limits
- A conclusion that will adequately summarize the essay and reinforce the thesis

Fact and Opinion

Facts are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as

true or false. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$. This expression identifies a true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views, or judgments. An opinion is what an individual believes about a particular subject. However, an opinion in argumentation must have legitimate backing; adequate evidence and credibility should support the opinion. Consider the credibility of expert opinions. Experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinion meaningful to a larger audience.

For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your gums, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the maintenance of your car. Both have knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should he or she offer an opinion about your car, and vice versa.

In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience than it gains.

Tip

The word prove is frequently used in the discussion of persuasive writing. Writers may claim that one piece of evidence or another proves the argument, but proving an argument is often not possible. No evidence proves a debatable topic one way or the other; that is why the topic is debatable. Facts can be proved, but opinions can only be supported, explained, and persuaded.

Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, take three of the theses you formed in “Exercise 1” of this section, and list the types of evidence you might use in support of that thesis.

Exercise 3

Using the evidence you provided in support of the three theses in “Exercise 2” above, come up with at least one counterargument to each. Then write a concession statement, expressing the limits to each of your three arguments.

Using Visual Elements to Strengthen Arguments

Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can often strengthen its persuasive effect. There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

Quantitative visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to see statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if you can see how the disparity looks graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data in spatial dimensions.

Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience’s emotions. Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals. Such images often try to convey a story, and seeing an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example. For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing.

Writing at Work

When making a business presentation, you typically have limited time to get across your idea. Providing visual elements for your audience can be an effective timesaving tool. Quantitative visuals in business presentations serve the same purpose as they do in persuasive writing. They should make logical appeals by showing numerical data in a spatial design. Quantitative visuals should be pictures that might appeal to your audience's emotions. You will find that many of the rhetorical devices used in writing are the same ones used in the workplace. For more information about visuals in presentations, see Chapter 9 – “Verbal & Visual Communication”.



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Writing a Persuasive Essay

Choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction.

Start by acknowledging and explaining points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. Also state the limits of your argument. This too helps you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may naturally be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay.

Make your appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated.

Make sure that your style and tone are appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice.

Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis. Below, you can read a sample persuasive essay.

Water Inequity: Sample Essay

Read Water Inequity in Plain text format

Note: HTML/plain text & Pressbooks do not always display page layout or APA formatting such as page numbers, spacing, margins or indentation accurately. Please review APA formatting rules to ensure you meet APA guidelines with your own work. The text version is included here in HTML format for ease of reading/use. You may also want to View Water Inequity: Sample essay in PDF format (<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/1984/2023/04/COMMESS-5-3-WaterInequityEssay-1.pdf>).

Water Inequity

Emily Cramer

Clean drinking water is not a luxury and access to it is not a privilege for most people living in the developed world. But for one group of Canadians, it is an elusive resource. Many people living on First Nations reserves across the country are unable to drink or bathe in water from the taps in their homes, and that is where piped water even exists. Lengthy boil advisories have been in place in some cases for more than twenty years. This problem is not merely the result of inadequate water systems but of the ongoing exclusion of Indigenous peoples and the failure to view their rights as equal, and related, to those of other Canadians. The government of Canada has a responsibility to provide clean drinking water to Indigenous reserves not only because access to water is a human right, but also because the lack of water is a direct result of racial marginalization and a failure to recognize that the well-being of one group of Canadians affects the well-being of all.

In 2010, the United Nations acknowledged that access to clean drinking water is a human right, and many other institutions support this definition: “According to both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, clean drinking water is a fundamental human right” (Erin, 2021, para. 1). In 2015, aware of a vast rights inequity to Indigenous Canadians, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to ending all long-term drinking water advisories in

Indigenous communities by March 2021. However, as of February 2022, there were still 38 advisories in place, and the government delayed the deadline to 2026 (Government of Canada, 2022). Canada has 20% of the world's freshwater reserves, yet many Indigenous communities have gone without access to clean, potable water for decades. This obvious human rights violation should not be occurring in a developed nation, particularly one as committed to equity as Canada.

Why does this water shortage exist? The problem of water access on reserves has many causes, but it stems, at least in part, from the racial marginalization of First Nations people. "Indigenous exclusion... is the bedrock factor in maintaining Indigenous water insecurity" (Hanrahan, 2017, para. 4). Most Canadians benefit from strict government regulations over water supplies, but the Canadian government has been reluctant to extend those benefits to its Indigenous people. Often, reserves are in remote locations, and water treatment plants are required to service those areas. Where they exist, these plants have not been regulated to ensure safety. The resulting systems are not only faulty, they have been inadequately maintained due to a lack of funding. These problems have persisted for so long, minor maintenance is no longer possible; in some cases, total system overhauls are required to finally end boil advisories. To make matters worse, traditional water sources are not an alternative as they are often affected by pollution from high-population areas. "[Waterways have been] degraded by activities that occur far from reserves and traditional lands" (Assembly of First Nations, n.d., para. 7). The resulting potable water shortage on reserves points to the government's racial marginalization of its First Nations people.

Yet in today's global community, it is increasingly clear that marginalizing one group has an impact on everyone because of human interconnectedness. The struggles and successes of one affect all. Apart from obvious outcomes such as the impact on Canada's health care system when people are exposed to unsafe drinking water, the health of Canada's First Nations communities is important to the country in other ways. Indigenous contributions to environmental protection are significant: "Around the world, where Indigenous rights to their lands are strong, biodiversity, and climate-critical carbon stores are better protected" (Skene, 2020, para. 3). First Nations' entrepreneurship has a profound impact on the Canadian economy: "Indigenous people represent the fastest growth segment of the population [and are] a driving force of Canada's long-term economic stability" (Amanto, 2020, para. 1). Moreover, Indigenous culture plays a vital role in the diversity, history, and richness of Canadian culture. The interconnection between living things is emphasized in Indigenous teaching, and it provides a lesson that Western governments need to learn.

The scarcity of clean drinking water on many First Nations reserves in Canada is a stark reminder of ongoing racism and inequity within the country. No one should struggle to access water in a water-rich nation like Canada. This human rights breach points directly to the failure of the government to extend the same protections and funding to First Nations people that it does to the rest of Canada. And although this failure is the product of racial marginalization aimed at one group, its outcome affects all Canadians.

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Online Persuasive Essay Examples

- Alan Dershowitz argues The Case for Torture Warrants [New tab] (<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUS1631336720110907>)
- Alisa Solomon argues The Case against Torture [New tab] (<http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-11-27/news/the-case-against-torture/1>)

Exercise 4

Choose one of the topics you have been working on throughout this section. Use the thesis, evidence, opposing argument, and concessionary statement as the basis for writing a full persuasive essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, clear explanations of all the evidence you present, and a strong conclusion.

Key Takeaways

- The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion.
- An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue, in writing, is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way.
- A thesis that expresses the opinion of the writer in more specific terms is better than one that is vague.
- It is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.
- It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish through a concession statement.
- To persuade a skeptical audience, you will need to use a wide range of evidence. Scientific studies, opinions from experts, historical precedent, statistics, personal anecdotes, and current events are all types of evidence that you might use in explaining your point.
- Make sure that your word choice and writing style is appropriate for both your subject and your audience.
- You should let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas.
- You should be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument

sound more biased than it needs to.

- Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data.
- Opinions are personal views, or judgments, that cannot be proven.
- In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.
- Quantitative visuals present data graphically. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience.
- Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions.

Attribution & References

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- “Water Inequity: Evidence of Racial Marginalization in Canada” (sample persuasive essay) by Emily Cramer is licensed under CC-BY-NC 4.0

5.4 - RHETORICAL MODES: EXERCISES

Exercises

1. The thesis statement is a fundamental element of writing regardless of what rhetorical mode you are writing in. Formulate one more thesis for each of the modes discussed in this chapter.
2. Which rhetorical mode seems most aligned with who you are as a person? That is, which mode seems most useful to you? Explain why in a paragraph.
3. Over the next week, look closely at the texts and articles you read. Document in a journal exactly what type of rhetorical mode is being used. Sometimes it might be for an entire article, but sometimes you might see different modes within one article. The more you can detect various ways of communicating ideas, the easier it will be to do yourself.

Attribution & References

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