

Functional Skills

English

Level 2 Writing W1a

Present Information/Ideas Persuasively v1.0

Functional Skills English:

Level 2

Skill Standard:

Writing W1a

Coverage and Range:

‘Depending on the purpose, learners may need to... inform or influence a course of action (for example buying or selling services).

‘Persuasiveness can be the result of numerous factors but should be supported by the increased use of supporting statements and evidence, as well as the utilisation of different presentation techniques, styles and vocabulary, in order to gauge and increase impact and effect on audience/participants.’¹

¹ QCA Functional Skills guidance: amplification of the standards June 2008 QCA/08/3700

Persuasion

Simply put, presenting information and ideas *persuasively* means getting people to read your work and thereafter do what you want. This can include, for example, changing the reader's mind about a subject, having them vote for or against someone or something, convincing them to buy a service/product that they wouldn't otherwise have purchased, and/or buying your service/product instead of someone else's. You often don't even need to be literal (e.g. Buy this phone now!), as it is often the case that subtler forms of persuasion can have greater effectiveness, e.g. emphasising the key features of a phone, showing attractive people using it, linking it with a particular sports team or player, etc., can all make people desire it so much that they go and make a purchase.

When reading any of the numerous **types** of persuasive texts (e.g. adverts, opinion pieces, leaflets, reviews, essays, articles, letters, brochures, speeches, slogans, etc.), it is therefore important to acknowledge that the writer has made up his/her mind and is now set on influencing you and others to think/act likewise.

When writing your own persuasive texts you should yourself be equally clear from the outset about several key factors:

- **Audience** (who you are writing for, what their existing level of knowledge is, what their current opinions are, and how strongly they hold them. You must engage with, and persuade, your readership);
- **Genre** (not only the type of document but also the style in which you are writing, e.g. formal versus informal, serious or humorous, etc.);
- **Purpose** (what you are writing for, e.g. persuading a reader to buy a chocolate bar can involve very different techniques than if you were hoping to get them to move their current account to a new bank).

Pre-planning, drafting, proofreading and redrafting are, of course, crucial skills that are also involved, as is cohesion (making a rounded case that holds together well, and using suitable conjunctions and connectives to join your paragraphs, e.g. *first*, *secondly*, *additionally*, *furthermore*, *finally*). Moreover, whilst in reality persuasive texts can differ markedly from one another, the **structure** you should adopt when attempting persuasion in your exam-based writing is:

- Title (In articles only)
- Opening statement/paragraph
- A minimum of three supporting arguments/paragraphs
- Concluding paragraph in which you restate your position

Lastly, persuasive texts fall into two major **formats**: expositions and discussions.

Expositions

Expositions are what most people think of when they imagine a persuasive text. The writer has a fixed point of view, believes in it strongly, and for whatever reason wants you to trust in it too. Opposing arguments rarely feature, but when they do they tend to be distorted or used selectively in order to be more effectively criticised. The immediate reason for writing is to get the reader to agree with the writer's opinions, whilst a secondary purpose is often to get the former to perform a particular action, e.g. vote yes/no, make a purchase, etc. Such texts also typically make use of emotive language and an authoritative tone to really make an impact.

The structure of expositions typically involves an engaging and interesting introductory statement that piques the reader's curiosity, reveals the author's opinion(s), and gives an insight into how their argument will be framed in the rest of the document.

This is followed by a variety of body paragraphs, each of which should contain an argument with suitable and sufficient evidence to support it. It is often the case that the most compelling reasons are listed first, but on occasion you may see the reverse being true, with authors reserving their best points till last in order to try and keep such ideas lingering in the mind of the reader.

Finally, the concluding paragraph will sum up the writer's case, restate his position, and promote any additional actions that he would like the reader to engage in. Persuasive language will have been utilised throughout the entire text, whilst cohesive terms and phrases will themselves link each separate point and paragraph to the rest.

Discussions

By contrast, *discussions* frequently take the form of articles introduced by an open-ended question, e.g. *Should young children be allowed to use computers?*, *Does eating 5-a-day make any difference to your health?*, or *Will you be better off fixing your mortgage now?*

In one sense this kind of persuasive text can be used to provide a reasoned opinion as to what is the best course of action for a reader via a writer's dispassionate and unbiased analysis. On the other this format can be used quite cunningly, in that a biased author whose views are already fixed can present an apparently balanced argument as a means of seeming more objective. In doing so writers can appear to be more trustworthy than they are, with readers believing that they have come to an even-handed conclusion based on an impartial assessment of the evidence, when in truth they are merely disguising their pre-existing convictions behind a veneer of reasonableness.

The structure of discussions thus follows a typical pattern, in that the background to a topic will be introduced, with various claims and counter-claims from different sides of the debate then included. This will be followed by body paragraphs which progressively play these arguments off against one another using quotes and evidence to slowly but surely portray one side as more deserving of public support than the other. Lastly, the conclusion will often continue the trend of detached comparison, with proponents' and opponents' views included, before a final summary is used to evaluate and recommend the best course of action for the reader to support/take.

Features of Persuasive Texts

Not all persuasive texts contain all these aspects all the time, but many do appear with regularity.

Certainty

The tone of, and vocabulary used within, expositions tends to convey authority, steadfastness, rigidity of opinion, and utter confidence in whatever is proposed being the correct path to follow, e.g. *will, definitely, certainly, decisively*. In turn, opponents' views are either characterised as being uncertain, e.g. *may, could, might, possibly*, or the only thing said to be definite about them is their inferiority and obvious foolishness.

Discussions, meanwhile, are at first more nuanced, e.g. *Voting: Should it be compulsory?*, but they will nonetheless settle one way or the other and make their case in the conclusion.

Triple Whammy

Also known as tripling or the rule of three, this is a mechanism by which three related words or points are presented in quick succession for literary effect, e.g. *friends, romans, countrymen; education, education, education; I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!*

Repetition

Using the same or similar words and phrases can be a very powerful way of focussing your audience's attention, e.g. in Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech, he uses the word dream 11 times.

Alliteration

Identical or similar first consonant sounds can be used to create easily memorable phrases which resonate with the readership, e.g. *make a mountain out of a molehill*.

Personal Experience

Readers tend to find claims made by an author to be more believable when they are presented from a personal perspective, e.g. *I saw this..., When it happened to me..., etc.*

Rhetorical Questions

This technique uses questions as another form of emphasis, almost defying the reader to disagree and/or inciting them to concur, e.g. *How could a sane, logical, intelligent person disagree with such a reasonable course of action as that proposed by the government?*

Use of Substantiated Facts, Statistics and Quotes

Both of these add weight to a writer's claims and make them appear more believable.

Exaggeration / Hyperbole

As a persuasive device, exaggeration is used to inflate opponents' positions into extreme arguments such that they become so absurd or outrageous that no reasonable person could support them.

Stress

Using **bold**, underline, *italics*, **colour**, fonts, exclamations and CAPITALS can make text physically stand out. Stress to impress!

Humour

Almost nothing can bring an opponent down to size as quickly and effectively as mockery. Satirising their position can make them and their supporters appear foolish and transform their positions into objects of ridicule. In fact many texts often entertain and/or inform just as much as they persuade.

Metaphors, Similes & Imagery

Painting a dramatic picture in as few words as possible is what metaphors and similes can be used for. *There is a stench of failure*, for example, is an intense metaphor which uses the senses to describe the disappointment of a writer in an event. Jeremy Clarkson, meanwhile, once described a car's gear change as being, 'as smooth as falling down stairs while wearing leg calipers,' which vividly informs us how bad it must have been.

Sarcasm

Although popularly referred to as *the lowest form of wit*, the disguising of an insult within a compliment or other apparently innocent statement is an effective method of belittling a rival or his claims. Winston Churchill, for instance, allegedly once described his opponent, Clement Attlee, as, 'a modest man, but then he has so much to be modest about.'

Provocative / Emotive Language & Active Verbs

A writer's choice of vocabulary has a huge impact on the tone of a text. *Fight, battle, destroy* and *throttle*, for example, are far more confrontational than, say, *work towards, campaign against, abolish* and *restrict*. Depending on the audience you're writing for, e.g. committed supporters or wavering fence-sitters, you may feel it more appropriate to be more or less aggressive, whichever would seem more fitting.

Guilt

As a powerful negative emotion, harping on about guilt can make people feel that their former opinions/actions were wrong. In some anti-smoking literature, for instance, smokers' families are often the focus, with their responses to their loved ones' illnesses, pain and early deaths used to dissuade others from continuing to smoke.

First Person / Personal Pronouns

Similar in effect to personal experience, using the first person to directly address the reader lends a more individualised feel to a text, raising in the reader the feeling that they are being spoken to directly.

Straw Man

This term describes when a writer deliberately misrepresents his opponents' arguments ever so slightly. This is done so that the new argument, which will be weaker or more ridiculous than the real original, can be easily dismissed, and with it the whole case made by the opposition. As an example, a politician's calls for very moderate spending decreases might be described by his opponents as, *slashing government programmes*.

Strong Ending

Persuasive texts all need a resolute ending, a call to arms, which seals the deal in terms of convincing them to think particular thoughts, and/or which incites the reader to act.

Present Tense

Persuasive texts are largely written in the here and now, with the past tense used to identify evidence of opponents' misdeeds. Elsewhere, the future tense is used to either show what benefits can be had if the reader is persuaded, or to present them with a ominous image of what will allegedly happen if they do not.

Checklist

When proofreading your own work, a good tip is to go through a checklist to ensure that you don't miss any crucial features, e.g.

- Is my text actually persuasive?
- It is interesting and does it hold the reader's attention?
- Do I use the first person form of address?
- Do I have a clear introduction?
- Have I included multiple points?
- Do I link my points together all the way through?
- Is each separate point in its own paragraph?
- Is each separate point supported by sufficient and suitable evidence?
- Have I used suitably emotive language?
- Do I have a clear conclusion that restates my case?
- Are my spelling, grammar and punctuation correct?

Creating Persuasive Texts

When writing persuasive texts, it is essential for the writer to work out the most important points of the text so that these can be used advantageously to persuade people to a particular point of view. Look at this example of how an article about using public transport has been constructed around five main points. Each main point is in a separate paragraph. The article is trying to persuade motorists to abandon their cars and use public transport instead.

Leave Your Car Behind

During December, the local council is asking motorists to leave their cars in the garage and use public transport for city centre Christmas shopping. Far too many cars enter our city centre during this busy time and drivers have problems in finding a parking place. Traffic wardens have been given strict instructions to move people on when queuing beyond the allowed limit at car parks.

Any motorist found parking illegally will be given a hefty fine and persistent offenders will find their cars wheel-clamped. The penalty fine to have the car released will cost as much as £100 for the first offence and will significantly increase with each offence. Parking illegally in disabled spaces will be punished even more severely.

The usual Park & Ride sites will be fully operational throughout December with additional buses at busy times both morning and early evening. The six sites, dotted around all edges of the city, take an average of more than 1000 vehicles each and, with buses leaving every 5-8 minutes, the journey into the city centre is quick and easy, especially where bus lanes are available.

In addition, the local bus services are cheap and convenient for all parts of the city centre. Many buses have easy access for pushchairs, buggies, wheelchairs and elderly people, and have plenty of space for all those oversized parcels.

But by far the most important reason why you should use public transport is so that our city centre does not become grid-locked and overcome with traffic fumes. Hopefully we can all then arrive home less stressed in the safe hands of our public transport drivers, in buses that can keep to their schedules and get you where you want to be quickly and safely.

Exercise 1

Presenting Ideas Using Persuasive Language

Using the same format as the public transport article, on the next page write an article of about the same length for a council newsletter trying to persuade people to recycle their unwanted glass, plastics, newspapers and tins/cans. Here are some guidelines you may wish to use to help you construct a piece of persuasive writing that will convince the reader to do as you ask.

- 1) Choose a suitable and engaging title for your work.
- 2) In your opening paragraph, outline the key points that you will say in the rest of your piece.
- 3) Each of these main points will become the focus for separate paragraphs. Some examples you might like to think about include:
 - better use of local council tax;
 - less landfill waste;
 - environmental and health issues;
 - money saved to be used for play facilities for children, better provision for teenagers' recreational pursuits or community facilities for the elderly, etc.
- 4) Compose a few sentences about each of your main points, remembering to use persuasive language to encourage your readers to recycle their waste materials.
- 5) Put your paragraphs into the most appropriate order so that they follow on from each other, thereby making the best effect for your persuasive argument.
- 6) Read it through to ensure that the article makes sense and that you have used words that will convince your audience to participate in the recycling scheme.
- 7) Edit any parts of the article that you are not completely happy with and then read it through again to check your alterations.

Exercise 2

As a member of a committee organising a Summer Fair, on the next page you have been asked to write a letter to ask people to give up their Saturday afternoon to run a stall, help with the games and sideshows, or serve refreshments. This could be an event where you work, at your child's school, or indeed anywhere that has to raise money in this way.

In order for this letter to have the most impact, you may like to think about how you can best persuade people to help, for example by:

- mentioning how successful the event has been in the past;
- stating how much money has been raised, how it has been used and who has benefited from it;
- including necessary details such as where and when the event will be;
- listing opportunities for helping out on the day;
- appealing to their sense of community – perhaps a good way of getting to know people;
- thinking about the best length for the letter – put yourself in the place of the receiver!
- looking at your choice of language – you're trying to persuade people to help;
- including a reply slip so there is no excuse for the recipients to back out;
- and remembering to say how much enjoyment and satisfaction the helpers will have.

Have your tutor mark your work when you are finished.

Exercise 3

Your cycling team is looking for a winter getaway holiday destination to relax and recover from the exertions of the last season. Look at the following image and then answer the questions that follow.



1. Which of the following textual features does this advert make use of?
Circle your answers.

Rhymes	Metaphors	Repetition	Tripling	Alliteration	Personal Experience
Personal pronouns	Guilt	Humour	Rhetorical Questions	Similes	Imperative Verbs

2. Which of these terms below best define the advert's approach to its readers?
Circle your answers.

Aggressive	Exaggerated	Humorous	Elitist	Aspirational
Guilt-inducing	Polite	Friendly	Sly	Refined

Exercise 4

Read the article below and then answer the questions that follow.



Cellini's World Record Claim Shattered



“Big Ben’s” nose is longer than his cycling record

Italian cyclist and life-long enemy of this magazine, Benvenuto “Big Ben” Cellini, has been sensationally stripped of his annual mileage record by the world cycling authorities. Meeting in London yesterday, the International Cycling Board of Control (ICBC) gave an extraordinary press conference in which it threw down the gauntlet to the fiery Florentine and directly accused him of falsifying timing records and fabricating entire stages of his 365 day globe-trotting odyssey.

Only two weeks ago Cellini was the toast of all Italy, when he cycled into Rome along the *Via dei Fori Imperiali* and completed a gruelling twelve month marathon in which it was alleged that he had ridden over 100,085 miles through 42 countries, thereby smashing the 75-year-old record of Britain’s Tommy Godwin. Travelling over roads strewn with rose petals and palm fronds, the conquering hero was treated like an emperor and even given a Papal audience, as delirious crowds thronged the capital to celebrate.

Not wishing to pour cold water on such claims, we at Cyclissimo initially congratulated Cellini on his achievement. Since then, however, fully credible sources who wish to remain anonymous have submitted damning evidence, seen by this magazine, which proves that rather than riding the necessary 274 miles every single day, Cellini actually conspired with his support team to engage in wholesale dishonesty.

Amongst the more sensational claims are:

- that ticket stubs in his name show that Cellini took a month’s holiday in June, during which he visited Japan and Australia;
- that notes in his own handwriting reveal that his claim to have survived an attack by a Mongolian death worm whilst *cycling* across the Gobi Desert was in fact taken from a book he was reading whilst being *driven* across it by his chauffeur;
- and most damningly of all, that video footage shows him overseeing the fixing of his bike’s odometer to his support van in order to record its movements as his own.

This is not, of course, the first time that Cellini has struggled manfully to tell the difference between the truth and a pack of total lies. Ten years ago in fact, Cyclissimo exclusively revealed that his childhood claim to have met an alien and flown with it on his bicycle was actually taken from a Hollywood film; and when confronted by paparazzo at his home in Tuscany, the hot-headed Italian once more flew into a trademark rage when informed of the latest news. Local police were then called, and the cyclist was arrested for grappling with one of our photographers who he claimed had personally insulted him.

As he was manhandled into the back of a waiting squad car though, a wild-eyed Cellini shouted his defiance and swore that he would avenge himself against Cyclissimo and his other accusers. ‘Always let your conscience be your guide’, he yelled.

OUR THOUGHTS

Who would want to have the sport they love tarnished by the actions of a minority of lazy, weak-willed fraudsters? Not us, that’s for sure. That’s why we at Cyclissimo are committed to removing cheats from cycling. We therefore urge all those who want to raise cycling’s reputation out of the gutter of public opinion to join our campaign to have Cellini **banned for life** from all competitive ICBC events.

To see the evidence and judge Cellini’s guilt for yourself, please visit www.cyclissimo.uk/cellini-fraud

To add your name to our petition, visit: www.BAN-Cellini-the-CHEAT.com

1. Which of the words below could realistically describe the tone of this article?

Gleeful	Tongue-in-cheek	Patronising	Conciliatory	Humorous
Objective	Informative	Scientific	Argumentative	Condescending

Exercise 5

Read the extracts below and then identify which contains each of these textual features:
Match up your answers.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| A | Factual Claims |
| B | Statistics |
| C | Sarcasm |
| D | Direct Quote |
| E | Cultural Reference |

A	"Big Ben's" nose is longer than his cycling record.
B	Only two weeks ago Cellini was the toast of all Italy, when he cycled into Rome along the Via dei Fori Imperiali and completed a gruelling twelve month marathon in which it was alleged he had ridden over 100,085 miles through 42 countries, thereby smashing the 75-year-old record of Britain's Tommy Godwin.
C	<p>Amongst the more sensational claims are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that Cellini took a month's holiday in June, during which he visited Japan and Australia; • that his claim to have survived an attack by a Mongolian death worm whilst <i>cycling</i> a 1,550-mile stage across the Gobi Desert was purely taken from a book he was reading whilst being <i>driven</i> across it by his personal chauffeur; • and that he hooked up his bike's odometer to his support van in order to record its movements as his own.
D	This is not, of course, the first time that Cellini has struggled manfully to tell the difference between the truth and a pack of total lies.
E	As he was manhandled into the back of a waiting squad car though, a wild-eyed Cellini shouted his defiance and swore that he would avenge himself against Cyclissimo and his other accusers. 'Always let your conscience be your guide', he yelled.

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- looking at your choice of persuasive language;
- including a reply slip so there is no excuse for the recipients to back out;
- and remembering to say how much enjoyment and satisfaction the helpers will have.

Remember to use the checklist (reproduced below) to ensure that you have included all the relevant features, and ask your tutor to mark your work when you have finished.

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- Are my spelling, grammar and punctuation all correct?