

Persuading

Open your Web browser, page through any magazine, scroll through Facebook, or take a walk to the coffee shop, and you will be barraged by texts and media created to persuade you — to think something, do something, like something, or buy something.

Online, advertisers individualize their messages to you. For example, when you log on to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), you are greeted with a list of recommendations based on your previous purchases. On Facebook, the ads on your page are generated according to your likes and dislikes, as well as other information you provide in your profile and posts.

While advertising is probably the most pervasive attempt at influence, there are many other kinds of texts that we create at school, in the workplace, or for public audiences to convince others to see things our way. In fact, you could argue that almost every communication — a text message to a friend about what movie to see, a posting of a cute kitten or puppy, a dating profile, an editorial on Fox News, a joke made on *The Simpsons* about Fox News editorials, or even a chapter in a textbook — has persuasive elements built into it.

Purpose: Why write to persuade? When we write to persuade, we do so because we want to convince our readers to do something — usually to agree with us about a topic, issue, or idea or to take a specific action. As a student, when you write a paper in which you take a stance on an issue or you give a speech in which you ask your audience to do something, you are writing to persuade. As a professional, when you apply for a job, you craft a resume and cover letter and make a convincing case for yourself during your interview to persuade the person hiring that you are the best candidate. A persuasive text can also be as simple as a six-word slogan.

Audience: How do we persuade others? As citizens of a democracy, we may read persuasive texts such as editorials to help us figure out our own positions on specific issues. As a writer, anytime you want to persuade your audience, you need to lay out your ideas, anticipate possible objections, and support your argument with relevant information. As with informing (see [Giving Information](#)), accuracy is important when persuading others. Backing up your ideas and claims with correct information, gathered from reliable sources, will make your argument stronger.

Rhetorical appeals: How do we use them to persuade? Whether you want to convince others to agree with you on an important issue, to date you, to vote for your candidate, or to buy your product, you will be most persuasive if you relate to your audience through the rhetorical appeals — ethos, logos, and pathos.

- *Ethos* — the authority and trustworthiness that you establish as a writer, composer, or speaker — is crucial when you want to persuade others. If your boss asks you to review several possible locations for an important fund-raising event and recommend one, you will want to establish yourself as dedicated to getting a high-quality venue for a reasonable price. To do this, you'll need to demonstrate that you've taken the assignment seriously, studied the options objectively, and weighed your company's needs and priorities carefully.
- *Logos* — the logical chain of reasoning that you provide for readers — is extremely important when you are making any kind of argument. Imagine you are taking a car for a test drive to decide whether you will buy it. You might mention to the salesperson that you are interested in a car that won't be too bad for the environment. The salesperson might then present you with some facts about the mileage the car gets, the measures the manufacturer has taken at the factory to protect the environment, and the paper-free policy the dealership has initiated by conducting as much business as possible electronically. By talking about these factors, the salesperson is creating a chain of reasoning that — she hopes — will lead you to conclude that the car you are driving is an environmentally responsible choice.
- *Pathos* — the appeal that you use when you want to evoke your readers' emotions — comes in handy when you are trying to persuade someone to do something. An appeal to pathos connects you with your audience, and vice versa. For example, when a salesperson asks you about yourself and then tells you a bit about himself and you find some commonalities, that salesperson is appealing to your pathos. When he later tells you that he loves the stereo you are looking at, you're more likely to buy it because you've already identified with him.