

Writing to argue or persuade

This kind of writing needs to be convincing and logical. Here are some useful techniques.

- Decide what you want to persuade your reader to believe. Which viewpoint are you going to put forward?
- Make 'for and against' lists: one list of the facts and ideas from the text which support your viewpoint, and another list of those which do not. Note: you can change your chosen viewpoint at this planning stage, but don't change it as you are writing!
- State your chosen viewpoint simply at the beginning.
- For each main point that you make to support your viewpoint, give evidence and examples to back up your case – use the text!
- Be balanced – your argument will be at its most convincing if you make points for both sides but prove that your own chosen viewpoint is the better one. Use your 'for and against' lists.
- Use paragraphs to help you make your points clearly. Start a new paragraph for each main point that you make and use the rest of the paragraph to give your evidence. This will mean that your paragraphs are of roughly similar lengths.
- Use persuasive phrases such as: 'It seems clear to me that ...', 'The text shows that ...', 'This example indicates that ...'.
- Use linking phrases to move between the two sides of the argument, such as: 'Nevertheless, ...', 'On the other hand, ...'.
- Rhetorical questions are a good way to get your reader on your side: these are questions which have an obvious answer, and the answer supports your point of view! For example, if you were arguing against animal experiments, you could ask: 'Would you like your own pets to have shampoo squirted into their eyes?' If you were arguing in favour of animal experiments, you could ask: 'Your little brother is dangerously ill – would you rather he had drugs whose safety had been tested on animals, or no drugs?'
- Finish by restating your viewpoint, perhaps saying also that although you can see the other point of view, you are convinced that yours is the right one.

Example of persuasive writing

School uniforms: turning our kids into soulless conformists

It would seem that nowadays, every educationalist is a fan of the dreaded blazer/tie school uniform combo. The journalist, Suzanne Moore, questions exactly how do they really think they're helping prepare schoolchildren for the 'real world'?

Unsurprisingly, I was never a fan of my own school uniform, which was bottle-green in colour. We were constantly lectured about the activities we were not allowed to be seen doing in it. In

In the opening paragraphs, the writer refers to her own school days. This technique creates a link with her readers and then, by stating that she was and still is a non-conformist in her views, and providing a humorous example of this, she begins to establish a personality with whom the readers will sympathise. The use of a colloquial tone and rhetorical questions in the third paragraph are also techniques by which she gets the readers on her side.

Having set out her position in a mainly light-hearted way, and having engaged her readers in her argument, the writer then starts to make some more serious and developed criticisms of the requirement for children to wear school uniform.

The article is clearly paragraphed. Each paragraph presents a different perspective on the topic and moves us a little further forward in the argument.

a hazy way, I remember them as basically eating chips and talking to boys. 'I'll just take it off then, Miss,' I used to say, for I was annoying then as I am now.

The price of the uniform itself was an issue. The wear and tear of it was an issue. We couldn't afford it. Once I had a Saturday job that helped, but naturally I bought myself some lime-green plastic platform shoes. Weirdly they were not acceptable as school shoes unless my mum wrote a note. What medical condition required the wearing of these beauties I can only guess, but my mum's notes I now look on with awe, the end line nearly always being: 'She is in a phase.'

Did this uniform instil in me a sense of oneness with my school? Did it resolve the class issue? Er ... not exactly. In those days we didn't have stupid fashion words like 'vintage' and 'pre-loved', we had hand-me-downs, and really, I don't know a modern child who wants a second-hand uniform.

The myth of uniform is that it is a social leveller, an equaliser. And pushes up results? Then show me how. Many European countries with good schools don't have uniforms. Bill Clinton thought back in the 90s that it might be the answer to gang-related violence. It wasn't.

No, uniform does what it says on the tin. It is about conforming. It heartens many a parent to see their child as somehow ready for work. Politicians love a uniform. Indeed the fetishisation of school uniform is education policy. Most schools are obsessed with it, parents like it and many children say it makes their lives easier.

Teachers vary, some reporting that too much of their time is spent on policing clothing violations. If education is to be about conforming and not drawing out talent, I guess that's fine, though the kind of overall worn in France for science or art would surely suffice. Uniform covers up many social ills. Sometimes, even poor parenting. ('Well they were always clean and in the right uniform.') The signifiers of class and money are simply rejigged around bags, phone and pens. It is as it ever was.

This nostalgia for a uniform is based on emotion not reason. Evidence does not come into it. Does all this produce better results? Happier children? What we really have, alongside the increasing prevalence of the ghastly blazer/tie combo, is increasing social inequality. You could map it out but don't ask me to, as I missed an awful lot of school on account of this kind of attitude. 'Don't ask questions, girl, and put your tie on properly.'

Don't ask questions about the world of work that we are preparing children for. At the moment it looks as if some will work for free in some superstore uniform. Get them used to it early. Compliance. Zero tolerance. The best days of your life.



The final three paragraphs return to the writer's own experiences which are those shared by many of her readers. This technique gives the whole argument more weight and authenticity.

The final paragraph starts quite light-hearted with the statement that the writer's daughter appears to be proud of her uniform (and, not surprisingly, is perhaps doing this to 'get at' her mother). However, the

tone becomes more serious at the end and the writer leaves us with a thought to reflect upon. This is given extra force by being expressed as a three-word, short sentence without a main verb:

My daughter will shortly start at a new school and in the Uniform Me shop this week it was hot and sweaty, as nasty polo shirts were pulled on. Skirts must be knee-length with over-the-knee socks. At least the stuff I bought was cheap. Some inner-city uniforms are close to \$300.

When I have had jobs where I had to wear a uniform – in restaurants and hospitals – I just got on with it. I saw the need. But to learn? To learn what? Again, I ask: where is the evidence that uniform works?

Since I bought my daughter's uniform she has, of course, had it on all the time, though school doesn't start until next week. She is expressing herself or getting at me. She makes me laugh. But the idea saddens me that when she gets to secondary school individuality must be knocked out of her as early as possible via the reinforcement of petty rules about shirts. This is indeed preparation for the real world. Of uniform thinking.

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