

# Persuasive Beginnings

**Butter-Them-Up Beginning**— When trying to persuade others, it's important to stay on their good side. Persuasive writing is polite argument on paper. Beginning with a respectful tone and an appeal to the intelligence and fairness of the audience is a great way to start.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Board of Directors and Citizens:  
One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. No enterprise seeking the material, civil, or moral welfare of this section can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success. I but convey to you, Mr. President and Directors, the sentiment of the masses of my race when I say that in no way have the value and manhood of the American Negro been more fittingly and generously recognized than by the managers of this magnificent Exposition at every stage of its progress. It is a recognition that will do more to cement the friendship of the two races than any occurrence since the dawn of our freedom. ("The Atlanta Compromise," Booker T. Washington, September 18, 1895)

**Hard-Hitting-Statement Beginning**— Shock value can grab a reader's attention. Starting with a strong statement alerts the reader quickly to the issue at hand.

Friends and fellow citizens: I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny. ("On Women's Right to Vote," Susan B. Anthony, 1873)

**Scenario/Situation Beginning**— Setting up a scene or drama can help the reader "picture" the point of the writer. Create a situation that portrays the thesis and personalizes the problem in a way that makes the reader more sympathetic.

I want them. I need them. I love them. I've got to have them. (*Earrings*, Judith Viorst)

Dear Mrs. LaRue, How could you do this to me? This is a PRISON, not a school! You should see the other dogs. They are BAD DOGS, Mrs. LaRue! I do not fit in. Even the journey here was a horror. I am very unhappy and may need something to chew on when I get home. Please come right away! (*Dear Mrs. LaRue, Letters from Obedience School*, Mark Teague)

Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, members of Congress, Ambassador Holbrooke, Excellencies, friends: Fifty-four years ago to the day, a young Jewish boy from a small town in the Carpathian Mountains woke up, not far from Goethe's beloved Weimar, in a place of eternal infamy called Buchenwald. He was finally free, but there was no joy in his heart. He thought there never would be again. ("The Perils of Indifference," Elie Wiesel, April 12, 1999)

As I speak today, 1979— and with it the 1970s— has less than two weeks to run. I myself will have some reason to remember both the year and the decade with affection. But in general few, I suspect, will regret the passing of either. The last 10 years have not been a happy period for the Western democracies domestically or internationally. Self-questioning is essential to the health of any society. But we have perhaps carried it too far and carried to extremes, of course, it causes paralysis. The time has come when the West— above all Europe and the United States— must begin to substitute action for introspection. ("Foreign Policy of Great Britain," Margaret Thatcher, December 18, 1979)

## Persuasive Beginnings, *continued*

**Provoking Question Beginning**— Getting the reader to think is the point of persuasion. Asking a good question can cause the reader to consider something that perhaps he has never thought of before.

Dear Mom, I know you don't think I should have Mikey Gulligan's baby iguana when he moves, but here's why I should. If I don't take it, he goes to Stinky and Stinky's dog, Lurch, will eat it. You don't want that to happen, do you? (*I Wanna Iguana*, Karen Kaufman Orloff)

Excuse me, but who do you think you are, opening this book when the cover clearly says DO NOT OPEN THIS BOOK!? If a sign on a door reads Do Not Enter, do you enter? (*Do Not Open This Book!* Michaela Muntean)

Fellow citizens, pardon me, and allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits, and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us? ("The Hypocrisy of American Slavery," Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852)

# Adding Details to Persuasive Writing

**1. Relevant reasons.** Support an argument or position with specific reasons.

The glasses were so glittery. The quarters were so shiny. And the purse played such nice music, not to mention how excellent it was for storing school supplies. (*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, Kevin Henkes)

If you sit very still, and are very quiet, I will try to work while you are watching me. But please, no matter what you do, DO NOT TURN PAGES WHILE I AM WORKING. Page-turning during story-writing can cause words to blow around and they might end up in the wrong order. (*Do Not Open This Book!* Michaela Muntean)

"Hit won't take much to raise it (the yearling), Pa. Hit'll soon git to where it kin make out on leaves and acorns." (*The Yearling*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings)

**2. Examples.** Show support for an argument through specific instances or cases.

Dear Mom, You would never even have to see the iguana. I'll keep his cage in my room on the dresser next to my soccer trophies. Plus, he's so small, I bet you'll never even know he's there. (*I Wanna Iguana*, Karen Kaufman Orloff)

The depressing tale of the St. Louis is a case in point. Sixty years ago, its human cargo – maybe 1,000 Jews – was turned back to Nazi Germany. ("The Perils of Indifference," Elie Wiesel, April 12, 1999)

**3. Anecdotes & Scenarios.** Prove your position with authentic stories or hypothetical situations.

Henry played so well that season that by the end of the year, some of the white fans who had stopped coming to games came back to the ballpark. Some of them even cheered for him. (*Henry Aaron's Dream*, Matt Tavares)

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second time... And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain to the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their conditions in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are..." ("Atlanta Compromise Speech," Booker T. Washington, September 18, 1895)

**4. Numbers & Statistics.** Provide specific data to support reasons, including age, date, quantity, temperature, time, speed size, score, price, degree, etc.

On that day in the mid-1800s seventy-five million buffalo roamed in North America. In little more than fifty years, there would be almost none. (*The Buffalo Are Back*, Jean Craighead George)

But Ted wanted to be great. He wanted to hit .400. He knew he wouldn't get a hit every time he got up to bat—no major leaguer has ever done that. In fact, major leaguers don't even get hits half the time they're at bat. But getting a hit 40 percent of the time—batting .400—Ted thought it might be possible. (*No Easy Way: The Story of Ted Williams and the last .400 season*, Fred Bowen)

## Persuasive Details, *continued*

**5. Quotes.** Include quotations and survey results that provide a “human” element of support.

The marches continued. More and more Americans listened to Martin’s words. He shared his dreams and filled them with hope. “I have a dream that one day in Alabama little black boys and black girls will join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.” After ten years of protests, the lawmakers in Washington voted to end segregation. The WHITE ONLY signs in the South came down. (*Martin’s Big Words*, Doreen Rappaport)

The preamble of the Federal Constitution says: “We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; not yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people who formed the Union. (“On Women’s Right to Vote,” Susan B. Anthony, 1873)

**6. Clarification & Interpretation.** Make a point (often within a topic sentence) and then explain WHY this proves your point (within supporting detail sentences).

Ali was the most entertaining fighter in the history of the sport. He fought every major fighter of his time. One of his toughest fights was known as the Rumble in the Jungle. He was going to fight George Foreman in Zaire, in central Africa. Foreman was the new heavyweight champion. Ali, now thirty-two, was expected to lose to the younger fighter. But Ali had a different idea. “Now you see me, now you don’t, George thinks he will, but I know he won’t.” (*Muhammad Ali: The People’s Champion*, Walter Dean Myers)

“Here is the way it is,” he told her, though he was not sure she knew what he meant, or even that she listened. “I do not know for sure where we are or how far we’ve come. But I think it is closer to the north coast and a village there than it would be to try to get back to your village. We came a long way.” (*Dogsong*, Gary Paulsen)

**7. Comparison & Contrast.** Highlight multiple perspectives of an argument.

That summer the fence that stretched through our town seemed bigger. We lived in a yellow house on one side of it. White people lived on the other. And Mama said, “Don’t climb over that fence when you play.” She said it wasn’t safe. (*The Other Side*, Jacqueline Woodson)

“I want one. I want a ‘coon, but I know a ‘coon gits mischievous. I’d love a bear cub, but I know they’re liable to be mean. I jest want something—” he puckered his face so that his freckles ran together—“I jest want something all my own. Something to foller me and be mine.” He struggled for words. “I want something with dependence to it.” (*The Yearling*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings)

**8. Action verbs.** Use powerful verbs to add passion and tone to persuasion.

“You are mistaken, my dear,” Mr. Sims said. “The whole world’s a stage—even 90th Street—and each of us plays a part. Watch the stage, observe the players carefully, and don’t neglect the details,” he said, stroking Oliver. “Follow an old actor’s advice and you will find you have plenty to write about.” (*Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street*, Roni Schotter)

Is it not astonishing that, while we are plowing, planting, and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver, and gold; that while we are reading, writing, and ciphering, acting as clerks, merchants, and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators, and teachers; that we are engaged in all the enterprises common to other men – digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hillside, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives, and children, and above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian God, and looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave – we are called upon to prove that we are men? (“The Hypocrisy of American Slavery,” Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852)

## Persuasive Details, *continued*

**9. Names.** Add proper nouns to designate specific names of people, places, brands, breeds, types, etc.

Dear Mom, I know you don't think I should have Mikey Gulligan's baby iguana when he moves, but here's why I should. If I don't take it, he goes to Stinky and Stinky's dog, Lurch, will eat it. You don't want that to happen, do you? (*I Wanna Iguana*, Karen Kaufman Orloff)

These failures have cast a dark shadow over humanity: two World Wars, countless civil wars, the senseless chain of assassinations – Gandhi, the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Sadat, Rabin – bloodbaths in Cambodia and Nigeria, India and Pakistan, Ireland and Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Sarajevo and Kosovo; the inhumanity in the gulag and the tragedy of Hiroshima. And, on a different level, of course, Auschwitz and Treblinka. So much violence, so much indifference. (“The Perils of Indifference,” Elie Wiesel, April 12, 1999)

**10. Repetition.** Repeating a line creates drama, builds momentum, and conveys significance.

Mr. Bing was stunned. He dropped Arnie back onto the plate. “I was going to...to eat you,” he replied in shock. “EAT ME?” Arnie shrieked, his sprinkles flying everywhere. “Why would you do a thing like that? Do you make a habit of eating all your houseguests?” “Nunno...of course not.” “So why then did it suddenly occur to you to eat ME?” Arnie demanded. (*Arnie the Doughnut*, Laurie Keller)

America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. (“The Hypocrisy of American Slavery,” Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852)

**11. Clinchers.** Drive home your message with a concluding statement(s) that leaves the reader speechless.

Dear Mrs. LaRue, By the time you read this I will be gone. I have decided to attempt a daring escape! I'm sorry it has come to this...From now on I'll wander from town to town...Such is the life of a desperate outlaw. I will try to write to you from time to time as I carry on with my life of hardship and danger. Your lonely fugitive, Ike. (*Dear Mrs. LaRue*, Mark Teague)

We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced. (“The Hypocrisy of American Slavery, Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852)

# Persuasive Endings

**Consider-This Ending**— This type of persuasion leaves the reader with a thought to ponder. It doesn't push the reader but rather assumes that if the reader thinks about the subject, he will consider the writer's side.

Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival. ("The Hypocrisy of American Slavery," Frederick Douglass)

**Strong Quote Ending**— Leaving the reader with a quotation from an authority or famous person adds credibility to the argument. If someone so famous felt the same way, the reader is more likely to be persuaded to feel similarly.

Enduring success never comes easily to an individual or to a country. To quote Walt Whitman: "It takes struggles in life to make strength; it takes fight for principles to make fortitude; it takes crisis to give courage and singleness of purpose to reach an objective." Let us go down in history as the generation which not only understood what needed to be done but a generation which had the strength, the self-discipline and the resolve to see it through. That is our generation. That is our task for the '80s. ("Foreign Policy of Great Britain," Margaret Thatcher, December 18, 1979)

**Hopeful Ending**— Ending on a positive, hopeful tone can encourage the reader to side with the thesis of the writer. Even if it is a difficult or disheartening subject, a thought of hope gives the reader energy to act on the main point of the writing.

And so, once again, I think of the young Jewish boy from the Carpathian Mountains. He has accompanied the old man I have become throughout these years of quest and struggle. And together we walk towards the new millennium, carried by profound fear and extraordinary hope. ("The Perils of Indifference," Elie Wiesel, April 12, 1989)

**Big Picture Ending**— Help the reader see how the issue fits into a broader scope. If the point seems relevant and affects other things in the world, then how could a reader dismiss it?

President Roosevelt showed us that a man who could barely lift himself out of a wheelchair could still lift a nation out of despair. And I believe – and so does this administration – in the most important principle FDR taught us: America does not let its needy citizens fend for themselves. America is stronger when all of us take care of all of us. Giving new life to that ideal is the challenge before us tonight. Thank you very much. (Speech for The Creative Coalition, Christopher Reeve, August 26, 1996)

## Persuasive Endings, *continued*

**Emotional Plea Ending**— Persuasion is an emotional playing field. Ending with a story or point that tugs on the reader’s heart strings might push the reader over the fence into agreement with the persuasive thesis.

“Yes, Mom! I wanna iguana... Please!”  
(*I Wanna Iguana*, Karen Kaufman Orloff)

In conclusion, may I repeat that nothing in thirty years has given us more hope and encouragement, and drawn us so near to you of the white race, as this opportunity offered by the Exposition; and here bending, as it were, over the altar that represents the results of the struggles of your race and mine, both starting practically empty-handed three decades ago, I pledge that in your effort to work out the great and intricate problem which God has laid at the doors of the South, you shall have at all times the patient, sympathetic help of my race; only let this be constantly in mind, that, while from representations in these buildings of the product of field, of forest, of mine, of factory, letters, and art, much good will come, yet far above and beyond material benefits will be that higher good, that, let us pray God, will come, in a blotting out of sectional differences and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice, in a willing obedience among all classes to the mandates of law. This, coupled with our material prosperity, will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth. (“The Atlanta Compromise,” Booker T. Washington, September 18, 1895)

**Dramatic Ending**— Using a dramatic ending can cause the reader to respond quickly to the demands of persuasion. Painting a picture of despair at the end might make the reader feel compelled to act right away.

NOW GO AWAY! (*Do Not Open This Book!*  
Michaela Muntean)

Webster, Worcester, and Bouvier all define a citizen to be a person in the United States, entitled to vote and hold office. The only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens; and no state has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several states is today null and void, precisely as is every one against Negroes. (“On Women’s Right to Vote,” Susan B. Anthony, 1873)