

# Prewriting

## Understand the assignment

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In your essay, you will state an opinion about an academic topic and persuade readers to agree with your opinion.

## Research

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Remember that after you do enough preliminary research to brainstorm and choose your focus, you should do more detailed research about your topic so that you can make your outline.

When you research for a persuasive essay, look for the opinions of the supporters, but also look for the opinions of the opponents. To best support your opinion, you will need to consider all of your audience, even those who have different opinions. Strong support often acknowledges the opposite point of view.

## Brainstorm

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You can use a mind map, a free write, a general internet search, or a discussion group if you are having a difficult time thinking of things to write about.

### Example topics could include the following:

- Should the government be able to legislate the end of labor strikes?
- Should nurses be allowed to work longer than eight-hour shifts?
- Should teachers' salaries be based on student performance?
- Should certain animals be protected?
- Are alternatives to a college education worth it?
- Choose a topic that you have a strong interest in. Do you have a debatable opinion about that topic?

## Brainstorming Guiding Questions

As you brainstorm, you may want to consider the following questions:

1. Opinion: What do I think?
2. Reason: Why do I think it?
3. Evidence: How do I know?
4. Appeal: How can I convince my reader of my opinion?

Questions 1-3 adapted from (Sedita, 2017, para. 7)

## Note: Switching Topics

While it is okay to choose a personally difficult or sensitive topic to write your essay on if given the choice of choosing your own topic, you may find it more difficult as you continue researching, writing, and revising. It is okay in those situations to talk with your teacher and switch your essay topic to a different one. If you feel comfortable writing about the topic, feel free to continue to do so, but if dealing with that topic becomes too much, it is okay to change topics.

## Choose your focus

Make sure the topic isn't too broad to cover in your essay. If you choose to state a broad opinion, you will need *a lot* of evidence to support the broad opinion that you have. Furthermore, when you have a broad topic, your readers will likely have more doubts about your opinion because they can think of more exceptions or other reasons that your opinion might not be true. Therefore, it is easier to defend an opinion with a more narrow focus and to do so with the time and word count restraints of a school assignment.

## Find Your Focus

You can use these questions to find the focus of your essay:

- What opinion do you have about the topic in the prompt?
- What reasons do you have for believing that opinion?
- Of those reasons which are the **strongest** reasons that would convince the reader the best?

As you determine your focus, also determine which of the effective rhetoric appeals would best help you support the narrowed topic you choose. Would ethos, pathos, or logos best convince your reader that your opinion is right? You can use one, two, or all three appeals if you think it will help your argument. For more information on effective rhetoric [Purdue OWL's resources](#) on this topic.

## Outline

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Also, begin an outline for your essay. As you research your topic, start organizing your findings. Some people begin an outline by listing topics and quotes. Others write topic sentences and supporting sentences. A persuasive essay follows typical essay organization, but you may find the body paragraphs don't always follow the regular 5-paragraph essay rules. You may need to plan for more or fewer body paragraphs depending on the support you need for your opinion.

## Introduction

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Your introduction should start by describing any background that will be important for the reader to know.

Here are some questions that can help you think about background information that the reader needs to be able to understand the problem:

- Who typically supports my opinion? What reasons do they have
- Who typically opposes my opinion? What reasons do they have?

At the end of your introduction paragraph, you should give your thesis. The thesis should clearly state the opinion that you will defend in your essay.

### Example

**Thesis Statement:** *Everyone should begin taking small steps today to begin reducing the negative effects of air pollution on our environment, our health, and the global climate.*

Review the characteristics of an effective thesis as needed. For a persuasive essay, it is especially important that you don't simply state a fact; your thesis should be an opinion. You can tell if it is an opinion by asking if someone else could have a different opinion on the topic. For example, "Dogs are animals." is a fact, but "Dogs are the best pets ever." is an opinion. Someone else could think that cats or some other animal are the best pets, so you can tell it is an opinion.

## Effective Thesis Statement Review

An effective thesis statement...

- addresses the **prompt** if there is one\* (i.e., answers the question. Includes an opinion.)
- is usually at the **end** of the 1st paragraph.
- controls the content of **all** of the body paragraphs.
- is a **complete** sentence.
- does **not announce** the topic (e.g., "I'm going to talk about why pandas should be protected.").
- should **not** simply be a **fact** (e.g., "There are many animals on the endangered species list.").
- should **not** be **too general** (e.g., "Preservation is good.").
- should **not** be **too specific** (e.g., "Animals with limited populations whose habitats are threatened by primarily human actions such as pandas, polar bears, and elephants should be protected at the local, national, and international level in order to preserve these species so that future generations of people will be able to live in a world full of biodiversity.")
- may **state** or **imply** main points (e.g., "Certain animals should be protected by multiple levels of government and organizations." vs. "Certain animals, namely endangered animals, should be protected by local, national, and international governments and organizations. ")

## Body

Your body paragraphs should give reasons that support your thesis. As you plan your essay, you should think about what type of appeal you will use to convince your reader your opinion is correct. You will need to use effective rhetoric to convince the reader.

**Rhetoric** is "the art of speaking or writing effectively" using principles of composition made by ancient critics to communicate and persuade (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Rhetoric was created by the ancient Greeks to effectively communicate and persuade (Sloane and Perelman, 2022). Aristotle, a famous Greek philosopher, divided rhetorical appeals into what we now call ethos, pathos, and logos (Sloane and Perelman, 2022).

**Ethos** is the appeal to authority. This is where you use experts or show yourself to be an expert in order to get the reader to trust you and believe your opinion.

**Pathos** is the appeal to emotion. This is where you use the emotions of the reader, specifically their emotional response to what you write, to convince them to agree with your opinion

**Logos** is the appeal to logic. This is where you use logical reasoning and evidence to show readers why they should believe your opinion. This is one of the most common appeals you will use in academic writing.

## Examples

Watch this video from Texas A&M University Writing Center. Can you identify the different examples of ethos, pathos, and logos in the video?

## Examples

Appeal	Example
Ethos	A commercial for basketball shoes that features a celebrity basketball player saying how great the shoes are.
Pathos	Telling a sad story about dogs in animal shelters to convince people not to give dogs as surprise presents.
Logos	Explaining that everyone should drive more carefully in winter weather because accidents increase by X% with snow on the roads.

As you try to persuade your reader, you can use these appeals to convince them. You can use one, two, or all of the appeals in the defense of your opinion.

### Optional Opposition Paragraph

Another way to support your opinion in the body paragraphs is actually to add a **counterargument** that shows how other people may disagree with you. This is optional in a persuasive essay. You follow this counter-argument with your reply or **rebuttal** about why your opinion is still good despite what the other opinion may be. This can be done in its own paragraph(s) or worked into the supporting paragraphs. A counterargument is usually followed by evidence for the counterargument and then a rebuttal with evidence for the rebuttal. When writing the counterargument, make sure you keep a respectful tone in your writing.

### Example Opposition Paragraph:

1. Counterargument	Some people say that regulations on guns are unwise because....
2. Evidence	The evidence they offer in opposition to these regulations includes....
3. Rebuttal	However, ...
4. Evidence	There is evidence to support this such as...

If you use a counterclaim, you will want your counterclaim to be strong so your rebuttal can stand out and give really good support to your opinion. If you give a good rebuttal to a strong and fairly presented counterclaim, your opinion will be even more convincing to the reader.

## Conclusion

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Your conclusion paragraph should start by restating your thesis to remind your reader of your main idea, your opinion. Then you should discuss your problem more generally and apply your opinion to the general context you established in your introduction. The middle part of your conclusion could be a summary or it could build on the information from your body paragraphs to apply the ideas of your essay to a bigger community.

You can end with a closing statement that is a suggestion, prediction, or opinion. For persuasive essays, you might also try using a **call to action**, asking your readers to join you in your cause.

### Call to Action Examples:

- To continue progressing, humanity should dedicate more resources to space exploration and scientific investigation.
- Let us grow to be more considerate of our neighbors by learning about their culture by trying the traditional foods of their countries.
- This is a serious issue that the government and its citizens should address.
- It is not just people who live near beaches who should be concerned about pollution; everyone should be concerned about the negative effects of polluting waterways, shores, and oceans and do their part to reduce pollution in everyday ways.

## Exercises

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### Exercise 3: Make an Outline

Make an outline for the example essay "[Students Should Keep Using Physical Textbooks](#)" at the start of this unit.

## Exercise 4: Build an Outline

*Make an outline for an essay with the following prompt.*

**Prompt:** What is one way your town should improve? Support your answer with reasons and details.

*Your outline could include any of the following parts in the order that you think would be most effective for convincing people of your opinion.*

- Thesis Statement
- Topic Sentence(s)
- Supporting Detail(s)
- Restated Thesis Statement
- Call to Action/Conclusion etc.

*Optional*

- Counterclaim(s)
- Rebuttal(s)

## Exercise 5: Practice Thesis Statements

*Read the titles of persuasive essays below. Consider the topic of the essay, and then write an effective thesis sentence for each one. Your thesis statement should clearly state your opinion.*

1. Card Games: Boring or Brain Building?

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2. Why Everyone Should Go Camping

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3. Designated Napping Zones on College Campuses?

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## Exercise 6: Revise thesis statements

*Revise the thesis statements to be more effective for a persuasive essay.*

1. The following paragraphs will talk about the three main positive effects of group sports: first, how group sports develop social skills, second, how sports with other people can lead to new friendships, how group sports are physically healthy.
2. Economical and social consequences are the issues to discuss.
3. Some people believe that working during high school has benefits, but others disagree. They think people who work during high school earn more money, they have more job opportunities after graduating, and they learn work skills their non-working peers don't
4. Taking vitamins is healthy.
5. Doing this will help significantly.
6. For example, entertainers become an important influence with young people, make money from endorsements of products, and contribute to the creating of creative projects.
7. I will explain why governments should be involved in managing water resources.
8. Human activity leads to many global problems.

## Exercise 7: Identify the Appeal

Identify which appeal is being used in each sentence. Write **E** for ethos, **P** for pathos, and **L** for logos. If more than one appeal is being used, you can write more than one letter.

1. \_\_\_\_ There are a few apps that people use to keep in touch with beloved family, friends, and other people who are far away.
2. \_\_\_\_ According to Costello (2015), "one of the advantages of studying abroad is to include a variety of experiences from studying in foreign countries as your list of academic experiences. It's a nice way to show cultural competency and your ability to mitigate the difficulties of living in a foreign environment"(p. 55).
3. \_\_\_\_ This powerful statement declares the importance, that authorities in the past, gave to uniforms as a way of protection for the students.
4. \_\_\_\_ These numbers reflect how rapidly the tablet industry has grown over educational publishers in the past decade, giving evidence of how this growing trend in the use of tablets has reduced the importance of the production, distribution, and use of printed books.
5. \_\_\_\_ In other words, through studying abroad, we can develop an inclusive view of life that allows us to understand cultural differences instead of wanting everyone to conform to our personal expectations.
6. \_\_\_\_ According to the survey by The University of Phoenix (2017) , 84 percent of U.S adults in 2016 admit that they have at least one account on social media. Social media provides multiple platforms that attracted hackers to attack (Beall, para. 1).



## Exercise 8: Appeal to the Audience

*Write a topic sentence to answer the prompt below as though you were writing a persuasive paragraph. Then write 1-2 sentences of support for your opinion using ethos, pathos, and logos.*

**Prompt:**

Some people consider carving a pumpkin for Halloween a wasteful tradition while others consider it an acceptable part of the holiday festivities. In your opinion, is Halloween pumpkin carving good or bad?

Ethos:

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Pathos:

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Logos:

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## Exercise 9: Rebuttal

*Write a rebuttal for the counterclaim below.*

**Thesis Opinion:** All school grades should include at least one day of mandatory outdoor classes.

**Counterclaim:** While there may be many benefits to outdoor classes, with outdoor classes come more opportunities for students to get hurt through physical activity, inclement weather, or even seasonal allergies.

**Rebuttal:**

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## Exercise 10: Call to Action

*Read the titles of essays below and write a call to action for each one.*

1. Comic Books' and Graphic Novels' Place in Reading Education

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2. Vanity in Today's Generation

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3. Do Essential Oils Work?

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4. Multi-Generational Homes

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## Exercise 11: Evaluate an outline

Read the outline for an essay about vaccines. Evaluate it. What would make the outline more effective? Revise the outline to better support an opinion.

- **TH:** The best way to fight stress is by exercising, eating healthy food, and listening to music.
  - **TS:** First, one way to cope with stress is by exercising.
  - **TS:** Another way to have less stress is by listening to music.
  - **TS:** Lastly, sharing concerns with friends and family can lesson stress.
  - **TS:** Another way to fight stress is by eating healthy foods.
- **RTH:** Because today stress is very common because of life we have, every person needs to be able to reduce the effects by exercising, eating healthy foods, and listening to music.

TH = thesis statement, TS = topic sentence, RTH = restated thesis statement

## Exercise 12: Complete the Outline

Complete the outline below by filling in the six blanks. You may need to write phrases or sentences to show your ideas. You may also need to fill in the missing cohesive devices to show the relationship between the ideas.

- TH: North Americans are too dependent on their automobiles in their everyday lives.
  - TS: **1)** \_\_\_\_\_, North Americans take their car where ever they go.
  - TS: **2)** \_\_\_\_\_, the public transport is underdeveloped in most cities and states.
  - TS: **3)** \_\_\_\_\_
  - CC: Some may say that North America's cold winters dictate the need for cars.
    - R: **4)** \_\_\_\_\_
- RTH: **5)** \_\_\_\_\_, North Americans **6)** \_\_\_\_\_

TH = thesis statement, TS = topic sentence, CC = counterclaim, R = rebuttal, RTH = restated thesis statement

## Exercise 13: Make an Outline

Make an outline for an argumentative essay that answers the prompt below.

**Prompt:** What is the best breakfast food? Support your opinion with examples and details.

## References

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