

Writing to argue, persuade or advise: 3. Writing to persuade

This audio bite is about writing to persuade.

ELIOT: Persuading people should be easy – it's about giving them ideas and deciding for them. The thing is, you're making them agree with you.

ALIX: Just imagine you wanted something from your mum – you'd tell her all sorts of things, not exactly lies, but you'd make her feel that she should do what you want.

ELIOT: You could start by using feelings and emotions, so pick your words really carefully. Let's see what Alix can do...

ALIX: Mum, I really need to go to the leaver's do. Everyone will be there, and if I don't go, I'll be letting all my teachers down.

ELIOT: That's not a bad start, is it? Then you can say the same thing again, and again, and again ... just so that she won't forget it.

ALIX: And I'll be letting my class down, but most of all I'd be letting Mr Wilkinson down, and you know how nice he's been.

ELIOT: Then you could add a few reasons why it's such a good idea – that means you talk about all the benefits, like this:

ALIX: And if I go, you'll be able to have a bit of peace on Friday night. It'll hardly cost anything because we've got a school discount, and I'll be able to wear that dress I got last year. And Sandie's mum said she'd pick us up at the end.

ELIOT: You can do even more, because you have got to make someone else believe you. One thing is to ask rhetorical questions, which you don't really have a choice about answering. Alix?

ALIX: So mum, do you really want me to sit at home moaning for the rest of the term? Do you want me to let the whole school down?

ELIOT: And Alix has started to exaggerate too – she's going a bit over the top. She can't really moan all the time until the end of term. But she's right about exaggerating – you need to make your persuasive writing strong. You are selling your idea, so you must be positive and only write about the good bits. Think about the reasons you chose something...

ALIX: I got this phone because it sounded really good, and the man in the shop told me it was ideal for me.

ELIOT: The salesman here was using another persuasive technique – he addressed people directly.

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ALIX: You can do the same in your writing, using words like ‘you’ or ‘we’ because it makes your readers feel important. When you use ‘we’ it even sounds like you know what they think, you’re speaking for them and you’re on their side.

ELIOT: And that’s what you should be doing in all your persuasive writing – getting people on your side. So remember, persuade people by using feelings and choosing strong words, such as ‘starving’ instead of ‘hungry’.

Repeat ideas so that they won’t be forgotten and just talk about the positive bits so it sounds better.

Include some rhetorical questions, like ‘Do you want to do well in your exam?’ – if you are listening to this audio clip, the answer’s bound to be ‘yes’, so pick questions which push people to agree with you. And as I’ve said a million times, you can exaggerate a little if you want. And you can make it personal by using ‘you’ or ‘we’.