Persuasive techniques

The main purpose of persuasive techniques is to place the reader in a position to agree with or support the writer's point of view.

Use this list of key terms and the practice tasks that follow (pp.34-48) to develop your knowledge and understanding of HOW persuasive techniques work to position the reader.

Description	Examples	How this persuades
Adjectives Describing words usually connected to a noun (naming word).	The bright red house (bright and red = adjectives), (noun = house)	Adds emphasis
Alliteration Repeating and playing upon the same letter.	A back-breaking job... (See p.34)	Adds emphasis and reinforces meaning, especially where an idea is repeated. Often used to create a highly emotive image.
Anectdote A short account or story of an entertaining or interesting incident.	'In my experience...' 'Many years ago...' 'You may recall the story about...'	Usually makes reader sympathetic and receptive to the point; can set up a character, then position reader to accept or reject that individual character.
Associations see also Connotations and Sub-text Words that create meanings beyond the literal meaning of the word.	Useful to look at words of similar meanings and notice different associations eg. attractive, alluring, pleasing, charming.	Suggests or influences reader response in certain ways, often subconsciously. Implied meanings need to be identified. Many everyday phrases such as 'How are you?" imply things not in the literal words. (See also sub-texts)
Attacks / praise The writer attacks or praises an opponent or idea. This is really an assertion of the writer's viewpoint. In the examples opposite we see forms of attack; the reverse for each will apply to praise.	• denigrating ('putting down') or humiliating the person • discrediting opponents as unreliable, dishonest, etc. • suggesting unsatisfactory associations - with political parties or undesirable people • attacking the person rather than the idea - s/he is unreliable, dishonest, unqualified, etc. • dismissing the credibility of a person or proposal can also persuade the reader to agree.	These methods are often effective in placing the reader in a position of agreement with the writer/speaker. This process works by forceful assertion through appropriate language and insistent claims that are not usually supported with evidence. (See sample text p.34)
Bias One-sidedness in presentation of view/opinion.	Eminem's tour promoter obviously sees no danger in what Eminem says.	Can subjectively influence the reader by intentionally only presenting one side of the argument.
Clichés Worn-out, over-used expressions	Fit as a fiddle Turn over a new leaf Pushing the envelope The bottom line (See pp.34-35)	Are familiar, often colloquial, so can offer a shortcut to convey meaning. (See p.35 for points on use of clichés in headlines).
Colourful words and descriptive language Words that are heightened, vivid, lively, full of interest.	Hot = 'blistering, sultry, muggy, suffocating, steamy, wilting, enervating.' (See p.36)	Produce a picture and/or induce an emotion. Engage reader by gaining attention and often put a new slant on familiar events and issues.

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Connotations of words Connotations are implied meanings of words - meanings or associations that words carry beyond their literal meanings. They are also the shades of meaning that create subtle differences between similar words.	Descriptive words such as slimy, beautiful, ugly etc. A range of words with related meanings can have different associations. An everyday noun such as 'mum' carries different associations from 'mother'. A valiant attempt differs from a courageous one. Consider the different effects of: wonderful, marvellous, remarkable, fantastic, great, grouse and terrific.	Through careful choice of words different effects are gained and different reader responses are generated. Note that many shades of meaning come from usage. Context and tone play an important role in the particular associations words generate in an article.
Contention The main line of argument in a text. A statement of the main idea being argued or debated. What the writer wants you to agree with. The contention focuses on WHAT is being argued.	Because safe-injecting houses for heroin users only encourage drug addiction, they should not be supported by the government. To pinpoint the contention, complete a phrase like: 'The article argues that ..." The article argues that Eminem should be allowed to perform in Australia.	The contention pinpoints the issue and the writer's point of view on it. Your main task is to analyse how readers are being influenced and persuaded to agree with the main contention. Analyse language use and persuasive techniques, not the argument itself.
Emotional appeals Emotional appeals are often subtle; they play on people's emotions such as fears, insecurities, hopes, desires and things that are valued.	Can target: • a sense of justice or injustice • family values • tradition or custom • patriotism • moral values (See pp.36-37)	Writers of media texts frequently appeal to our emotions. Invariably, these appeals relate to our values and attitudes. Often, the appeals are relatively subtle, as we are unaware of the ways in which our own values shape our opinions. Be aware that writers often shrewdly know how to persuasively direct our opinions through their appeals. Can manipulate reader to take notice of issues by triggering an emotional response.
Emotive language The deliberate use of strong emotive words to play on readers' feelings. Language that carries strong emotions.	Powerful emotive words like 'sleazy, slimy, vicious, disgusting, outrageous' - words that have a legitimate use in appropriate circumstances - are used in unusual contexts to describe an action or situation. For example, 'That proposal is outrageous and disgusting, typical of a bigoted racist.'(See p.38)	Evokes strong emotional response in order to coerce/force agreement from reader. Such language is intentionally used to stimulate strong emotional reactions that manipulate the reader's responses.

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Evidence Information, facts or statements used to support a belief, opinion, point of view or proposition.	• statistics • research • expert opinion • expert advice • facts Evidence is often presented in graphs, diagrams and tables. (See p.48 for an article using evidence.)	Positions the reader, adds weight to/backs up the author's point of view; often seems objective and irrefutable. Check for omissions as often only part of the picture is being presented in order to make a particular point more persuasive.
Exaggeration (also **Hyperbole**, see below) Overstatement; stating the case too strongly; magnifying importance, danger, happiness, the excellent state of the economy or whatever.	'I'll die if he finds out.' 'This weighs ten tonnes' Often used in sports reports to describe the winner as the hero or to capture the spirit of success. (See p.38)	Exaggeration makes a point dramatically to reinforce it. It is used to gain attention and can arouse strong or extreme emotional responses such as panic and anxiety to manipulate the reader. When used to generate fun and humour, it predisposes the reader positively to the point of view. Used widely in headlines to grab attention.
Generalisation A general statement that infers or claims that whatever is being asserted is true for most people or a majority because it is true in one or some cases.	Australian children see too much violence on television. – implies that this is true for most or all children. This claim would need statistics from reputable research to be acceptable.	• can appeal to our general sense of what is true and so sound authoritative • may pick up on prevailing prejudices and stereotypes in the culture and so seem convincing because familiar • can use a kind of emotional appeal to our agreed prejudices and untested opinions. • Look closely at any generalisation to see how it works to make the reader agree.
Graphs and Diagrams Aim to explain and interpret information	See example on p.48. The figures on the safety of Ford Falcons, for example, do not support the headline although the article does analyse figures clearly.	Makes the meaning of figures and statistics more readily accessible – look scientific and reliable. Watch how they are used/abused.
Hyperbole A figure of speech that overstates eg. a simile that exaggerates.	The wicket keeper grabbed the catch as fast as lightning.	Adds emphasis and gives clear picture; helps remember a point or situation; usually part of a cumulative effect.

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Inclusive language Includes reader/audience by assuming 'we all agree or disagree'.	'We all know that..' 'We all feel that...'	Engages reader and is often friendly – gains sympathy or persuades reader to reject an idea, individual
Irony **Ironic situations** Implied or intended meaning is different, often the opposite, from the literal meaning. A situation arising from an ill-timed or perverse event or circumstance eg. something desired happens but at the wrong time.	"Oh great! I've just lost my wallet with everything in it." "How ironic - he survived so many threats to his life during war only to die in a freak accident in his new country". (See ironic tone of 50/50 letters p.38 & p.40)	A powerful device used for scorning or 'sending up' others. Effective for humiliating opponents. A clever device that makes the point distinctively; engages reader through tone, choice of words, and even by creating a ridiculous situation.
Language style How the writer 'says' things. The kind of language used to suit the writer's purpose; eg. formal, informal, colourful, plain, everyday, ornate, poetic, literary, reasoned, informative, and so on.	How would you describe these styles? "Only when my computer died last week did I finally twig how we've been conned by the Great Technological Revolution." 'The Jalozi refugee camp in north-western Pakistan is a sea of plastic tents, so densely packed they are touching each other. There are about 60,000 people there...' 'Courageous young Jesse Martin is home at last having grown beyond his years during his round-the-world voyage.'	Language style is deliberately chosen to influence the reader. For example, **formal** styles create an impression of authority and research that can impress readers with information, knowledge, the importance of writer. Readers can feel close to, or distant from, the writer depending on other techniques. **Colloquial** styles are chatty, friendly, inclusive because readers are treated more as equals. Language is accessible and familiar. You always need to consider style in the context of the entire article; do not assume particular styles will always have the same effect.
Loaded words (also **Labelling**) Words that are 'loaded' with associations	Words like 'Capitalist, Communist, salesman, Socialist, politician'. Many such words carry negative associations of contempt, disgust and ridicule or suggest untrustworthiness and dishonesty. Used in statements such as, 'Anyone who thinks like that is nothing but a Communist...'	This is a shorthand way of belittling or discrediting someone by suggesting 'association with undesirables.' This tactic usually assumes the reader's agreement with the 'emotional baggage' that such words carry. Loaded words can be powerful in swaying the reader to a point of view and are exploited by writers who know how to position the reader for various purposes.

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Metaphor A comparison that describes one thing in terms of another. It omits 'like' or 'as'.	Time is the subtle thief of youth. (adapted from Milton) He was whip-fast off the blocks – Thorpedo	Can reinforce a point without mere repetition; image creates interest – engages reader. In opinion articles and political comment, metaphors add colour, are often witty and can highlight a point.
Perspective or Point of view – also stance The writer's outlook on, or attitude to, the topic. **An issue** will also generate a range of perspectives or points of view. (See pp.18-19)	'Child slavery can be overcome with help from Australians' (See p.39). 'Marine parks will make fishing a marginalised sport because no one is a wake-up to the government's tactics.' (See p.40) Point of view is usually clear from the main contention and tone, but it can be more subtly implied. Background to the issue can help to understand the writer's point of view, eg. the writer might have entered the debate late and be adding information to one side of the debate.	Identifying point of view. Ask yourself why the article/letter/editorial, etc. is being written, that is, the purpose of the article. Is the writer supporting an issue, opposing an issue, or pretending to be completely objective? Be as precise as you can about writer's position, eg. a writer might only support an idea or proposal on certain conditions. The viewpoint itself is often persuasive if the reader already agrees with writer's position. Remain objective as you analyse the language.
Pun A play on words to suggest different meanings	'Lord of the Lies' – a play on *Lord of the Flies* (English novel) in describing Lord Jeffrey Archer (title now removed) who was gaoled for lying in court and asking people to give false witness. (Look for examples in headlines).	Humorous, clever. Positions reader to enjoy the joke. Engages mind – often used in headlines and sub-headlines. Attention-getting device.
Reason and logic The use of an argument developed step by step with reasoning and evidence (the justification) to support each main point	See example p.39	Often takes into account the opposing viewpoint to help establish the strength of one side. Note that language can still be highly persuasive, reinforcing reason.
Repetition Repeated words, phrases, sentence patterns, ideas	'Never, never, never to be released'. (See p.39)	Gives emphasis and prominence to a point or idea; repeats ideas to reinforce point, makes reader remember point.
Rhetorical questions Questions that have the answer embedded in them; they often use irony.	'Are we going to accept these third-world hospital conditions in our country?'	Powerful device to manipulate the reader to agree because assumes the answer is obvious. Can position the reader/audience in such a way that to disagree would be to dismiss some point that clearly commands agreement.

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Sensationalise; sensationalism To exaggerate and over-dramatise; 'to blow up' an issue or point so that it assumes great importance in the public's mind; often evident in headlines.	Our hospitals have now become deadly health hazards.	• grabs the reader's attention by presenting an extreme point of view • can arouse extreme emotions, such as alarm, panic, terror • can invoke a sense of outrage or provoke extreme response eg. a sense of gross injustice – that may not really be warranted.
Simile One thing is likened to another using 'like...' or 'as......as......"	He ran like a rocket. As slow as a tortoise.	Clarifies and enhances an idea or situation. Effective if comparison is unexpected as surprise can delight/shock; aptness of comparison can help make a point.
Structure How material and ideas are ordered or arranged.	The structure can be very clear, signposted with words like firstly, secondly, etc. or 'Originally I thought...but now...'. These keep the reader on track. There are numerous ways of organising material, eg. a writer can declare the main point immediately or lead to it late in the article. Anecdotes/stories can be used to arouse curiosity and interest – then move to main points. Endings provide a final persuasive opportunity. Always see if it is used to advantage.	The order of points affects reader response. Dramatic beginnings are effective in engaging reader but the next challenge is to sustain reader interest. Stories also engage readers quickly and can arouse curiosity. Tactics such as a major point, repetition, summing up, conviction in tone, short sharp sentences can be used to persuade. In the body of the article key information, examples and strong opinions can be used to develop or reinforce viewpoint. The strategy of keeping the most important point until the end is powerful as it leaves the reader in no doubt about the viewpoint.
Sub-texts literally meaning 'below the text'. Meanings implied but not stated literally; requires 'reading between the lines.' Sub-text is often the unstated assumptions of the text.	See the Issues SAC on the CD-ROM – in the discussion of the Editorial, implied meanings explored.	Can subtly manipulate, often almost subliminally. Often assumptions in the sub-text are difficult to identify because they tap into values and attitudes we tend not to question. Identifying these can highlight the appeal and persuasive power of the article.
Tone Refers to the voice of the writer; the writer's attitude to both the subject matter and the reader. Tone can be emotive (but identify the emotion) eg. angry, sympathetic, ironical, dismissive, sarcastic, dictatorial, reasonable, belligerent. aggressive, calm, outraged, condescending, haughty.	'What do you think I am? Your slave?' (See p.40) Because tone is related to what we hear, reading a piece aloud can help identify tone. Try that with the above example. Which words help you decide how to read it? These cue you into the tone.	Reflects the writer's attitude, which can position the reader to agree or reject something. If the tone is very aggressive, the language itself can be forceful and persuasive; a calm tone often informs a reasoned piece of writing. Changes of tone are important too as they can signal a new direction, shift in attitude or feelings that affect reader.