

Assignment Guide: The Persuasive Letter

Assignment Prompt

For this assignment, you will be writing a letter compelling a friend or family member to change either a behavior or a belief with which you disagree. Choose your own topic, but for example, this letter could petition an enthusiastic neighbor to scale down his blinding Christmas decorations, an immature cousin to take a gap year between high school and college, a grandparent to vote to pass the new school district budget, a friend to stop drinking, or a spouse to reconcile with an estranged sibling. Because the letter will be written to an individual of your choosing, you must tailor your [language](#) and [logic](#) to the person to whom you are writing.

Assignment-Specific Requirements:

Length: This assignment should be at least 750 words.

Thesis: Underline your [thesis statement](#) or the main [claim](#) of your letter.

Sources Needed: None required. [Cite](#) if used, following [MLA guidelines](#).

Page Formatting: Use [MLA guidelines](#). Also add an opening salutation (e.g. Dear Sarah, or Hello, Jon.), and a closing salutation & signature (Best regards, Tom or Sincerely, Liza)

MLA Requirements: See Formatting your Essay: [MLA 8th Edition](#)

Rhetorical Mode

The goal of [persuasive writing](#) is to get a [reader](#) (your [audience](#)) to agree with your [point of view](#). [Persuasive writing](#) blends facts and emotion to convince the [reader](#) that the writer is right. This [genre](#) relies on opinion and emotion to a greater extent than argumentative writing, but in moving a [reader](#), the successful persuasive letter also deploys logically sound [argumentation](#) and quite often researched support and fact.

Rhetorical Considerations

Purpose:

The purpose of [drafting](#) a persuasive letter is to move your [reader](#) to agree with your [point of view](#). [Persuasion](#) is single-minded; it is based on a conviction that a particular way of thinking or acting is the only way to go; all of the energy of the letter works toward this end. As a writer, you will present one side—your side. While an [opposing point](#) should be mentioned, it is only mentioned to be refuted

or dismissed in the service of your position.

Audience:

Persuasive writing is almost always written with a particular **audience** in mind. For this piece of writing, you will direct your persuasive letter to one person. Thus, your **audience** is not imagined, but rather very real, and that person and their characteristics will inform many of the choices you make as a writer. The persuasive letter requires constant negotiation with another person's mind. At every phase of the writing process, as you prewrite, draft, and **revise**, this assignment will ask you to imagine and anticipate how your **reader** feels, responds, and thinks.

Form:

This piece of writing will be presented using a letter format. Thus, while you still need an **MLA-style** heading to format your work for submission, you will address your letter directly to your **reader** with a formal letter salutation.

Five Features of a Persuasive Letter

1. **Rhetorical Situation:** **Persuasive Writing** vs. Argumentative Writing: **Persuasive writing**, in a way, is a form of argumentative writing; however, the goal of **persuasive writing** is to get a **reader** or group of readers to agree with you/your **point of view** on a particular topic, and the goal of argumentative writing is to get the **reader** to acknowledge that your side is valid and is worth considering. **Persuasive writing** blends facts with emotion in an attempt to convince the **reader** that the writer is "right," while in argumentative writing, the writer cites relevant reasons, credible facts, and sufficient **evidence** in order to convince the **reader** to consider a particular perspective. The nuances are subtle but important to consider. (Later in this course you will be crafting an argument and will see the differences in these genres of writing with greater clarity. The letter makes balanced use of the three rhetorical appeals to persuade a **reader** to change a behavior or belief. The three appeals, which come to us from that consequential deceased Greek, Aristotle, are:
 1. **Ethos:** a writer's or speaker's credibility. In your letter, therefore, **ethos** is you, sort of. It's the "you" that your writing transmits to your **reader**, the sum total of your **tone** and **language** choices, and also the values and intelligence that your writing communicates. Therefore, be vigilant with your work because **ethos** is the appeal that's most immediately harmed by faulty word choices, punctuation mistakes, and lapses in **tone**.
 2. **Pathos:** the appeal to a **reader's** emotions and values. Get your **reader** to feel. Play (in a non-evil way) on their emotions—their compassion, their fears, their sense of community.
2. **Logos:** the appeal to a **reader's** **logic** or reason. Ensure your **claims** are logical, free of fallacies, and backed with specific support.

3. **Organization:** Organize using argumentative structure: an **introduction** with a **thesis/main claim**, body paragraphs that advance points in support of the **thesis/main claim**, and a **conclusion**.
2. **Transitions:** Uses **transitional** phrases to connect your ideas and move the **reader** forward smoothly and logically between sentences.
3. **Known Audience:** The letter's appeals are personalized to the **reader's** characteristics—their professional role and its obligations, as well as their values and emotions.
4. **Formal or Informal Writing?** The **tone** of the letter depends upon the recipient and your relationship and also upon **subject** matter. The **tone** should enhance the letter's persuasive efforts, not undermine them. Always strive for a respectful approach.

Mini-Lesson on **ETHOS - PATHOS - LOGOS**

Plan to use these appeals heavily throughout your Persuasive Letter.

<p>Ethos</p> <p>This is an ethical appeal. It relies on your reliability and credibility as the author.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes reliable sources • Is written from an unbiased perspective • Shows the writer's expertise through the presentation of careful insight and research
<p>Pathos</p> <p>This is an emotional appeal. It relies on the construction of careful connection between the claims presented and the emotions of the readers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes the writer's values and beliefs • Uses stories or examples that convey emotion • Contains broader appeal and focus

Logos

This is an appeal to **logic** and reason. It relies on facts and figures that can convince the **reader** of the **claims**.

- Relies on fact and opinion
- Focuses on reasonable **claims** and **organization** of ideas
- Only includes relevant material with a **narrow focus**