

Sample analysis: The style of this piece is **formal** and **direct**. The use of bullet points gives the piece the style of a report, leading the reader to perceive it as factual and evidence-based. The sentences each express one point clearly and assertively which contributes to the **straightforward, declarative** style. The writer structures the piece by outlining the three main problems with zero tolerance and finishing with the declaration that 'decriminalisation is the only solution'. This leads the reader to feel that the writer's conclusion is a result of logical deduction, thus positioning them to accept the writer's viewpoint.

Overview of persuasive devices

Writers and speakers can use many different persuasive techniques and strategies. This section gives you a brief overview of the main devices, ranging from the deliberate choice of particular, powerful words to the overall structure of a piece of writing.

Persuasive techniques

Writers aim to deliberately persuade you when they:

- ▶ **use strongly emotive words** like 'evil', 'horrendous', 'disgusting', 'rude', 'great', 'triumphant'
- ▶ **appeal to your emotions** by playing on your feelings, desires, needs and prejudices
- ▶ **include you** in their approach with 'we' and 'us' to get you on side – 'We all know that ...'
- ▶ **use a strong tone or voice** to engage you, make you like or dislike someone or something, retain your interest and give cohesiveness to the writing
- ▶ **use overstatement and exaggeration** to manipulate your feelings, amuse and entertain you, make the incident or issue sensational and increase the importance of something in your mind
- ▶ **tell a brief story** – an anecdote – to interest you and as part of the supporting evidence
- ▶ **attack a person, idea or situation** to get you to reject them; often used to distract you from the main issue or make you think that if the person is 'no good', then neither is the viewpoint they support
- ▶ **use rhetorical questions** to engage you and position you to see the answer as so obvious that you can only agree
- ▶ **use generalisations** that make what is true for one or a few, appear to be true for everyone
- ▶ **use experts, statistics, reports, graphs** and so on to help convince you that something is fact, not just opinion
- ▶ **repeat** letters, words and phrases to attract your attention and to emphasise their point
- ▶ **use metaphors** to make a picture of a person, group or incident more graphic and memorable.

Structuring strategies

In order to make their writing more persuasive, writers select and arrange their material in particular ways. They can:

- ▶ **give selected information** – a little or a lot – that helps to sway you to believe and agree
- ▶ **omit important information** because they feel it will undermine their case, or because they are poorly informed on an issue, or because they have chosen to ignore the opposing side to be more persuasive
- ▶ **declare their viewpoint up-front** and then present evidence, a series of assertions and other techniques to persuade you to agree
- ▶ **overtly set out to persuade/coerce** you to agree by strongly favouring one point of view on the issue (opinion articles, letters to the editor)
- ▶ **give a balanced account**, but still aim to convince you that one viewpoint has more validity than any other (editorials)
- ▶ **present a carefully structured argument** with any number of highly persuasive devices.

Summary of the main persuasive techniques

Technique	Example	Effect
Alliteration Repetition of a sound, particularly at the beginning of words. Often used in headlines.	'Fighting fat at just five' (Headline, <i>Daily Telegraph</i> 12 January 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captures attention • Adds emphasis to the writer's point • Draws attention to key words
Analogy Compares one thing or situation with another.	Self-regulation for chemical companies is like putting students in charge of marking their own exams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains a complex point in more familiar terms • Makes the contention look simple and obvious
Anecdotes A brief personal account or story.	A friend visiting from interstate was baffled by our train ticketing system. Rather than being helped, she received a fine for not having the correct ticket.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often entertaining or humorous • Personal angle engages the reader • As 'true stories' they carry weight with readers
Appeal to a sense of justice Speaks to people's belief that everyone deserves fair treatment.	Mandatory detention of refugees is punishment for a crime they didn't commit, and an attack on the most vulnerable group in our society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions the reader to agree that punishment should fit the crime • Arouses anger at a perceived injustice

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<p>Appeal to family values</p> <p>Based on the belief that traditional family arrangements are the best foundation for individuals and society.</p>	I blame the ease of divorce nowadays, which results in fractured and fatherless families, for the spiralling crime rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads readers to view traditional families as the most desirable arrangement Positions the reader to feel that other arrangements threaten the 'moral fabric' of society
<p>Appeal to group loyalty</p> <p>Uses the desire of people to belong to a group in order to persuade them to agree with a viewpoint or take action.</p>	It was heart-warming to see so many in our community joining forces to prevent the new freeway destroying our town.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can play on people's guilt, sense of obligation, fear and sentimentality Convinces people that the interests of the group require their support
<p>Appeal to the hip-pocket nerve</p> <p>Relates to people's concern about their financial wellbeing.</p>	Another day, another tax hike for the ordinary taxpayer. What I want to know is, where is all this extra money going?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provokes strong emotions, such as outrage at being taken advantage of Positions readers to feel threatened by those who want to raise prices etc.
<p>Appeal to patriotism</p> <p>Draws on national pride and people's loyalty to their nation.</p>	Our national flag has seen us through two world wars, social upheavals and the change of millennium.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positions readers to feel that they would be disloyal to their country to disagree with the writer Arouses strong emotions of pride, guilt, loyalty; sometimes anger and fear
<p>Appeal to self-interest</p> <p>Suggests that one's own interests should be placed ahead of others'.</p>	The problems of the Aboriginal community are not my fault. I don't intend to be out of pocket when the compensation claims come rolling in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often divides people into 'them' and 'us' Suggests that the interests of others are in competition with and threaten our own
<p>Appeal to tradition and custom</p> <p>Places a high value on the past and one's heritage. Suggests that abandoning tradition is damaging to society.</p>	His family have farmed the land for generations. But now drought relief payments are all that separates him from having to give up the only life he has ever known.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages the reader to resist change, and to feel that links with the past should be retained Sometimes romanticises the past and rejects modern ways of doing things
<p>Attacks</p> <p>Used to denigrate an opponent and, by implication, their point of view.</p>	It's a bit rich for the Minister to be pontificating about family values considering the skeletons in his own closet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw attention away from reasoned argument Position the reader to agree that if an individual is flawed, their message must be too
<p>Clichés</p> <p>A familiar but overused expression that carries a range of associations.</p>	If Jo Blow had been found with that amount of cocaine it would have been a jail sentence for sure. But it seems our sportspeople these days get away with murder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convey meaning in an economical way Can help readers feel more comfortable with an idea

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Technique	Example	Effect
<p>Connotations</p> <p>Associations or implied meanings of words.</p>	Predictably, the feminazis pop up again, bleating about unfair treatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arouse feelings and attitudes that position the reader to like/dislike, accept/reject a group, idea or viewpoint
<p>Emotive language</p> <p>Deliberately strong words used to provoke emotion in the reader.</p>	I am absolutely disgusted at the travesty of justice apparent in the pathetic sentence given to such a vicious killer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positions the reader to react emotionally, rather than rationally Leads the reader to share the writer's feelings on the subject
<p>Evidence</p> <p>Facts, information or expert opinions; often from an authoritative source. May be used selectively.</p>	The CSIRO's extensive testing has found no or minimal risk associated with GM foods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives the writer's argument more credibility as it is apparently objective and/or supported by experts Supports the use of logic and reason
<p>Generalisation</p> <p>Involves the claim that if something is true of some people, it is true for all members of the group to which they belong.</p>	Older drivers are the real menace on our roads. They're less alert, have slower reaction times and panic under pressure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appeals to commonly held prejudices and attitudes Positions the reader to judge others according to stereotypes
<p>Inclusive language</p> <p>Involves the reader directly in the issue by using such words as 'we' or 'us'.</p>	It's up to all of us to stand up to the multinational corporations whose rampant development is destroying our town.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes the reader feel included and that their view counts Encourages the reader to agree since this view is apparently shared by the group as a whole
<p>Metaphors</p> <p>Comparisons that describe one thing in terms of another.</p>	Love of money is a cancer that is eating away at our society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalise on associations with a vivid image Evoke emotion in the reader which matches that of the writer
<p>Overstatement/exaggeration/hyperbole</p> <p>Using dramatic, forceful language to exaggerate the true situation.</p>	It's a fight to the death between arch-enemies Collingwood and Carlton.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arouses emotion in the reader Can be humorous 'Worst-case scenarios' play on readers' fears
<p>Puns</p> <p>Play on words that gives one word or phrase multiple meanings.</p>	'Two-drink limit hard to swallow' <i>Courier-Mail</i> 22 January 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often humorous Gain the reader's attention and emphasise the writer's point Use connotations of words to convey writer's point of view

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Technique	Example	Effect
<p>Reason and logic</p> <p>Involves a clearly stated main contention and an argument supported by evidence or deduction, that is, by drawing a conclusion from something generally known or assumed to be 'true'.</p>	<p>If you choose to forfeit your right to participate in the democratic process by voting, you forfeit all right to complain about the result.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives writer's viewpoint credibility for being apparently objective • Can consider opposing viewpoints and argue logically against them
<p>Repetition</p> <p>Repeating words, phrases or ideas for emphasis.</p>	<p>House prices are up, fuel prices are up, grocery prices are up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasises the writer's viewpoint and captures attention • Makes the point more memorably
<p>Rhetorical question</p> <p>A question that requires no answer, usually because the answer is implied.</p>	<p>After the last fiasco, can the government really expect us to believe that they know what they're doing now?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions the reader to agree by assuming their answer will be the same as the writer's • Engages the reader by addressing them directly

Persuasive techniques in detail

The previous section of this chapter shows you some of the main ways writers will set out to position you to agree with their viewpoint. To help you develop your knowledge and skills of language analysis further, this section:

- ▶ defines and describes in detail a range of persuasive language techniques
- ▶ gives examples of each technique, with brief notes on first reactions
- ▶ provides a sample analysis showing how each example positions and persuades the reader.

Alliteration

Alliteration is a repeated sound, often at the beginning of words, which plays upon the same consonant or syllable, for example, 'dirty deeds, done dirt cheap'. The repeated sound is a popular device used in headlines and media texts to reinforce and draw attention to a major point.