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How persuasive language 'works'

HOW PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE 'WORKS'

There are three basic steps to understanding *how* language works to persuade the reader to accept a particular viewpoint on an issue.

STEP 1 Identify the main point (the main contention) and state it clearly in your own words. In brief, this is what the writer is persuading you to accept.

- ▶ You have to be clear about *what* the writer is saying, but you must not summarise the newspaper articles you are analysing.
- ▶ Your focus is on *how* the *language* is used to influence and persuade.

STEP 2 Focus on the language used.

- ▶ Take an overview of language – is it formal? Informal? Sophisticated? Is it colloquial – like everyday speech?
- ▶ Look for emotive words – words that trigger your feelings. How do they make you feel?
- ▶ Next, see if you can work out how you have been 'set up' to respond in certain ways. For example, have you been made to feel sympathetic to someone or a group? To support an idea or proposal? To reject a person, group or idea? This is called *positioning* the reader and is discussed in detail below.
- ▶ What is the tone of the piece? That is, how would it sound if you read it aloud? Would it be spoken in a disgusted way? A light-hearted, jocular way? Sarcastically or ironically? Calmly? In a controlled and reasoned way? (See *Tone*, p.87 and 105.)

Brewer, I., Evans, S. and Heintz, K., 2003, "Insight
Issues : studying media texts", Insight
Publications, Mentone Vic., pp 59-90
pp 91-96
pp 100-105

STEP 3 Now work out (analyse) how the language has positioned you.

- ▶ In other words, **how** has the writer used a situation, certain words, tone and so on, to make you respond in a particular way? Find as many examples as you can that make you accepting of the writer's viewpoint.
- ▶ This is the crux of understanding **how** language is used to influence, persuade and manipulate you. (See below for more details.)

What does 'position the reader' mean?

Writers aiming to persuade you to accept their viewpoint have to deliberately get you to 'come on side'. This can be done subtly or heavy-handedly and in a myriad of ways in between. Writers have to **position** you to agree. This means that they use language, situations, stories, information, evidence and arguments to manipulate your responses. If you can see how readers are being positioned, then you will be well on your way to understanding how persuasive language influences readers.

Vocabulary for 'position'

It is important to develop a good vocabulary for discussing language use. Here are some words that you can use when you examine how writers are positioning readers. The varied vocabulary shows you the kinds of ways in which persuasive writing can operate and this is not a complete list by any means!

Sentence	Alternative words for 'positions' and 'see'
This (give example) positions...	sets up / prepares / predisposes / influences / sways / inclines / persuades / convinces / compels / manipulates / coerces / pressures / ...
the reader to see...	consider / agree / accept / think / respond / believe / understand / like / feel sympathy for / realise / disagree / reject / fear / dislike / distrust / lose sympathy for / lose patience with / hate / ...

EXAMPLE - HOW LANGUAGE POSITIONS THE READER

In headlines, each word has to 'work' on the reader, that is, be rich in emotional and informational associations to entice the reader to pick up the paper and start reading. Language is used in a very concentrated, shorthand way to give information.

Setback as terror bomber escapes

The Age 15 July 2003 p.1

After reading the headline opposite, carefully go through Steps 1 to 5 below to see how the writer positions you, the reader.

1 Identify the key words: setback, terror, bomber, escapes.

2 What is the message or point in one brief sentence?

- The escape of the terrorist figure is a major setback. (That it is 'major' is implied by the headline's status.)

3 How does each key word affect you? Does it raise questions? Trigger strong or certain feelings?

- **setback**: sets off questions – Why a setback? Setback for whom? Need to find out who escaped and when – need to know the context. Setback also suggests some kind of failure, loss of ground, disappointment – negative, emotional associations – definitely not good.
- **terror**: triggers alarm, fear of terrorists or an attack.
- **bomber**: more danger – combined with 'terror', definitely alarms and confirms fears of terrorists. What kind of bomber? Like the Bali bomber? Must be caught and punished – cannot have these people free.
- **escapes**: more alarm – dangerous terrorist at large. Where? How close?

4 How are you positioned to respond in particular ways?

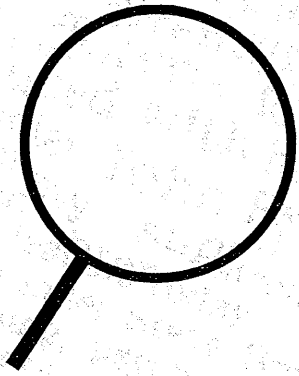
- Each word carries strong emotional triggers that set off fears.
- The opening word suggests new danger just when it was apparently thought some headway was being made with the control of bombers. Where has the bomber escaped from/to? This sets up a question – need to read the story to get the answer.
- The opening word also taps into the constant concern about terrorists since 9-11. How do these emotional effects work to position you, the reader? How are they used to 'set you up' to agree to something?

5 Discuss how the language has positioned you – some main points. For example, the headline may set off strong emotional responses that make you feel insecure about safety. You may be positioned to feel the need for better security measures for controlling terrorists and bombers.

SAMPLE STUDENT ANALYSIS

The unsettling nature of this headline has 'set me up' to want, and agree to, new or better security measures. That means that I am being emotionally 'prepared' through fear to accept proposals or to see the need for more money to be spent. It also makes me feel totally unsympathetic towards the bomber because I fear that the bomber is now a threat to my personal and national security (links with the Bali bomber also come to mind). I want some kind of punishment or revenge for such people. I would be ready to agree that such people must be caught and punished.

ANALYSE TAKE APART CRITICISE EXPLORE TEASE OUT CONSIDER SELECT COMMENT SUMMARISE SURVEY



SUMMARISE SURVEY WRITE

ACTIVITY 1

Compare headlines

Compare *The Age* front-page headline (p.60) with the *Herald Sun*'s headline (below) for the same story, which appeared on page 2.

PM claims arrest stopped terror attack

Dennis Atkins in Manila, *Herald Sun* 15 July 2003 p.2

In this story, the escape is not mentioned until the fourth paragraph, which reports that 'Philippine authorities were red-faced when the top bomb-making expert for Jemaah Islamiah...broke out of the Manila jail with two other extremist Filipino Islamists'. This report foregrounds a different incident – the arrest by Indonesian authorities of terrorist suspects with explosives and arms that Australians believed averted a serious terrorist attack.

1. How does the *Herald Sun* headline position you to view the Prime Minister?
2. How does this article minimise embarrassment for both Australian and Philippine authorities?

ACTIVITY 2

Identify key words

1. Find all the words that refer to teenagers or their behaviour.
2. How would these position the reader to respond to teenagers? Discuss some examples in detail.
3. What emotions does this writer play on?
4. What viewpoint is expressed and how are you positioned to agree?

Party Animals

There's a new menace in Australian suburbia on Saturday nights – hundreds of teenaged gatecrashers, summoned by text messages, looking for trouble and ready to riot.

For several years now, police across Australia have been struggling with what is fast becoming a regular weekend fixture: gatecrashers, not just tens of them but hundreds at a time, converging on suburban parties and spilling onto the streets.

Paul Toohey, *The Weekend Australian Magazine* 12-13 July 2003 p.16

Chambers of horror reveal evil secrets

Red blood stains the walls of the tiny dimly lit rooms – the blood of those tortured by Saddam Hussein's barbaric henchmen.

Each cell in the 20 single-storey prison blocks contain the same tell-tale marks, betraying the fact that until five days ago the people of Basra were suffering unspeakably.

Herald Sun 19 April 2003

ACTIVITY 3

How are you being positioned?

1. Who are you being manipulated to reject? How?
2. Who are you being positioned to sympathise with? How?
3. How is this positioning you to react to the war on Iraq?
4. What viewpoint is the writer getting you to agree with?

THINK READ ANALYSE TAKE APART CRITICISE EXPLORE TEASE OUT CONSIDER SELECT

Rude Rusty so romantic

I never thought I'd say it, but isn't it time we gave Russell Crowe a break?

'Which arm?' is probably a reasonable response, but I'm serious.

Sure, the man who scored an Oscar has been guilty of numerous atrocities over the years: boorish behaviour often stemming from a rampant ego, not to mention crimes against music and, more lately, crimes against hair.

But crimes against romance? I don't think so.

In fact, he might just have proved himself about the most romantic man on the planet.

Robyn Riley, Herald Sun 10 April 2003 p.18

ACTIVITY 4

Do you agree?

1. What viewpoint is expressed?
2. How are you positioned to agree?

THINK READ ANALYSE TAKE

Powerful and effective 'persuaders'

Readers respond to 'emotional persuasion'. This is achieved in many ways, but particularly through the use of emotive words and tone.

Emotive words have many associations that can be marshalled to influence readers and evoke strong reader responses by playing on feelings. They can trigger fears, sympathy, desires, admiration, hatred, disgust, hope, and so on. Powerful, emotive words are often used to exaggerate problems or to overstate the case to ensure or elicit a desired response.

The three extracts in Activities 2–4 have all been selected because they use very emotive words. Look at the table of emotive words on the following page. Record how each word positions you to respond to a person, a group or a situation.

Emotive word	Some effects
barbaric henchmen	
boorish	
evil	
gatecrashers	
horror	
menace	
rampant	
riot	
romantic	
tortured	
unspeakably	

Tone indicates how a piece would sound if read aloud. A very strong tone and very emotive language usually go together. A mild, more reasoned tone is created with more controlled language and emotions or ideas.

ANALYSE TAKE APART CRITICISE EXPLORE TERSE OUT CONSIDER SELECT COMMENT SUMMARISE

ACTIVITY 5

Identify tone

1. Re-read each of the extracts in Activities 2, 3 & 4 to identify the tone of each. Find key words or phrases that help you to decide.
2. How does the tone contribute to your response to each extract?
3. Read 'Protesters...'. How would you describe the tone? Discuss how the tone and emotive language are used to position you to agree. Incorporate the writer's viewpoint into your answer.

Protesters more dangerous than enemies

If it is good for the innocent Iraqi people to experience death and terror, it should be good for us to face the brutality of their experience on TV.

From Letter to the Editor
Herald Sun 10 April 2003

T SUMMARISE SURVEY WRITE

persuasive devices

structuring strategies

Writers to make their writing more persuasive, writers can:

- ▶ **give selected information** – a little or a lot – that helps to sway you to believe and agree
- ▶ **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 and feature articles)
- ▶ **present a carefully structured argument** with any number of highly persuasive devices.

Persuasive techniques

Writers aim to deliberately persuade you when they:

- ▶ **use strongly emotive words** like 'evil', 'horrendous', 'disgusting', 'triumph', 'rude', 'great'
- ▶ **appeal to your emotions** by playing on your feelings, desires, needs and prejudices (see Emotional appeals pp.70–80)
- ▶ **include you in their approach** with 'we' and 'us' to get you on side – 'We all know that ...' (see Inclusive language, p.83)
- ▶ **use a strong tone** – also called voice – to engage you, make you like or dislike someone or something, retain your interest and give cohesiveness to the writing (see Tone, pp.87,105)
- ▶ **use overstatement and exaggeration** to manipulate your feelings, amuse and entertain you, make the news or incident sensational and increase the importance of something in your mind (see Overstatement, etc. p.84)
- ▶ **tell a brief story** (an anecdote) to interest you and use it as evidence (see Anecdotes p.68)
- ▶ **attack a person, idea or situation** to get you to reject or admire them; often used to distract you from the main issue or make you think that if the person is 'no good', neither is the issue they support or vice versa (see Attacks, p.68)
- ▶ **use rhetorical questions** to engage you and position you to see the answer as so obvious that you can only agree (see Rhetorical questions, p.87)
- ▶ **use ridicule and irony** to make you see that something is really 'not on'
- ▶ **use generalisations** that make what is true for one or a few, appear to be true for everyone – 'Protesters more dangerous than enemies' is an example that makes it appear that **all** protesters are more dangerous than **any** (that is, all) enemies (see Generalisations, p.82)
- ▶ **use experts, statistics, reports, graph** summaries to help convince you (see Evidence, p.81)
- ▶ **repeat letters, words and phrases** for emphasis and special effects to get your attention – find examples in 'Rude Rusty so Romantic', p.63 (see Alliteration, p.67; Repetition, p.86)
- ▶ **use metaphors** to make a picture of a person, group or incident more graphic and memorable; also to position the reader to like or dislike someone – the headline in 'Party Animals', p.62 is a metaphor (see Metaphors, p.83).

PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE AND TECHNIQUES

Persuasive language and techniques

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. You need to look at many examples closely and become familiar with the kinds of persuasive techniques that can be used in preparation for your writing tasks.

To help you develop your knowledge and skills of language analysis further, this section:

- ▶ defines and describes a range of persuasive language and techniques
- ▶ gives brief notes on first reactions to each example
- ▶ provides a sample answer showing in detail how the technique works to position/influence/persuade through deliberate language use.

Main contention

The main contention pinpoints the issue and presents the writer's point of view on that issue. To show that you have understood the main contention, aim to express it in a single sentence. After this, your primary task is to analyse how readers are being influenced and persuaded to agree with the main contention.

EXAMPLE

Warne deserves his suspension
and the public deserves to
know how the decision was made.
The Age 25 February 2003

Notes

This sentence pretty much sums up what the writer wants to say. While stating the issue, they make two strong and direct statements about their opinion of Warne's suspension. Repeating the word 'deserves' makes the statement catchy; definitely makes me pay attention and want to read on for more explanation. 'Deserves' seems to mean two slightly different things: Warne 'had it coming to him' and the public 'has the right'. Alliteration in the use of 'd' adds to the definite, authoritative tone.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer openly declares his position on the issue of Shane Warne's suspension from cricket: he deserves his punishment – but the public also deserves something – knowledge about the grounds for this decision. The suspension is fair, but it is unfair if the public does not know why this decision was made. The clear, direct approach is persuasive and there is the added impression of the fairness of the writer, who sees that not everything has been revealed. The writer's conviction is reflected in the authoritative tone which helps to position the reader to agree, while the alliterative use of 'd' in 'deserve' and 'decision' reinforces the definite viewpoint.

Alliteration

Alliteration is a repeated sound, often used at the beginning of words, that 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.

EXAMPLE

Sex-sells' advertising is sleazy, sexist and stereotypes women
(Subheading for an article on advertisers who exploit sex to sell products.)

Notes

A bit of a tongue-twister! The attention grabber is the phrase, 'sex-sells' – sells what and how? Makes me want to read on! The alliteration of the 's' sound – five words begin with the letter 's', two repeat it within the word and there are also the related sounds of 'z' in 'sleazy' and 'x' in 'sex' – seems to link all the words and slow you down as you read the sentence. Also, when you read this sentence aloud, the 's' sounds create a spitting sound which sounds really nasty. This adds to the tone which is forthright and accusatory.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer forthrightly criticises advertisers' selling techniques that exploit sex, claiming that the practice is tawdry and sexist and that it stereotypes women. The first word, 'sex-sells', grabs attention by highlighting advertisers' tactics. The repeated use of the letter 's' slows down the reader, which has the effect of emphasising words that begin with, or use, 's'. The repetition positions the reader to associate the words 'sex-sells' with 'sleazy, sexist and stereotypes' because they begin with the same sound. Even the 's' in 'advertising' links that word with the others. The overall effect of the repetition gives the subheading a vicious, almost spitting sound which strengthens the point, since the words themselves sound 'sleazy' and unpleasant. This alliterative use of 's' makes this seem like a powerful tongue-twister, brief and concise, manipulating the reader's desire to take up the play on sounds and to want to repeat it, adding further to its impact.

Anecdotes

Anecdotes are short accounts, or stories, of an entertaining or interesting incident. They can be used to engage the reader, add variety and offer another way of giving information.

EXAMPLE

The latest in a string of incidents I have witnessed on public transport occurred last Monday night on a late night train. Several youths who were chroming started abusing two young men. The men attempted to leave and the next thing I knew the chromers were attacking these men. Why can drug-affected, violent people be allowed to intimidate the travelling public? Why is the only Connex employee on the train the driver, who is powerless to do anything?

Adapted from *The Age* 2 March 2003

Notes

This story makes travelling on public transport sound really frightening. This isn't a 'one-off' incident either. Uses the term 'the travelling public' to appeal to/include other users. Describes the attackers as 'drug-affected, violent people' – sounds pretty scary. Sounds like the writer wants to create a link between incidents like this and the absence of employees with any power to protect the public. This story definitely makes me think there should be guards or conductors so people don't have to put up with stuff like this.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this anecdote, the writer recounts a frightening experience of youths on a train who were 'chroming'; they abused, then attacked, two other young men. This incident is used to alert members of the public to the dangers and risks involved in using public transport. That this is the 'latest in a string of incidents' indicates that this is not a one-off occurrence. This positions the reader to fear travelling on public transport because it is so dangerous. The writer continues to play on people's fears with the alarming description of the youths as 'drug-affected, violent people' who 'intimidate the travelling public'. The story is used as evidence that there should be more employees on trains other than the 'powerless' driver. The upsetting and personal nature of the story positions the reader to react sympathetically to the writer's argument, while the repeated play on people's fears about personal safety is also a persuasive device, pressuring people to agree.

Attacks

Attacks denigrate an opponent. They employ various means such as undermining/belittling/insulting/dismissing/embarrassing the person, political party or institution.

Attacks can be used to:

- ▶ gain control over the opposition by using one or more of the means described above
- ▶ position the reader to agree
- ▶ emphasise weaknesses in the opposition's argument
- ▶ draw attention away from reasoned argument.

EXAMPLE

Ned Kelly was a terrorist who killed policemen. I am disgusted that there is an exhibition for this criminal who sanctioned murder, theft and thuggery.

Adapted from *Herald Sun* 3 March 2003

Notes

This is a pretty full-on attack on Ned Kelly and an art exhibition about him; uses really insulting, powerful words like 'terrorist' and 'criminal' to describe Kelly. Ned Kelly a 'terrorist'? – 'terrorist' reminds me of the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Bali. The writer wants the reader to hate Kelly as much as we hate the people who committed these acts. The writer also lists Kelly's crimes, including the fact that he 'killed policemen' – something people really hate. 'Disgusted' is a pretty strong word to describe the exhibition – sounds like they not only hate it, but it makes them feel sick.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer attacks Ned Kelly as a person in order to influence readers to agree that he is a 'criminal' and does not deserve to have an exhibition dedicated to him. By bluntly condemning Kelly as someone 'who sanctioned murder, theft and thuggery' and denouncing him as 'a terrorist who killed policemen', the writer aligns Kelly with terrorists responsible for violent killings, including police killings. The word 'terrorist' is particularly emotive in today's climate because of the fear and hatred it arouses. The reader is positioned to reject Kelly as a person and therefore regard him as an unsuitable subject for an art exhibition. The use of the extremely emotive word 'disgusted' in relation to the exhibition presents it as sickening and appalling. These factors, combined with the indignant, accusative tone, work to make readers think that an art exhibition based on such a reprehensible figure is totally unacceptable.

Clichés

A cliché is an overused expression that brings with it an array of associations and connections. It can help readers to feel familiar with the material presented and often conveys meaning in an economical way. The use of clichés can, however, detract from the overall quality of the writing.

Notes

'There's a time and a place' – I've heard that so many times before. Sounds like something my parents used to say when they told me off. I guess it's an easy way of saying that some things are okay if done at the right time in the right place, but not okay otherwise. Indicates that the writer isn't against breastfeeding, but thinks it should only be done in certain places at certain times. Makes me curious to find out what these times and places are.

EXAMPLE

There's a time and a place for breastfeeding.
Herald Sun 3 March 2003

SAMPLE ANSWER

The cliché 'there's a time and a place' is used to appeal to the idea that some activities are unsuitable at certain times and in certain locations. This cliché appeals to the importance of appropriate behaviour and codes of conduct that serve to guarantee the comfort of all. The expression is not used to criticise the actual activity, but to criticise the appropriateness of that activity in certain places during specific times. Therefore the writer is not against breastfeeding as such, but argues that it is not something that should happen anywhere, at any time. The reasonable tone and well-worn idea of appropriateness position the reader to see the writer as reasonable and tolerant.

Connotations

Connotations are the implied meanings of words. There are positive connotations and negative connotations. Think of different words for *thin*: svelte, slender, slim, gaunt, scrawny, willowy, lean, skinny, emaciated, skeletal. Each has different associations and creates a different image in the reader's mind.

Notes

This writer is describing the show where Michael Jackson responded to the way other TV shows had presented him. The word 'whingeing' makes me think of kids' whiny voices, complaining about stuff they think is unfair. It also makes me think of people who moan about everything, despite the fact that nobody wants to listen to them. A word like 'talking' would have been way more neutral and non-judgemental.

EXAMPLE
Michael Jackson's whingeing about his supposed misrepresentation is not my idea of entertainment.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer uses the word 'whingeing' to describe the way Michael Jackson discussed his misrepresentation on other TV shows. 'Whingeing' has many negative connotations. It is often associated with immature children or annoying people; here its use suggests that Jackson is childish and petulant, even petty and tedious. This makes the reader feel unsympathetic towards, and critical of, Jackson. Linking the word 'supposed' with 'misrepresentation' casts doubt in the reader's mind about the basis of Jackson's complaint and gives more strength to 'whingeing'. This positions the reader to be even more antagonistic towards Jackson, whose 'whingeing' then seems even less justified and his self-defence unwarranted.

Emotional appeals

Appeal to a sense of justice

This is an appeal to a deep-seated belief that we all have the right to be treated fairly. It is a common form of appeal as people react quickly when they think they, or others, are victims of unjust circumstances. In Australia, too, there is a keen sense of the right to 'a fair go' that is often used to appeal to our sense of justice.

EXAMPLE

The two men who gunned down two police officers in cold blood are simply sent to jail and justice is said to be done. What a joke! Justice would only have been done with the death penalty.

Adapted from *Herald Sun* 27 February 2003

Notes

'Gunned down...in cold blood' is a pretty full on way of saying 'murdered' gives the impression that the murderers were really evil men. 'Simply sent to jail' makes their punishment sound pretty weak. The writer seems really disgusted that this is seen as justice – describes it as 'a joke'. It's a bit like saying 'Are you kidding?' or 'You can't be serious'. This writer really hates the cop killers and believes that the punishment they received is not good enough.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to a sense of justice, the writer indignantly and angrily declares that sending the killers of two police officers to jail is a complete miscarriage of justice. The writer positions the reader to reject the killers as violent, ruthless and cold-hearted by creating the brutal image of the 'police officers' being 'gunned down...in cold blood'. This sets up the police as victims of an unfair situation that prepares the reader to agree that such violent criminals deserve to be punished harshly. The key issue, the inadequacy of the prison sentence, is picked up in the words 'simply sent to jail'. The extent of the writer's dissatisfaction is clearly conveyed in the sarcastic comment that 'justice is said to be done'. This is then taken further by asserting that the inadequacy of the sentence is ridiculous, 'a joke'. Such heavy irony and scorn for the process aim to manipulate the reader to agree that the punishment is completely inadequate and, therefore, unjust. Consequently, when the final accusatory declaration is made – that only the death penalty would achieve justice – the reader is positioned to agree.

Appeals to a sense of security

Appeals to our sense of security play on our need to feel safe and free from unexpected attack. These appeals are powerful because people strongly value adequate and continued protection from random attacks, acts of violence and other destabilising events that threaten to disrupt their lifestyle. If readers have been exposed to threats to their security either in person or because they lived through a major event, such as September 11, they may be more easily persuaded because of their heightened sense of fear. Writers may try to exploit their need for increased security in order to persuade the reader to accept their viewpoint.

EXAMPLE

Australia's isolation no longer justifies a 'no worries' detachment from a dangerous world. Down Under is now within reach of the long arms of terrorists and rogue states.

Herald Sun 20 March 2003

Notes

Scary – I really don't like the idea that in Australia we are 'within reach' of terrorism and war. Hostile countries and terrorists having 'long arms' sounds as though they can reach us even here, when I thought we were pretty safe from all that stuff. 'Isolation' makes me think we are separate from the rest of the world – once safe, now we seem defenceless and on our own, and that the whole world is 'dangerous' and a threat to us. 'No longer justifies' makes it sound like we've got no excuse but to change our attitudes. 'No worries' in quotation marks casts doubt on the phrase, suggesting we do actually have something to worry about.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to a sense of security, the writer works on undermining the reader's sense of national security by claiming that Australia is vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The writer's first step is to show that Australia is no longer protected by its geographical isolation and that the 'no worries' detachment is really misplaced complacency based on a foolhardy, uninformed attitude that can no longer be indulged. The key words 'no longer' and 'dangerous' reinforce the idea that old securities now don't exist. This effectively persuades the reader to reconsider Australia's national security and to be alarmed. The colloquial term, 'Down Under', invokes patriotism and protective feelings towards the beloved country. The writer positions the reader to feel that Australia is very vulnerable by claiming that the country is 'now within reach' of terrorists and hostile countries because of their 'long arms'; very emotive and unsettling images. Such emotional manipulation positions readers to be persuaded that unless Australia takes action to improve national security, everyone is under threat of terrorist attacks.

Appeals to being modern and up-to-date

Appeals to being modern play on people's desires to be part of 'the scene' or the 'in-crowd', and are seen as ways to gain popularity and acceptance. This appeal to be 'with it' is a very powerful tool for persuading individuals who pride themselves on being up-to-date. Consumers are constantly pressured to keep up with fashions, not just in clothing, but also in personal possessions such as the latest mobile or computer console. This pressure also applies to lifestyle – personal image, cars, holiday packages, home wares, entertainment, even pets and gardens. Writers and advertisers manipulate readers' desires for status and acceptance by suggesting that the essential ownership or adoption of these latest items and trends secures these desires.

Notes

The writer is accusing the Federal Parliament of sounding like they are from the 1950s. Saying we're 'headed back' implies that we are reverting to the past instead of moving toward into the future. That doesn't sound too good. Isn't the 1950s a time period associated with old-fashioned values, women being stuck at home and a boring lifestyle? The Howard government has been accused of this before – the writer is really attacking Federal Parliament by saying they are not up-to-date with the times.

EXAMPLE

Sometimes when I'm listening to Federal Parliament, I feel we're headed back to the 1950s.
Herald Sun 25 February 2003

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to being modern and up-to-date, the writer attacks Federal Parliamentarians. Saying that 'we're headed back' creates the idea of social regression, which goes against the ideals of striving for a better future. The writer specifies the point in time that they fear we are regressing to – the 1950s – which is generally regarded as a time period associated with conservatism, discrimination and suppressed behaviour. The writer attempts to persuade the reader to condemn the Parliamentarians in order to avoid the potential restriction of liberties associated with 1950s society. Indirectly, this appeal to being modern and up-to-date depends on associating Federal Parliament with past times that do not serve us now. It plays upon the readers' desires to be part of a modern, progressive and different world from that of the 1950s.

Appeal to family values

An appeal to family values argues in favour of traditional family life – often stereotyped as trouble-free with two loving and patient parents of two or three well-adjusted children. Family life is promoted as the best way to provide a healthy nurturing environment for children, ensuring that they become socially responsible, well-adjusted, caring and morally sound citizens. In turn this is seen to create a stable society. Appeals of this kind are extremely powerful as threats to family values are often equated with threats to society itself.

EXAMPLE

How are children supposed to develop emotionally and socially without the presence of a father? Single women are only thinking of themselves when they decide to have children.

Notes

Opening rhetorical question is really powerful; asserts that children without a father can't develop emotionally and socially. We're meant to answer, 'They can't! A father is essential'. Puts me in a position where I don't think to question it. Developing 'emotionally and socially' is pretty important stuff. Sounds like fatherless children are doomed. This is just working on people's emotions and conventional views – assumes that all children in families with fathers will be okay, but what about dads who are alcoholics or gamblers or something? Then it just starts attacking 'single women' who 'decide to have children' because they're selfish. What a joke – how about the women who are single because of a separation or divorce or an unplanned pregnancy, or even the death of a partner? We're expected to think that children of single parents will be inadequate. This is a pretty common attitude among conservative groups.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to family values the writer asserts that children need both a mother and a father in order to develop into emotionally and socially responsible adults. The opening rhetorical question is asked in an indignant, almost outraged tone that sets up the reader to agree: 'No, obviously children can't develop in a balanced way without a father'. The cleverly framed question, 'How are children supposed to...' implies that it is impossible for them to grow up in a balanced way because having a father is natural, which in turn implies that not having one is unnatural. When the writer next attacks 'single women' who 'decide' to have children, much groundwork has been done. The link with the first statement, the absence of a father, positions the reader to see that having a single mother will be damaging to children. The reader is positioned to reject single mothers. This critical attitude is reinforced in the assumption that single mothers all choose to have children – a questionable claim. Then single mothers are accused of 'only thinking of themselves'. This positions the reader to reject single mothers out of hand because they are selfish and, by implication, irresponsible, not thinking of their children. This appeal to traditional family values has been used to attack, without evidence, single mothers, stereotyping them as a group that is seriously harming the lives of innocent children. This positions readers to blame single mothers for children in our society who are not emotionally and socially well-developed, and to accept unquestioningly that children with two parents will be stable members of society.

Appeal to fear

It is easy to play on people's fears because people tend to respond emotionally when things like their safety, security, country and those dear to them appear to be threatened. This appeal is widely used by politicians in times of crisis when strict security measures or defence strategies are deemed necessary. Appeals to fear usually work by portraying an extreme-case scenario as highly probable. This triggers the feeling that it is imperative for solutions be found; thus people can be easily pressured or coerced into agreement in order to allay their worst fears.

EXAMPLE

Violent computer games are training our children to become professional killers with the marksmanship of military assassins and the blood lust of mass murderers. Remember Port Arthur and Columbine.

Notes

This is a bit intense! The idea that kids are being 'trained' to become violent is full-on because heaps of kids, including myself, play computer games. There are some pretty extreme words here to describe what kids are being trained to become – 'professional killers', 'military assassins' and 'mass murderers' – sounds a bit far-fetched. Then again, who ever thought the killing sprees at Port Arthur and Columbine would happen – anything's better than incidents like this ever happening again. Kind of makes me think that if computer games really do give kids 'marksmanship' and 'blood lust', then there's no way kids, especially young kids, should be able to play them.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to fear, the writer evokes in people a deep anxiety that society risks being subjected to violence because of the dangerous effects of violent computer games on children. These games are transforming innocent children into 'professional killers' and 'mass murderers'. This positions the reader to respond with horror, an extreme emotion that activates their worst fears. A strategic word like 'training' suggests that playing computer games systematically prepares children to become 'professional killers'. Readers are then positioned to think that children will develop 'the marksmanship of military assassins', and that they will become expert, lethal gun-handlers with 'the blood lust of mass murderers'. Readers are manipulated by this hyperbole to fear addiction to violence and total immorality. 'Remember Port Arthur and Columbine' implies links between violent computer games and these tragedies where terrible mass murders occurred. The sustained evocation of fear, terror and horror plays on people's worst nightmares, manipulating them to agree, or at least to fear, that violent computer games are indeed so dangerous that innocent children are at serious risk of becoming violent killers.

Appeal to fear of change

As most people tend to resist change, this is a common way to play on people's insecurities and increase their desire to cling to the familiar. Often the idea of confronting or experiencing new things is more challenging than staying within one's comfort zone. Writers play on the human desire for comfort, safety and routine in order to make people feel uneasy about embracing new ideas, developments, social changes and new ways of doing everyday tasks.

EXAMPLE

Lygon Street, Carlton, used to be the home of good coffee, Italian restaurants and intimate bookshops. It had atmosphere and culture. Now it is being taken over by multinationals such as Starbucks, 7-11 and Borders. One of Melbourne's most treasured areas is being transformed into a cold and bland strip mall.

Notes

This person is really unhappy about the changes made to Lygon Street. They say it is being 'transformed' – sounds like the entire street is changing into something entirely different. Saying Lygon Street 'had atmosphere and culture' and using the words 'used to be', suggests that Lygon Street has already changed for the worse. The phrase 'one of Melbourne's most treasured areas' evokes warm, protective feelings – kind of makes me sentimental. In comparison, the words, 'cold and bland' make me feel cold and uncomfortable. What's with 'strip mall'? That's so American. Makes me angry that our local culture is being taken over by even more American guff. 'Multinationals' just reinforces my anger – they just come in and bully everyone because they can.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to fear of change the writer claims that Lygon Street is being 'transformed' into a bland mall. It 'had atmosphere and culture', implying that it no longer does. This claim positions the reader to regret the loss of 'Italian restaurants and intimate bookshops' and to yearn for the time when it was 'the home of good coffee'. The assertion that 'multinationals' are taking over to create a 'bland strip mall' plays on many people's dislike of big American corporations such as those specifically cited – Borders, Starbucks and the 7-11 chains. Readers are then persuaded to reject multinationals altogether because, firstly, they have 'taken over' the area, implying greed and insensitivity and, secondly, they have 'transformed' Lygon Street. This places the reader in an even more antagonistic position towards change because it implies that the old Lygon Street has vanished. By nostalgically naming it 'one of Melbourne's most treasured areas' the writer positions the reader to oppose the changes made by the multinationals.

Appeal to freedom

Appeals to freedom tap into people's deep desire for a sense of unrestricted possibilities. Everyone yearns for an ideal state of freedom. In democratic countries, where personal and political freedoms are highly valued, governments support individual human rights. People feel angry, indignant, cheated and protective of these rights, especially if they believe their freedom is threatened. This strong desire for freedom can leave people open to manipulation by those who aim to exploit it for their own gain.

Notes

Sounds like we are all living according to a set of rules that somebody else has made for us. 'Bans' are something that prevent us from doing certain things and being in certain places. But then again so are laws and they keep society together. Hang on; the difference is that bans are a form of punishment. Nobody likes bans. 'Submit meekly' to bans makes us sound kind of pathetic and powerless. I don't like that. 'Too often' – sounds as if this happens much more than it should. People who suggest bans are 'those who think they know what's best for us'. Who are these people? The writer doesn't say, but I don't like them. Who has the right to tell me what's best for me?

EXAMPLE

Too often we submit meekly to bans suggested by those who think they know what's best for us.
Herald Sun 28 February 2003

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to freedom the writer is alerting the reader to a loss of freedom to people who impose bans on them. The word 'bans' positions the reader to be cautious, as bans are restrictions or forms of punishment that bring about loss of freedom. The writer's reference to those imposing these bans as 'those who think they know what's best for us' provokes indignation in the reader; people do not like being told what to do, especially by others who claim to have more knowledge or to be more intelligent. The assertion that 'we' – an inclusive term suggesting we are all the same – 'too often...submit meekly' to bans has a sting, suggesting submissive compliance. This criticism positions the reader to see that this kind of ineffectual response allows individuals' freedom to be eroded. This in turn implies that people should be more proactive, stand up to these faceless people and reclaim their freedom.

Appeal to group loyalty

Group loyalty is an appeal to the need to stick together under any circumstances. It does not allow for personal differences or disagreements within a group. This appeal can be used to inspire people to take action or it can play on their guilt, making them feel obliged to join or support a cause because of their membership of a group.

Notes

Saying that Howard's comments were a 'disgrace' makes it sound as if he said something pretty offensive and mean. I would be pretty upset if somebody was 'questioning' my 'loyalty'. 'Half a million mums and dads' sounds like every single parent in Australia. I'm sure there are way more than half a million parents in Australia, but this still sounds like a lot of people. I'm inclined to side with half a million people, rather than Howard who is only one person. Plus, 'mums and dads' are just ordinary people looking after their families - what could Howard possibly have against them?

EXAMPLE

It is a disgrace that Mr Howard is questioning the loyalty of more than a half a million mums and dads who marched for peace.

Adapted from *The Age* 21 February 2003

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to group loyalty the writer positions the reader to support the 'half a million' people who marched for peace as loyal citizens and to reject Prime Minister Howard's questioning of their motives as disgraceful. The writer's view is that ordinary people - 'mums and dads' - can remain loyal to their country and still march for a good cause - peace. The emotive word 'disgrace' denounces Howard's response to the marchers against the war. This positions the reader to feel that Howard's response is shameful and unacceptable. This appeal to group loyalty works by persuading the reader that Howard's stance is unjustified and, by implication, the loyalty of over half a million ordinary people should not be in question.

Appeal to hip-pocket nerve

Appeals to the hip-pocket nerve persuade readers to feel concerned for their financial wellbeing, making them feel 'ripped off' or overcharged. This incites strong emotions such as indignation, anger and even outrage. Such appeals are often used in relation to public spending - for example, governments wasting taxes or politicians over-spending on their credit cards. Writers often use this appeal when higher charges are implemented, using phrases such as 'user pays', 'we must all share the burden', and so on. The introduction of tollways, beachfront parking fees and tax levies on airfares have all been targets of appeals to the hip-pocket nerve. Consumer issues such as increased bank charges and insurance premiums are further examples high on the agenda for this type of appeal.

EXAMPLE

If all pacifists and peace marchers realised how much they are going to have to start spending on petrol, then they would squeal the loudest to go to war with Saddam.

Adapted from *Herald Sun* 25 February 2003

Notes

Saying that the pacifists and peace marchers would 'squeal the loudest' makes them sound like pigs - that's so offensive! This suggests that the peace protesters haven't considered the economic aspect of the war - uses 'realised' as if to say 'they haven't realised'. 'If' suggests the protesters don't realise how much petrol will go up. The word 'they' sets the protesters apart. This suggests that if the protesters knew about the economic repercussions of not going to war, then they'd be arguing to go, not to stop it. How ridiculous - since when is petrol more important than human lives?

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to the hip-pocket nerve, the writer argues in favour of a war on Iraq for economic reasons because not going to war will mean that petrol prices will rise steeply. The reader is positioned to criticise and reject the pacifists and peace marchers. Firstly, they are ignorant that petrol prices will rise if war doesn't go ahead. Secondly, they will 'squeal the loudest', an emotive and insulting remark that makes them sound like pigs who make a lot of noise and are only concerned about themselves. A further implication is that pacifists and peace marchers will be partly responsible for us all incurring increased petrol costs, so we should reject their opposition to the war. In short, readers are positioned to think that the major issue is economic and that if we don't go to war the cost of petrol will rise and we'll all suffer.

Appeal to patriotism

Patriotism is a devotion to the homeland and a readiness to support or defend the country. Important symbols of patriotism are the national flag, national coat of arms, national anthem, colours (green and gold), national heroes such as the Anzacs, sporting heroes, flora (wattle) and fauna (kangaroo and koala). An appeal to patriotism exploits people's loyalty to their country by suggesting it is under some kind of attack. These appeals can arouse feelings of anger, defensiveness, even outrage (for example, over the burning of the national flag and resisting conscription). Writers often use these kinds of emotional responses to elicit support from the reader.

EXAMPLE

Our country was built on the kind of bravery and tirelessness that was recently demonstrated by our dedicated volunteer firefighters, ordinary men and women who risked their lives to save their fellow Aussies. The least the rest of us can do is to donate to the battlers who lost their homes and loved ones in the tragic fires.

Notes

Firefighters – brave, tireless and 'dedicated' but just 'ordinary' people as well – makes me feel almost guilty – I'm ordinary too, but haven't done anything like this! These guys 'risked their lives' to save other Australians. The idea that 'our country was built' by 'bravery' and 'tirelessness' is kind of cool – sounds heroic. It's so sad that my 'fellow Aussies' 'lost their homes and loved ones' – makes me feel that we should all be looking after one another. 'Battlers' is a bit old-fashioned, but still means decent people just doing their best to get by. Yeah, if the volunteer firefighters can risk their lives helping out 'fellow Aussies', then I agree with the writer that 'the least the rest of us can do' is donate money. After all, we're all Australians, too.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to patriotism the writer evokes the traditional image of Australians as struggling 'ordinary men and women' who help each other out. The writer positions the reader to feel sympathy for the victims of the bushfires by describing them as 'battlers who lost their homes and loved ones'. The word 'battlers' is particularly Australian and conjures up images of hard-working, honest people. The reader is positioned to admire the volunteer firefighters, given heroic status when described as brave, tireless, and 'dedicated'. These qualities and values are also described as the values 'our country was built on', appealing to readers' pride in their past. The writer draws a parallel between fire fighters who risked their lives and being a decent Aussie. This appeal to the Aussie spirit and its implied generosity is used to persuade readers to donate to those who lost their homes in bushfires. They are, after all, Aussie battlers who have had bad luck and deserve more than sympathy.

Appeal to self-interest

Self-interest refers to the way we put our own needs before the needs of others. Appeal to self-interest usually provoke an immediate strong emotional response such as indignation or outrage. Sometimes such appeals stir people to lobby for what they want to be a just resolution to an issue or a cause. Often these appeals are used in news articles related to issues such as health, education, civil liberties and financial wellbeing.

EXAMPLE

I don't take drugs. My family, neighbours and friends don't take drugs. So why is there a proposal for an injecting room on my doorstep? My family shouldn't have to put up with stupid and dangerous junkies in our community. Lock these criminals up and leave the rest of us in peace.

Notes

Calling drug addicts, 'stupid', 'dangerous', 'junkies' and 'criminals' is really harsh. Just because the writer doesn't have any 'family, neighbours and friends' who take drugs, they assume there's no need for an injecting room near them. The writer is pretty closed-minded. The writer is basically saying, 'I don't take drugs' and therefore want to be left 'in peace' from those 'criminals' who do.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to self-interest the writer is rejecting an injecting room nearby because he is not a drug user and it is not fair to introduce injecting rooms into his community. The reader is positioned to see drug users as extremely undesirable – 'stupid', 'dangerous', 'junkies' and 'criminals' – emotive words that link these people with crime, danger, lack of intelligence and dropping out. In fact, the writer later asserts that drug users should be locked up, reinforcing the claim that they are not acceptable in the local community. The writer also manipulates the reader to reject the proposal because it is unfair to their 'family, neighbours and friends' who do not take drugs, and therefore, shouldn't have to 'put up' with this. The writer, who only wants to be left in peace, then implies that the community's basic rights will be denied, making the reader feel the injustice of the situation. This grim picture of drug users in the community and its unfairness to ordinary individuals cleverly plays on the reader's own sense of self-interest by claiming that danger, disturbances and injustice will result if the proposal for injecting rooms is approved.

Appeal to tradition and custom

This is an appeal to retain traditions and customs, which at one level is a resistance to change. However, it is also an appeal to retain links with the past and to value history and heritage. Take, for example, the support of Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of State in Australia. Appeals to tradition and custom include the protection of rituals that are used to mark special occasions (a wedding) or have social significance (Anzac Day marches). Writers often use this appeal to persuade people that a failure to retain tradition or observe customs will result in the breakdown of social cohesion and sense of community or even undermine our national identity and weaken moral values.

EXAMPLE

I can't believe that the government is seriously considering a ban on Christmas carols in schools. Next they will want to ban Christmas trees, presents and Santa Claus.

Notes

'I can't believe' suggests the writer is really shocked that Christmas carols may be banned from schools. The writer is suggesting that Christmas carols are as much a part of Christmas as 'Christmas trees, presents and Santa Claus'. I guess Christmas wouldn't be the same if these things didn't exist. I don't think the writer is concerned about the religious element of Christmas carols – just seems to be worried that the ordinary celebrations of a traditional Christmas are under attack.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to tradition and custom the writer expresses opposition to the suggested banning of Christmas carol singing in schools. Open disbelief – 'I can't believe' that the government would do this – makes the reader agree that this is indeed incredible. The reader is positioned to share the writer's concern at something that has not yet happened. Firstly, the idea is presented as a significant possibility because of the assertion that 'the government is seriously considering' this. The writer then identifies three other aspects of Christmas that are likely to be banned next: 'Christmas trees, presents and Santa Claus'. The reader is manipulated to feel that these essentials of traditional Christmases are also under attack and to reject the idea as preposterous.

Appeal to value of technology

This appeal to the value of technology is powerful because it plays on a fear that failure to embrace new developments will result in lost efficiency, lack of progress, lack of competitive edge or a poor global image. This kind of appeal can make people who are reluctant to accept new technology feel backward, inferior and even ignorant. This, in turn, can pressure people to be swayed to accept new technologies.

Notes

This praises the Internet and email as a great method of communication, in fact, as the 'ultimate' form of communication – not only the best, but the best there will ever be. The writer likes email so much because it can communicate on such a grand scale – 'large', 'instantly', 'vast' and 'billions'. Talking about not 'a single tree being cut down' makes me think of how much paper is usually used by newspapers, magazines and letters. Email does save a lot of paper – makes heaps of sense to use it!

EXAMPLE

Email is the ultimate form of communication. Thanks to email large amounts of information can be instantly communicated over vast distances to billions of people without a single tree being cut down.

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this appeal to the value of technology the writer is praising email technology by saying it is 'the ultimate form of communication'. 'Ultimate' implies that there cannot be, and will not be, anything better. The writer supports this claim with words that evoke a sense of mighty proportions: the amount of information is described as 'large', the speed of communication as 'instant', the distance covered as 'vast', and the number of people it reaches as 'billions'. The effect of this is to establish the superiority of email in the reader's mind in these four key areas. This is capped with the writer's appeal to the environmental benefits of email, which can be achieved 'without a single tree being cut down'. This clearly implies the disadvantages of print communications with their expensive delivery processes, environmentally unfriendly chemical processes and paper wastage. In the absence of any disadvantages being cited for email, the reader is now positioned to agree that the technology of email surpasses all other forms of communication.

Emotive language

Emotive language is the deliberate use of strong words to play on readers' feelings. They evoke strong emotional responses in order to pressure, even force, readers to agree.

Some examples of very emotive words are:

- * disgusting
- * marvellous
- * massive
- * outstanding
- * tremendous
- * vicious
- * vile

A helpful strategy to understand the full impact of very strong words is to substitute other words for the strongly emotive words, then to look at how that changes the impact of the language. For example, 'Swearing is a *vile* habit' changes if we say, 'Swearing is a *bad* habit'. The former is clearly condemnatory while the latter is critical without expressing overtones of disgust.

EXAMPLE

It is absolutely disgusting and abhorrent that children are able to look up pornography on the Internet.

Notes

The writer is using some really intense words to describe their feelings. 'Disgusting' and 'abhorrent' are both words people use to describe things they really hate or are sickened by. Two words with the same meaning have much more impact than one. 'Absolutely' makes the other words even more powerful. This writer is really outraged at the whole porn on the Internet thing and wants everybody else to feel the same way as them.

Evidence

Evidence can be presented as information, facts or statements used to support a belief, opinion or point of view. Evidence positions the reader, adds weight to the writer's point of view and often seems objective and irrefutable. Check for omissions as sometimes only part of the picture is being presented in order to make a particular point more persuasive. The writer's own professional position is also often used as a device to lend credibility and relevance to their participation in the debate.

Evidence can come in many forms:

- ▶ Expert advice
- ▶ Expert opinion
- ▶ Facts
- ▶ Research
- ▶ Statistics

Notes

Wow, this Bell guy is a researcher, a doctor, and works for a University! – an expert – he must know what he is talking about, I guess. Deakin University is a pretty well-respected University – I don't think they'd come up with anything shonky. This sounds like a health issue – Bell's an expert doctor – I reckon what he says is probably right. But then, how do we really know?

SAMPLE ANSWER

The highly emotive words 'disgusting' and 'abhorrent' convey the writer's horror that pornography on the Internet is accessible to children. These words also capture the writer's aggressive and appalled tone that helps to position the reader to share the same feelings of outrage. The word 'absolutely' maximises the power of 'disgusting' and 'abhorrent' to show the writer's complete repugnance and hatred. This extremely emotive language allows no room for the possibility of any other opinion and can emotionally manipulate the reader to agree.

EXAMPLE

Researcher Dr Colin Bell, from Deakin University, called for widespread removal of junk food vending machines from schools and fitness venues.
Adapted from *Herald Sun* 27 February 2003

SAMPLE ANSWER

By describing Dr Colin Bell as a 'researcher', giving his full title and mentioning the fact that he works for a reputable University, the writer establishes that Bell is an expert in the health field. The reader is, therefore, positioned to agree with the idea of removing junk food vending machines from schools and fitness venues, since it is something that Colin Bell – a medical expert – has 'called for'. The writer is using the fact that Bell is opposed to junk food vending machines as evidence, in the form of an expert opinion, that such vending machines should be removed.

Generalisations

A generalisation is a sweeping statement that claims or asserts that something is true for most or all people because it is true in one or some cases. So we hear statements like 'The youth of today are irresponsible, selfish and lazy' or 'Cities are not as safe now as they used to be'. Both of these assume that 'All young people are...' or 'All cities everywhere are unsafe'. Generalisations can be very persuasive because they appeal to our general sense of what seems true and they also tap into social stereotypes and racial prejudices which are familiar. This familiarity can lull the reader into accepting the claim. The power of generalisations lies in their ability to appeal emotionally to untested opinions and group prejudices. All generalisations need to be closely analysed and questioned.

Notes

Wow, Schoolies week sounds like a war zone with Gold Coast residents versus teenagers. Sounds like the teenagers are winning because the Gold Coast 'streets are taken over' Surely, it can't be that bad. So, every teenager who goes to Schoolies is 'irresponsible' and does nothing but get drunk and have sex? Hmm, I'm sure some do, but all of them? Also claims that all Gold Coast residents feel the same way. Note 'our streets'. I wonder if all Gold Coast residents are really as concerned as the writer. 'Often aggressive' suggests that the teenagers are aggro more often than not – pretty different from saying they get aggressive 'sometimes' or 'occasionally'. I'm not convinced.

EXAMPLE

Each year Gold Coast residents are subjected to Schoolies week when our streets are taken over by irresponsible and often aggressive teenagers, who celebrate leaving school by drinking as much as possible and having as many sexual encounters as possible.

Adapted from *The Age* 26 February 2003

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer is using several generalisations to denigrate Schoolies week. Firstly, the writer claims that every teenager attending Schoolies week is 'irresponsible'. Secondly, the assertion that teenagers are 'often aggressive' suggests that aggressive behaviour is common. Thirdly, the next generalisation – that teenagers at Schoolies week celebrate leaving school by drinking and having sex 'as much as possible' – suggests that drinking and sex are the entire extent of their activities at Schoolies week. Then there is the generalisation on the impact of Schoolies on the Gold Coast. 'Gold Coast residents' insinuates that all residents in the whole area have to suffer this invasion, as does 'our streets are taken over'. This gives the impression that the residents have lost all ownership of their streets. The reader is positioned to reject teenagers as completely out of hand, and the residents as being 'subjected to' a terrible experience they have no control over, representing them as victims in their own city. Generalisations reinforce the magnitude of the problem for the Gold Coast victims of the Schoolies' invasion and position readers to believe that the whole experience is threatening because the teenagers are immoral and out of control.

Inclusive language

Inclusive language aims to involve the reader directly by assuming that everyone agrees or disagrees with the point being presented. For example: 'We all know that...' or 'We all feel that...'. This type of language engages the audience because of its friendly tone. Inclusive language is usually combined with appeals to community, family or patriotism to fuel the audience's feelings of social responsibility or common good. It directly involves us in the debate; we cannot sit back and be innocent bystanders when a writer uses inclusive language.

Notes

This writer repeatedly uses 'we', 'our' and 'us' – sounds as if they are talking on behalf of myself, themselves, and everybody else who lives in the same town as me. Suggests we all have the same feelings and ideas. Suggests also that we all have a common goal and a common sense of duty – makes the point important.

EXAMPLE

We should all do our bit to keep our town clean and litter free. It is up to each and every one of us to all do our bit and dispose of rubbish thoughtfully.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer uses inclusive language such as 'we', 'our' and 'us' to appeal to a sense of community. The writer is not simply presenting their own opinions or what they believe other people should do, but what they perceive to be a common goal and a shared sense of responsibility for the people living in the town. By repeatedly using the word 'our', the writer is positioning the reader to feel included in the sense of duty required of themselves and their fellow residents. The cliché 'each and every one of us' reinforces the need for solidarity amongst the townspeople in order to achieve the shared desire of having a clean and litter free town.

Metaphors

A metaphor is a comparison that describes one thing in terms of another. It is a figure of speech that goes further than suggesting one thing is *like* another, but actually implies that it is another thing. It aims to create an image in the reader's mind that helps to make the point being argued graphic, striking and more easily understood.

EXAMPLE

Without proper resources and funding, people suffering from serious mental illnesses are drowning in a sea of misery and neglect.

Notes

This sentence gives me a really depressing image of helpless people literally drowning in the ocean – pretty full-on way to say that mentally ill people need serious help. It makes me feel really sympathetic towards people with mental illnesses – ‘drowning in a sea of misery and neglect’ is a really powerful way of saying that these people are not only totally overwhelmed by their condition, but that nobody is doing anything to help them – that they are just being left for dead. It’s horrible and unfair. It makes me feel angry and that the government should be doing more to help them.

Overstatement/exaggeration/hyperbole

A writer uses overstatement and exaggeration to dramatically reinforce a point being made. The language used is very colourful, forceful and highly emotive. This can result in the case being stated too strongly so that the issue appears more important or more dramatic than it is; this may lead the reader to reject the viewpoint. Hyperbole (pronounced high-per-boll-lee) comes from the Greek, meaning ‘excess’. It is a figure of speech using extreme exaggeration to create a strong impression or feeling not intended to be taken literally. Sports writing often uses this device.

EXAMPLE

Every day millions of people are being completely brainwashed through the lies spread by the media.

Notes

This writer is arguing that the media can manipulate the way people think, but this is a bit extreme, isn't it? The words, ‘completely brainwashed’ and ‘lies’ grabbed my attention – pretty full-on accusations – makes the situation sound pretty drastic. Can it really be as bad as the writer suggests? I'm sure a lot of people do believe whatever the media tells them, but ‘millions’?

SAMPLE ANSWER

In order to position the reader to mistrust the media, the writer uses exaggeration to make their point very dramatically. That the media is spreading ‘lies’ and ‘completely brainwash[ing]’ people are extreme forms of sensationalist-style exaggeration. Both ‘lies’ and ‘brainwashed’ make the situation sound extremely even dire. This does grab the reader's attention though and provokes feelings of fear and outrage. By describing the brainwash[ing] as something that occurs ‘every day’ to ‘millions of people’, exaggeration is used to imply a vast magnitude of influence. Readers are being manipulated to believe such an exaggerated claim because it plays on their fears of the power of the media. Furthermore, this assertion is stated boldly in a very authoritative tone without any qualifications to undermine the reader's acceptance of the allegation.

Puns

A pun is a play on words that suggests double or multiple meanings of a key word or words. Puns are often used in headlines; they are clever and eye-catching and can often entice the reader to continue reading the article; they can also be found in the main body of the article. The following words and phrases have been used as puns to suggest a double or a multiple meaning about an issue. The pun is highlighted.

- ▶ Carlton never felt more like the **Blues**
- ▶ Tall Tales are **hit or myth**
- ▶ Waistline **deadline**
- ▶ TV **down the tube**
- ▶ **Rabble without a cause** (Reference to ‘teenage rebellion in the form of mass gatecrashing’.)

EXAMPLE

AFL **potters** with rules, **seeking Wizard result**.
The Age 21 February 2003

Notes

Hang on, at first glance I thought this was about Harry Potter, but it's about footy. That's pretty clever, using the word ‘potters’ when discussing the Wizard cup to create a pun. Describing the AFL as ‘pottering’ suggests they don't really know what they are doing and are careless. ‘Seeking Wizard result’ suggests they want something that's impossible.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The pun on the word ‘potters’ plays on the name Harry Potter, a child wizard in the Harry Potter novels, and the fact that the AFL competition is called the Wizard Cup. Using ‘potters’ to describe how the AFL is changing the rules of Australian Rules football implies that the AFL is damaging the game because they are incompetent and indecisive. The claim that they are ‘seeking Wizard result’ further suggests their inefficiency since it implies they are searching for an unrealistic outcome and will need magic to produce it.

Reason and logic

Reasoning is a powerful (and often neglected!) tool. A well-reasoned, logically sequenced argument often takes into account the opposing viewpoint to help establish the strength of one side. The position being argued is clearly stated in a main contention. The argument is then supported by points, each of which is explained and/or justified with evidence in various forms. Each point is clearly related to the main contention. When a writer explores a broad issue, both sides are often explored with a range of viewpoints. Sometimes readers are given substantial information with well-reasoned views and left to make up their own minds. Note that highly persuasive language can still be used to present well-reasoned views.

EXAMPLE

Simply being me, or you, or anyone else is not morally relevant. It is what we do that attracts moral judgement, not who we are. Accordingly, our actions towards our enemies are judged under the same absolute moral principles as their actions towards us.
The Age 20 March 2003

Notes

Wow – this is profound! The writer is straightforward and clear; despite the fact that discussions about morality can be really complex. Arguments are organised in a logical manner so that each point flows on naturally to the next. It's refreshing to read an argument that's worded so reasonably! I was getting used to only reading emotive language and simplistic points of view. This is very intelligent, so I'm inclined to agree.

SAMPLE ANSWER

This writer clearly states that moral judgements are based on actions, not on who we are. Clear language and careful reasoning are used to argue that our actions define our morality, including our actions towards our enemies. The writer avoids emotive language and uses an intelligent, reasoned, honest tone to present their viewpoint. The argument is developed in a logical and straightforward manner based on the opening statement. 'Who we are' is irrelevant to 'moral judgement' because we are judged by what we do. The linking word 'accordingly', meaning consequently, cues the reader into the logical relationship between the sentences and sets up the reader to accept the principle outlined in the last sentence. The argument has considerable strength because it relies on reason rather than opinion.

Repetition

The use of repeated words, phrases, sentence patterns and ideas gives emphasis and prominence to a point or idea. It is also an excellent strategy to help the reader remember the point.

EXAMPLE

There is not enough funding for education, not enough money spent on health and not enough done for the unemployed. It is time to tell this government that enough is enough.

Notes

Well, this writer likes the word 'enough' – uses it five times; three times with 'not'. They seem pretty upset about what the government is doing in regard to education, health and unemployment. The writer also uses the word 'enough' in the cliché, 'enough is enough', to make the point that this situation isn't what it should be and that we shouldn't have to put up with it. They want somebody to tell the government to lift their game!

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer repeats the word 'enough' to position the reader to agree that the government is not spending adequate funds in the areas of education, health and unemployment, aspects of society that the writer believes need more attention. Repeatedly saying 'not enough' persuades the reader to think that much more money should be allocated and more should be done. This positions the reader to view the government as neglectful and incompetent since there are several areas of need. For emphasis, the writer uses the word 'enough' in the cliché 'enough is enough' to persuade the reader to agree that there has been too much neglect by the government already and that it must stop now. The reader is positioned to feel that the situation is urgent, which could result in active support to pressure the government into changing its funding policies.

Rhetorical questions

A rhetorical question requires no answer – it is used purely for effect. It is intended to engage the reader in thought and reflection about the issue through the emphasis of a point. As a result, it can manipulate the reader in subtle ways. When writing about rhetorical questions, use phrases like: 'By directly questioning the audience, the writer aims to invite us into the debate so we cannot sit back as passive onlookers', then quote the question. You should also consider the tone and words of such questions and analyse them.

Notes

The writer presents this question to us in a way that suggests the answer to the question is an obvious 'no'. The expression 'time and time again' is a cliché used to suggest that the same thing always happens; in this case, the Minister has always lied and broken promises. I suppose the writer questions our trust and belief in the Minister to really make it clear that, considering his track record, we shouldn't trust or believe him. This question makes me feel more involved in the issue and that my opinion is important, even though the writer wants my opinion to be the same as theirs!

EXAMPLE

Time and time again the Minister has lied to us and broken his promises. Are we supposed to trust and believe him again?

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer uses a rhetorical question to persuade readers to agree with the point of view that the Minister cannot be trusted and will lie again. By using the cliché 'time and time again' to describe the frequency of the Minister's lying, the reader is positioned to see how very dubious the Minister's reputation is when it comes to keeping promises. The rhetorical question, 'Are we supposed to trust and believe him again?' sets the reader up to reply 'No', the only possible answer, given the context of the question. Thus, the writer uses this rhetorical question to position the reader to agree that it is obvious that the Minister will lie. The question engages the reader to not only consider, but to respond to the issue, because they feel involved, even though they are not really given any option but to answer the question in a specific way.

Tone

Tone reflects writers' attitudes or emotions towards their subject matter or audience. 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 as they can signal a new direction, reflecting a shift in attitude or feeling that affects the reader.

Words for describing tone include:

- accusing
- admonishing
- aggressive
- alarmist
- angry
- antagonistic
- arrogant
- assertive
- authoritative
- bemused
- bitter
- calm
- concerned
- condescending
- cynical
- disappointed
- dismissive
- guarded
- mocking
- optimistic
- outraged
- pleading
- reasonable
- respectful
- restrained
- sarcastic
- sympathetic

EXAMPLE

Saddam Hussein is cruel and merciless indeed – he challenged poor George Bush to a debate.

The Age 27 February 2003

Notes

This is pretty funny! It's making fun of Bush's intelligence by suggesting it's a 'cruel and merciless' thing to expect him to be able to debate. Many people have described Hussein as 'cruel and merciless', but for totally different reasons. They are powerful words, and at first it looks as though the writer is attacking Hussein. I don't think the writer seriously thinks that challenging somebody to a debate is 'cruel and merciless' – just using those words to make fun of Bush. The expression 'poor George Bush' might appear sympathetic if written elsewhere, but this writer is really amused at the idea of Bush having to debate with Hussein – very ironical, almost sarcastic.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The writer is using the common joke regarding George Bush's lack of intelligence to humorously comment on Saddam Hussein's offer to debate him. If read literally, the article would be a genuine attack on Hussein and a genuine expression of sympathy for Bush. However, the idea of a debate being 'cruel and merciless' is so ridiculous that the writer's tone is clearly sarcastic and ironical. This cues the reader into the fact that the writer means the opposite of this sentence's literal meaning. The reader is then positioned to mock Bush's intelligence and to recognise that the condescending tone of 'poor George Bush', expresses false sympathy and amusement towards him. The reader is placed to see the full implication – that George Bush lacks the intelligence to debate Hussein.

ANALYSE TAKE APART CRITICISE EXPLORE TEASE OUT CONSIDER SELECT COMMENT SUMMARISE SURVEY



ACTIVITY 6

Identifying persuasive techniques

Identify the persuasive language techniques in the following pieces of writing (answers on p.90). Write a short paragraph for each example listing the technique/s used and how they are used to position the reader to agree with what is being argued. Some of the examples may contain more than one persuasive technique, so be sure to identify them all.

T SUMMARISE SURVEY WRITE

1. These Rolling Stones have gathered no moss.

2. If Iraq has weapons of mass destruction then it would be devastating to create hostilities with them. If they do not have these weapons then there is no case to be made for attacking them, based on the argument that they are a potential threat to the rest of the world.

3. The wife of the murdered police officer has been left to look after 3 kids with no income. Meanwhile our taxes are paying for her husband's killer to watch DVDs, play computer games and complete a tertiary degree!

4. The fruit bats have taken over and destroyed our treasured botanical gardens.

5. With all our troops fighting overseas, there is nobody left to defend Australia.

6. At the peace demonstration I marched with a decorated Anzac veteran, a middle-aged businesswoman, two teenage boys and a young couple pushing a pram. Despite our differences we were all united in our desire for peace.

7. While other countries are developing solar power technology, Australia is being left behind in the dark ages.

8. Soccer fans are nothing but violent hooligans who are more interested in fighting with each other than actually watching the game.

9. In order for mothers to establish the crucial bond with their child, paid maternity leave must be increased.

10. Due to the current threat of terrorism we must allow police the power to search anybody whom they suspect of carrying a weapon.

11. If the Classification Board continues to ban controversial films, then we are not going to be able to see many of the critically acclaimed films that are enjoyed by open-minded audiences in the rest of the world.

THINK READ ANALYSE TAKE APART CRITICISE

12. Australia is Yanked into war.

13. Why should taxpayers have to pay for drug rehab programs? Perhaps if the government addressed issues such as unemployment, mental illness and poverty, then we wouldn't have a drug problem at all.

14. The crowd was restless as the speaker lumbered up to the microphone.

15. I don't like this government either but I am disgusted that some people are burning our flag in protest. The Australian flag represents our country and its people, and has remained constant while many governments have come and gone.

16. Iraqi civilians and soldiers on both sides are losing their lives. Yet we are told that this war will bring petrol prices down. Is this supposed to make us feel better?

17. Without the use of stem-cell research, we do not have a hope of scientifically contributing to the international quest to find a cure for cancer.

THINK READ ANALYSE TAKE APART CRITICISE

18. Hip, hip hooray for Federation Square. How lovely it is to be able to gather with my fellow Melburnians at this monument to art and culture and passion and diversity.

19. When I went to school learning how to write was an essential component of education. Much attention was paid to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. However thanks to computer spell checks and mobile phone text messages, students' ability to spell and write is being compromised.

20. Rev-heads run riot at the racetrack.

21. When shopping we all should take extra care to buy Australian made products. Australian made products equals Australian jobs.

22. The Immigration Minister's ignorant, bigoted, mean-spirited attitude towards refugees works against our international identity as an intelligent and compassionate nation.

23. It's all very well to say that cuts to health care decrease our state deficit, but what happens when we need a hospital bed and there isn't one available?

24. We will take to the streets, we will storm the radio stations and we will bombard the television networks until we are heard and we will not give up.

25. Research by leading criminologists, psychiatrists, and media analysts has found no link between depictions of violence in the cinema and real life violence.

26. As women we need to continue to speak out against sexual harassment. We deserve to be treated with respect, as do our daughters and grand-daughters.

27. Many young people are repeatedly running into the brick wall of unemployment.

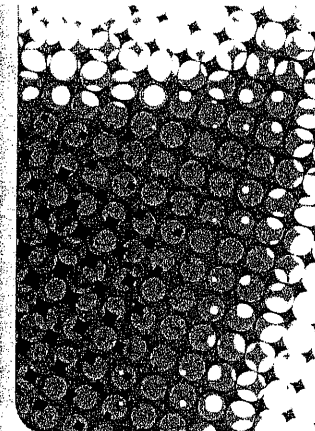
28. We all must take a long hard look at ourselves and ask if we really want to be considered 'Australian' any more.

29. To all members of the stolen generation my heart goes out to you. Although I will never understand the pain and suffering you have been through, I am truly sorry for the pain that my ancestors have inflicted on you and your families.

ANSWERS

- 1. Climax
- 2. Reason and logic
- 3. Appeal to a sense of justice
- 4. Overstatement/ exaggeration
- 5. Appeal to a sense of security
- 6. Appeal to a sense of modern and up-to-date
- 7. Connotation
- 8. Appeal to family values
- 9. Appeal to fear
- 10. Appeal to freedom
- 11. Appeal to group loyalty
- 12. Metaphors
- 13. Inclusive language
- 14. Tone
- 15. Appeal to tradition and custom
- 16. Rhetorical questions
- 17. Appeal to value of technology
- 18. Emotive language
- 19. Appeal to fear of change
- 20. Alliteration
- 21. Appeal to patriotism
- 22. Anecdote
- 23. Appeal to self-interest
- 24. Repetition
- 25. Evidence
- 26. Appeal to fear
- 27. Appeal to freedom
- 28. Inclusive language
- 29. Connotation

RISE SURVEY WRITE



WRITING YOUR LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

In this chapter

- Writing language analysis
- Model for writing language analysis
- Language analysis of a cartoon
- Guidelines for writing on 3 media texts
- Vocabulary for language analysis
- Activities for practice SACs Years 11 and 12

Writing language analysis

WRITING LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

When writing language analysis you need to show clearly how the reader is **positioned**, **persuaded** or **manipulated** to agree with the writer's point of view.

Your focus for this task is on how *language* is used to achieve this.

The main steps to writing language analysis are:

- ▶ reading and noting key features
- ▶ selecting and organising your material
- ▶ structuring your answer
- ▶ understanding what goes in an introduction, body and conclusion of an analysis piece, then writing it
- ▶ writing – using well chosen vocabulary that enables you to describe how language is used. (See pp.104–105.)



STEP 1 Reading your media text

Use the three key questions – What? How? Why? – with the guidelines in the table below to assist you when reading your analysis piece.

Ask key questions using What? How? Why?	What to do when reading
What is the writer saying?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the main contention. This is what the writer is persuading the reader to agree with. Identify main points that are used to support the writer's main contention.
How is the writer saying it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify persuasive language and persuasive techniques. How do they position/persuade/manipulate the reader to agree? (See Persuasive language and techniques, pp.66–88.)
Why is it persuasive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why are the techniques persuasive? Focus on each technique (or selected examples). Show how the language used persuades the reader.

STEP 2 Preparing to write

Next, be really clear about what you are being persuaded to agree with and the main ways in which the writer is manipulating or positioning you to agree. Order your original notes as follows:

- Re-state the main contention in your own words.
- Summarise the main points or arguments used to support the contention.
- Underline/highlight words and phrases that are intended to make an impact on the reader.
- Ask yourself how these words and phrases make the reader feel and/or react.
- Label the persuasive techniques.
- Decide how the technique supports or enhances the writer's point of view.
- Find good, brief quotes to illustrate the techniques you have identified.

STEP 3 Writing your language analysis

Writing an analysis piece consists of three main sections:

- introduction
- body
- conclusion.

Model for writing language analysis

Closely read the letter to the editor – 'Nothing more than a few silly names' – and the annotations below.

Background for the following letter to the editor

The issue which prompted this letter arose from the use of racist language at a basketball match. Racist jeers from a group of Year 11 inner city students disrupted a special match, threatening to undermine a new sports program that involves inner city students in community sport. The butt of these jeers was 19-year-old Aboriginal player, Noah Gulpili, who left the court; players and many spectators were very upset. Teachers from the school removed all of their students from the stadium.

Nothing more than a few silly names

¹What's all the fuss about? ²It's a joke for all these so-called tough men, who pit themselves against each other physically and fight for domination on a basketball court, ³to go off sulking for being called "a few silly names."

⁴It's all part and parcel of sport; ⁵getting to opponents and achieving an upset any way you can. ⁶These guys should be used to being called much worse, and anyone with half a brain and a bit of experience in competition knows that ⁷the words are irrelevant. They don't mean anything. These Wombats need to get a grip and ⁸stop trying to whip up sympathy. They played badly and should cop it, not make excuses. Are they ⁹men or wimpy wombats?

Ted Blake

The Zeus 26 April 2003

Annotations

1. Rhetorical question – dismissive tone
2. Provocative – ironical
3. Humiliates players' responses and denies issue is serious
4. Aims to reduce racist insults to non-issue
5. Generalisation that begins to indicate writer's viewpoint
6. Now declares real issue – winning by upsetting opponents
7. No rules – reinforces idea that issue of racism is trivial
8. Assertive, sarcastic, belittling tone – intensifies dismissive approach
9. Real issue declared
10. Now accuses players of ulterior motive
11. Appeal to macho strength to humiliate any player who thinks racial jibes are an issue

▶ See how to write an introduction, body and conclusion, starting below to page 95. Each part has a paragraph from the student's sample essay based on this letter to the editor.

▶ Finally read the completed student answer (see pp.95–6) as an example to guide you. Make sure you read the Assessor comments, too!

Introduction: What is the writer saying?

- Re-state the writer's **contention** in your own words.
- Use phrases such as: 'The writer **contends** that', 'The writer argues that', 'The writer **asserts** that', 'The writer **is adamant** that'.
- Include the **writer and article details**: surname of writer, source, page number, kind of text.
- Identify the **tone** of the language.

Sample introduction

In the letter to the editor, 'No more than a few silly names', that appeared in *The Zeus* on 26 April 2003, Ted Blake declares his disgust with the basketball team the Wombats and their inability to 'cop' a few harsh words. His aggressive tone serves to assert the notion that the players deserve no sympathy at all.

The body: How is the writer saying it?

- ▶ The body of your analysis consists of a series of paragraphs in which you analyse the major points and persuasive techniques.
- ▶ The three key questions used at the beginning of this chapter are used again to structure the body paragraphs: What? How? Why?

Writing a paragraph

In each paragraph, follow these 3 steps:

- What is the writer saying?**
In your own words, describe/explain the main point being advanced.
- How is the writer saying it?**
Identify and explain the persuasive techniques being used to present this point. Incorporate very brief relevant quotes as you write.
- Why are the language and techniques persuasive?**
Analyse how selected techniques affect the reader. Ask yourself questions such as: How does it sound? Which words carry specific connotations? Are there any strongly emotive words? How is the language used to persuade readers to agree?

Sample body paragraph

Blake begins with the rhetorical question, 'What's all the fuss about?' to immediately create a sense of the triviality of the uproar. His macho attitude is evident in his disregard for 'these so-called tough men' who 'go off sulking for being called a few silly names'. He intentionally uses insulting phrases to persuade the reader to agree that the whole issue is petty.

Conclusion: Why is it persuasive?

- Sum up the overall effectiveness of the article in persuading readers.
- Mention which persuasive techniques work best and why.

Sample conclusion

In this letter to the editor, Blake ends much as he began with a rhetorical question, 'Are they men or wimpy wombats?' reinstalling a sense of the triviality of the issue and restating his contention that the players do not deserve sympathy. His consistently dismissive, often sarcastic and intolerant tone, aims to pressure the reader to agree. He appeals to his readers' understanding of a competitive ethic that justifies any means to win. To do this, he tries to coerce their agreement that physical strength is the key issue and that racist insults and jeers are merely 'silly words', but this ignores the deeper issues of prejudice signified by racist language. He relies on people's agreement and implicitly appeals to readers' own macho prejudices by belittling the players who stopped playing in protest. Such heavy-handed tactics are unlikely to convince a reader sympathetic to the issue that this is a matter of no consequence.

SAMPLE STUDENT ANALYSIS - LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Introduction - states contention of letter, identifies source and date, establishes tone

In the letter to the editor, 'No more than a few silly names', that appeared in *The Zeus* on 26 April 2003, Ted Blake declares his disgust with the basketball team the Wombats and their inability to 'cop' a few harsh words. His aggressive tone serves to assert the notion that the players deserve no sympathy at all.

Shows how rhetorical question and emotive language of insulting terms persuade

Blake begins with the rhetorical question, 'What's all the fuss about?' to immediately create a sense of the triviality of the uproar. His macho attitude is evident in his disregard for 'these so-called tough men' who 'go off sulking for being called a few silly names'. He intentionally uses insulting phrases to persuade the reader to agree that the whole issue is petty.

Shows further use of derisive language and identifies colloquial language

Throughout the entire article, Blake uses derisive comments such as, 'It's a joke...' and 'wimpy' to denigrate the players as 'sissy' in order to invoke similar sentiments of disdain in the reader for their poor performance. He even claims that the players' sensitivity in this issue is a sign of their bad sportsmanship. He targets such sentiments in the reader to gain support for his argument, shrewdly knowing that his appeal to macho strength will sway many readers. The colloquial language like 'get a grip' and 'cop it' ensure he has identified with readers on this level.

Understands how writer sets out to gain reader's support; 'adamant' well chosen

In mocking the players and delegitimising their cause by claiming they are bad sports rather than victims of racial taunts, he minimises the sympathy that the reader may feel for them. He is adamant that they are overreacting, saying, 'These guys should be used to being called much worse'.

Again, accurately identifies how Blake's tactics position reader to agree with him

Blake is dismissive and indignant of the players saying that they were not unfairly treated, rather 'getting to opponents and achieving an upset any way you can' is all in the spirit of the game. Such comments are intended to make the reader agree that no injustice has been done. He uses a patronising tone coupled with matter of fact, aggressive statements like 'It's all part and parcel of sport...' to convince the reader of his argument and make it seem as though he has some authority and right to his stance.

Good commentary on the attack on 'tough men'; powerful tone and use of repetition

Good conclusion – sums up aggressive approach that depends on manipulating reader emotionally; use of clever appeals to latent racial prejudice.

Blake outlines the contradictory nature of their behaviour, 'tough men...go off sulking', to show the unsubstantiated quality in their claim and again convince the reader that the issue is a 'joke'. He also uses repetition of similar ideas, and phrases such as 'anyone with half brain' to try to prove that his argument is the only logical one and win the reader over. His condescending tone has an intimidating effect on the reader, forcing some sort of agreement.

In this letter to the editor, Blake ends much as he began with rhetorical question, 'Are they men or wimpy wombats?' reinstalling sense of the triviality of the issue and restating his contention that the players do not deserve sympathy. His consistently dismissive, often sarcastic and intolerant tone, aims to pressure the reader to agree. It appeals to his readers' understanding of a competitive ethic that justifies any means to win. To do this, he tries to coerce their agreement that physical strength is the key issue and that racist insults and jokes are merely 'silly words', but this ignores the deeper issues of prejudice conveyed in the racist language. He relies on people's agreement and implicitly appeals to readers' own macho prejudices by belittling the players who stopped playing in protest. Such heavy-handed tactics are unlikely to convince a reader sympathetic to the issue.

Language analysis of a cartoon

When analysing a cartoon, you need to indicate the ways in which cartoons attempt to persuade readers. Just as writers can use exaggeration, tone, emotive language and many other persuasive techniques available to them to manipulate and position reader so, too, cartoonists can use many highly persuasive techniques. Look for some of the common tactics:

- ▶ Exaggerating facial features on central figures – huge nose, big ears, squinty eyes, large jutting chin, etc.
- ▶ Representing members of a group as being similar – to make a point about, say, their powerlessness, their loss of identity, their mindlessness, and so on
- ▶ Using animals (or film figures) to represent humans, for example, as sheep, rats, cats, etc. in order to critique behaviour or an individual's point of view
- ▶ Illustrating a concept or point of view to literally 'show' an idea – for example, in Mark Knight's cartoon (opposite) the clear statement is: 'Boat people doomed to die – either on overloaded boats or by refusing to board such boats'
- ▶ Using metaphorical references, that is, drawing a comparison between what is actually shown and some other well known story, event or image – for example, once again in the Mark Knight cartoon (opposite) – the image of Noah's Ark is invoked
- ▶ Using sharp, witty statements and/or dialogue to encapsulate main idea or point of view

THE AGE

¹ Baby should be no stranger in the House

²When a nursing infant is ejected from Parliament, it is time to change the rules.

The day before new Labor MP Kirstie Marshall ³made history by breastfeeding 11-day-old baby Charlotte during proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, ⁴her colleague Judy Maddigan was elected Speaker. Ms Maddigan became the first woman in 150 years to take on the role in the Victorian Parliament, while in the upper house Monica Gould also made the record books by becoming the first woman President of the Legislative Council. Ms Maddigan predicted the appointments would mean "significant changes in how the Parliament operates and how the parliamentary staff operate as well".

She did not foresee, however, that the need for the change would become apparent the very next day. This was when Ms Marshall, faced with the ⁵dual demands of a hungry infant and the bells signalling the beginning of a parliamentary session, acted on instinct and attempted to do two jobs at once. In her own words: "I whacked her on the breast and walked in." Mother and child were ejected by the serjeant-at-arms because of a parliamentary rule that does not recognise ⁶"strangers", or unelected members, in the house. Ms Marshall said she was not trying to make a statement, and that she did not expect the parliamentary rules to be bent for her. ⁷But by acting unselfconsciously she did make a statement, and ⁸the rules should be bent for her. An inter-parliamentary

committee now has the task of reconsidering them. Ms Maddigan, who has spoken in favour of a parliamentary crèche and of family-friendly sitting hours, said she had no personal objection to breastfeeding in Parliament, but added, "I will be guided by what the parties and what the members want to do".

⁹We hope common sense prevails and that Charlotte is allowed to make periodic appearances in the assembly if her feeding schedule demands it. The sight of a nursing mother is certainly more edifying than some of the things witnessed in Parliament that have been known to make onlookers ¹⁰despair at the spectacle of democracy in action.

⁵By choosing to juggle motherhood and parliamentary duties, Ms Marshall, who hitherto has been ¹¹better known as a champion aerial skier, has taken a difficult path. ¹²She should be congratulated for making the attempt, and for giving Parliament the challenge of ¹³adapting to the demands she has made on it. If women choose to ⁵combine a political career and motherhood they should be allowed to make whatever ¹³transformations are necessary in their immediate working environment. By doing so they can provide an example of how best to ⁵combine conflicting responsibilities. It is hoped that Charlotte will not be the last baby to appear in the house.

The Age 28 February 2003 p.14

Annotations

1. *Headline clearly states opinion of editorial*
2. *First paragraph restates opinion and context of issue*
3. *Highlights a first for a politician and links with what follows*
4. *Descriptive background information suggests 'bigger picture' of concerns for women in Parliament and the need for changes*
5. *Repetitive appeals to the pressures of being a working mother – sympathetic tone*
6. *Quotation marks give the word 'strangers' an ironical tone*
7. *Empowering and non-judgemental tone*
8. *Restates position of editorial, already stated in headline and first paragraph*
9. *Direct appeal to commonsense*
10. *Criticises unjustified outcry over baby by using ironical reference to other issues that reduce supporters of democracy to 'despair', an emotive word evoking hopelessness*
11. *Irony that motherhood should prove difficult for 'a champion aerial skier'*
12. *Extremely warm and supportive tone*
13. *Appeals to the need for progress*

Media texts for sample student answer

Read the following articles and their annotations to identify the main strengths of the sample answer that follows.

Stand up to them, Kirstie

There can be no clearer proof of the barriers against women participating in politics than the expulsion of Kirstie Marshall from the Victorian Parliament. Her offence? To breastfeed an 11-day-old baby in the House.

The argument that newborn Charlotte is a "stranger in the house" is specious.

Ms Marshall's electors put their faith in her to represent them knowing she was pregnant, and she should not be forced to abandon her responsibilities to either electorate or baby by a pack of blokes who can't stand to see bosoms doing what they were made for.

You stand up to them, Kirstie. Don't let them make you feed your baby in a discreet side room. After all, there are so many boobs in Parliament that yours should hardly be noticed.

Naomi Parry, Katoomba, NSW

The Age 28 February 2003

Family friendly? Maybe not

Kirstie Marshall was elected when she was pregnant.

Her constituency understood that part of her being a new MP was that she was also a new mother.

People want politicians who understand everyday life rather than clones who compromise all, including their personal and family development, for political expediency.

And people understand that politicians with balanced lives are more likely to have a balanced view on real issues.

Like Kirstie Marshall, I had a baby, James, soon after entering Parliament in 1995.

As much of my time is spent in Canberra the Remuneration Tribunal adjusted, but not extended, entitlements so he could travel with me.

I have always arranged for a carer at my own expense when Parliament is sitting. Often this was my mother.

But the very long hours were bound to sometimes clash with feeding, nurturing and loving requirements of a new baby.

During lower-key caucus meetings I often tried to spend time with James.

Indeed, there is an unsoftened, unanimous resolution of caucus that allows him to be at such meetings until he's 18.

When senators were called to vote in the chamber, in the absence of anyone else appropriate, I was encouraged to leave James with the parliament attendants.

But the sight of an attendant trying to run from one of the chamber to the other, juggling James as he sought to lock the doors on time was concerning.

Barring me and James from the chamber was tantamount to threatening assault and kidnapping, according to the then-Whip, Senator Gerry Jones, so action was taken.

Soon after, Senate President Brian Behan applied commonsense and it was agreed that James was hardly going to interrupt debate or count as a vote.

Indeed, a baby could be expected to be much quieter and better behaved than many politicians.

While Senator Amanda Vanstone suggested that the precedent had been set for her to bring her beloved pooches into the chamber, my fellow parliamentarians have now turned a blind eye to several babies in Parliament.

Much has been made of the need to modernise parliaments to make them more relevant.

Parliaments around Australia have abandoned wigs and robes. Many politicians have removed the word "honourable" from their title and the Victorian Government will soon introduce family-friendly sitting hours.

But a hungry 11-day-old baby still manages to cause a level of sensation that rates on the front page of our newspapers.

It's doubtful when Kirstie Marshall took her baby into the chamber she was intend-

ing to breastfeed on national and international TV.

It is likely she was responding to the demands of a very new baby who didn't understand that the bells ringing for Question Time signalled an inopportune moment to decide she was hungry.

Incredibly, when Kirstie Marshall was removed from the chamber it was not because she was breastfeeding but because her baby girl was a stranger in the House.

We still have a way to go in achieving family-friendly parliaments - underlined by the angst that James, now a young boy, caused by riding his trike around Parliament.

But federally we are getting there. I'm encouraged that Victorian Speaker Judy Maddigan has suggested the rules are under review and that we may see some real modernisation. Indeed, it's essential if the Parliament is to uphold its own anti-discrimination legislation.

Federal Minister for Employment Tony Abbot has said politicians pontificating on work and family are hypocrites because you can't be a federal politician and adequately participate in family life. It's essential for this to change.

JACINTA COLLINS is an ALP Senator for Victoria

Herald Sun
3 March 2003

STUDENT SAMPLE ANSWER

Sets context and states issue succinctly.

Other important perspectives neatly presented.

'Unintentional' economically pinpoints part of Marshall's dilemma.

Articles introduced intelligently through good link to issue via the positive stance each takes.

Shows good understanding of how Collins keeps the reader on side while acknowledging Parliament's attempts to help breastfeeding/working mothers.

Effects of writer's personal approach on reader well presented.

Effects of use of authority figure well understood and explained.

February 26, 2003, saw newly elected Labour MP Kirstie Marshall ejected from the Victorian Legislative Assembly while breastfeeding her then 11-day-old daughter Charlotte. The eviction of mother and child sparked immediate debate over the rights of breastfeeding mothers, despite the sergeant-in-arms' request being based on a ruling that 'strangers' are not permitted in the house. Extensive media coverage has highlighted issues associated with family-friendly workplaces, inequity and the highly relevant issue of mothers' choices. For while much coverage has openly expressed an opposing view toward Marshall's unintentional political stand, many have strongly supported her actions, questioning the level of tolerance Parliament displayed. This stance is successfully represented in the feature article, 'Family friendly? Maybe not', an editorial entitled, 'Baby should be no stranger in the House' and the letter to the editor, 'Stand up to them, Kirstie'. Despite all being in support of Marshall, the pieces represent a diversity of tone and approaches.

Jacinta Collins heavily relates to Marshall in her article titled 'Family friendly? Maybe not'. As the headline suggests, Collins understands that there is still 'a way to go in achieving family friendly parliaments.' The question she poses to the reader is self-answered with 'Maybe not', a highly suggestive yet indecisive response. Such indirect language sets Collins' tone as initially firm yet avoids reader resistance by acknowledging the steps taken in Parliament's attempt to modernise its tolerance levels. Collins states, 'the Remuneration Tribunal adjusted, but not extended entitlements.' This acknowledging, highly personal style permits readers to believe the journalist is considerate and is not being over-critical or heavily negative in her views. As a result, her 'suggestions' and criticisms are likely to be taken as constructive rather than interpreted as direct, unsupported complaints.

Furthermore, Collins' use of anecdote communicates a sense of personal compassion that relates the journalist to Kirstie Marshall. She explains to the reader the troubles endured as a politician and working mother, stating, 'Like Kirstie Marshall, I had a baby...the very long hours were bound to sometimes clash with feeding.' The intended effect of expressing such highly personal details is to develop a receptive audience and, in this case, evoke a sense of sympathy. Collins follows up in providing a highly clarified opinion supported by expert advice. She states, 'Much has been made of the need to...modernise parliaments to make them more relevant.' This somewhat generalised remark impresses on the reader a widespread and common view that, therefore, indicates truth. Maddigan's suggestion, 'the rules are under review' provides an expert's advice. Here authority is utilised and appears, to the reader, as if her statement holds great accuracy.

continued next page ▶▶

Go to p.30 for the third article, 'Baby should not be a stranger in the House', Editorial, The Age 28 February 2003.

Opening word – effective link.

Immediately indicates difference of this writer's attitude, the broader approach and strong support for working mothers.

Tone and style identified and effects stated.

Can see and spell out implications for Marshall and Parliament of increased number of female members. How expert's views influence reader.

Impact of emotive language clearly identified.

Article's praise for Marshall understood and demonstrated.

Quickly identifies common links with other articles, some differences and the writer's strong feminist stance and directness.

Cleverly links Australian style with attitudes that readers will admire.

Writer's use of ridicule and effects very well articulated

Similarly, The Age's editorial 'Baby should be no stranger in the House', is also in support of Marshall, yet holds a stronger attitude. The editorial touches on the wider issue in contending that mothers 'should be allowed to make whatever transformations are necessary' in their working environment to accommodate motherhood duties. The title 'Baby should be no stranger in the House' intimates true didactic qualities which are carried throughout the piece. A confident tone that radiates an assertive formality can be sampled in such statements as, 'the rules should be bent.' This didactic style cunningly aligns the reader with the journalist's stance, virtually gaining their support in giving them little choice but to agree, while a formal, convinced tone displays a sense of certainty and provides the journalist with an informed authority.

The opening paragraph of the editorial is complimentary to the Kirstie Marshall cause in that it informs the reader of the growing number of women in Parliament. Through citing the case of Judy Maddigan as 'the first woman in 150 years' to be elected speaker, the reader becomes aware that as ritualistic tradition is broken, a need for renewing rules and modernising standards becomes apparent. This is followed by the esteemed Judy Maddigan providing the statement, 'significant changes in how Parliament operates' will be under review. This expert advice is likely to be highly regarded by the reader as Maddigan's position of authority supplies credibility to her words. Through complimenting Marshall's actions, the editorial continues by describing her 'unselfconscious' behaviour as 'acting on instinct' and relays that she was 'faced with dual demands'. Such emotive language provokes in the reader a sense of sympathy toward Marshall, as it is highly suggestive that her breastfeeding was out of necessity. In concluding, Marshall is idolised 'as a champion aerial skier' who 'should be congratulated'. Her portrayal is that of a woman who can do very little wrong, whose heroic demeanour does not deserve an unjust blemish.

Letter to the editor, 'Stand up to them, Kirstie' also provides strong support for Marshall, though through a different style. In colloquial language, Parry expresses an aggressive tone that captures true Australian outrage. Confident assertions such as, 'there can be no clearer proof of the barriers against women participating in politics than the expulsion of Kirstie Marshall', reinforce the writer's direct, feminist approach. The reader is highly aware of such undying confidence through direct statements. Easily related to, this informal, Australian slang style of writing portrays a genuine honesty. As the Australian public, readers will associate with this up-front, 'matter-of-fact' style.

Marshall's ejection from Parliament is ridiculed by Parry, making the ruling seem outrageous. Emphasising that 'newborn Charlotte' was 'a stranger in the house' seems ludicrous to the reader who is likely to be swayed by this unfit, cunning connection. In asking Marshall's offence, Parry self-responds in writing 'breastfeeding an 11-day-old baby'. Parry then continues by

Good close analysis

Effect of pun on reader clearly analysed

Conclusion sums up differences in tones with good reference to content without summarising

Current situation for Kirstie successfully rounds off analysis

belittling other members of Parliament, describing them as 'a pack of blokes who can't stand to see bosoms doing what they were made for'. Through mudslinging to counter any possible opposition, the writer takes a feminist approach, providing herself with a sense of superiority. In the following lines, Parry separates Marshall from 'them' and appears to address 'Kirstie' directly. In doing this, the writer clearly and confidently defends Marshall by redirecting personal insults to support her. Concluding the letter with a touch of humour, Parry utilises a pun. In stating, 'there are so many boobs in Parliament that yours should hardly be noticed', the reader is left engaged, entertained and with a final thought in support of Parry's argument.

While all three pieces are in support of Kirstie Marshall breastfeeding in Parliament, they differ in tone. Within the feature article, 'Family friendly? Maybe not', Jacinta Collins takes on a personal approach. She expresses the need for modernising Parliament, yet acknowledges that efforts were made to facilitate her son while she fulfilled her Parliamentary duties. 'Baby should be no stranger in the House', on the other hand, is an editorial that expresses a more assertive, highly confident and controlled tone in favour of Marshall and the rights of breastfeeding mothers. Likewise, 'Stand up to them, Kirstie' also has a convinced and direct approach, yet portrays its arguments through a 'matter-of-fact', colloquially expressed style. Since Kirstie Marshall's ejection from Parliament, she has learnt that a room was set aside for her to feed her baby. Alongside this, there is currently a review being undertaken associated with the rights and rulings of breastfeeding mothers in Parliament. Meanwhile, Marshall's mother, Anne Marshall, is babysitting her 11-day-old grand daughter at State Parliament while Kirstie fulfils Parliamentary duties.

Vocabulary for language analysis

Useful vocabulary and sentence structures

It is helpful to have a range of vocabulary to frame your sentences. Rather than stating, 'The writer says X...', select vocabulary from the following lists to make your writing more precise. In all of the examples, the model sentence leaves a gap which can be filled with relevant words from the list below. For example, when introducing a main contention, phrase your sentence like this:

'The writer advocates that governments should not provide free medical services to people who engage in risky behaviours like smoking and drug abuse.'

Writers present certain claims by _____ a particular idea

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> accentuating | <input type="radio"/> condoning | <input type="radio"/> proposing |
| <input type="radio"/> advancing | <input type="radio"/> contending | <input type="radio"/> repeating |
| <input type="radio"/> advocating | <input type="radio"/> magnifying | <input type="radio"/> supporting |
| <input type="radio"/> asserting | <input type="radio"/> promoting | <input type="radio"/> underpinning |

Writers argue against people's opinions by _____ their ideas, their relevance to the debate or them personally

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> attacking | <input type="radio"/> downplaying the significance of | <input type="radio"/> questioning the professionalism of |
| <input type="radio"/> casting doubt on | <input type="radio"/> exposing the inadequacies of | <input type="radio"/> refuting |
| <input type="radio"/> criticising | <input type="radio"/> mocking | <input type="radio"/> revealing the flaws in |
| <input type="radio"/> denigrating | <input type="radio"/> provoking opposition to | <input type="radio"/> undermining |
| <input type="radio"/> dismissing | | <input type="radio"/> vigorously condemning |
| <input type="radio"/> disputing the validity of | | |

In an attempt to persuade or manipulate the reader, writers may also _____

Example: In an attempt to persuade the reader, writers may also appeal to our sense of decency (or patriotism and so on).

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> appeal to our sense of... | <input type="radio"/> evoke our sense of outrage | <input type="radio"/> quash speculation |
| <input type="radio"/> directly propose a solution | <input type="radio"/> exaggerate | <input type="radio"/> seek our unflagging support |
| <input type="radio"/> elicit our sympathy | <input type="radio"/> generate our collective support | <input type="radio"/> urge readers to... |
| <input type="radio"/> establish a clear agenda for change | <input type="radio"/> include us in the debate | <input type="radio"/> use shock tactics |

When writing, use a range of verbs to pinpoint ways writers persuade. Consider:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> accentuate | <input type="radio"/> evoke | <input type="radio"/> signal |
| <input type="radio"/> allude to | <input type="radio"/> exemplify | <input type="radio"/> signify |
| <input type="radio"/> demonstrate | <input type="radio"/> foster a sense of | <input type="radio"/> suggest |
| <input type="radio"/> downplay | <input type="radio"/> indicate | <input type="radio"/> typify |
| <input type="radio"/> elicit | <input type="radio"/> intensify | <input type="radio"/> undermine |
| <input type="radio"/> encourage | <input type="radio"/> produce | <input type="radio"/> underpin |
| <input type="radio"/> engender | <input type="radio"/> promote | |
| <input type="radio"/> enhance | <input type="radio"/> reflect | |

Use linking words to give your analysis flair and fluency. Try using:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Furthermore,... | <input type="radio"/> In addition to... | <input type="radio"/> In contrast,... |
| <input type="radio"/> However,... | <input type="radio"/> In a similar fashion,... | <input type="radio"/> On the one hand,... |

Tone

It is important to use precise words to describe the tone of a piece. Tone usually refers to speech and how something is spoken or delivered – the kind of feeling expressed. Someone might speak to you gently, in a sympathetic tone, when you are upset, or a hostile tone when they do not like the way you have treated them. In writing, tone is the attitude of the writer to the subject matter. This is identified from reading the article aloud, or imagining how it would sound if it was read aloud. This is also called the 'voice'. When someone is speaking to you it is much easier to detect the tone – particularly sarcasm or irony. Here some key words for tone.

Positive	Powerful/Strong	Negative	Ironical	Useful
admiring	amazed	aggressive	derisive	apathetic
amicable	astonished	arrogant	facetious	apologetic
appreciative	carping	bitter	flippant	baffled
approving	caustic	bullying	irreverent	benevolent
calm	confrontational	cynical	mocking	bland
conciliatory	conservative	disappointed	ridiculing	blasé
convincing	controlled	disparaging	sarcastic	businesslike
diplomatic	definite	dogmatic	scornful	clichéd
elated	didactic	hostile		deprecating
enthusiastic	forceful	insensitive		despondent
fervent	forthright	insincere		formal
friendly	hypocritical	insulting		indifferent
lively	incredulous	officious		matter of fact
passionate	moralising	scathing		measured
reasonable	outraged	strident		neutral
respectful	pessimistic	superior		puzzled
spirited	querulous	sympathetic		reasonable
sympathetic	sacrilegious	threatening		regretful
visionary	snide	venomous		stoic
	strident	vindictive		unmoved

posed in a burned-out house in The Bunk, though it had been renamed Wadcote Street to improve its image. I had got them together as they were setting off for an afternoon at the Astoria cinema.

Now, much more than then, I can recognize that it was a strong picture. It shows an awareness of structure that must have been instinctive because I would not have known what the term meant at the time. It was also brilliantly exposed, which must have been a fluke, for I did not possess a light meter.

That one picture changed my life. People have told me that if I had not made a breakthrough with that photograph, then I would have done so with another. I don't think that would necessarily have been the case. I had a low tolerance of rejection, and no burning desire to be a photographer. If I had been obliged to battle my way into Fleet Street, I would never have got there.

1990
Barton, G., 1994
"Reportage", Oxford UP, Oxford.

An Interview with Kate Adie

The BBC's Special Assignment reporter, Kate Adie, took part in an interview with students at Framingham Earl County High School in Wymondlebury. What follows is a direct transcript of part of the interview.

Interviewer: When you were reporting from Libya, how did you ensure that you didn't get emotionally involved?

Kate Adie: One of the rules for any reporter is not to get emotionally involved, and at times it's very, very difficult. For example, if you go to a disaster or where someone's been killed and you meet people who are in a terrible state themselves, or you see something which moves you so much, you think it's natural, isn't it, to express sympathy or to want to feel like those people do; it's the normal thing, and all reporters have to guard against it because what you say to yourself first of all is the reason I'm here is not to break down in tears, or even to help; the reason I've been sent is because I have a professional job and I'm here to report. That's the only reason you've got, so you have to, to a certain extent, set your feelings aside. Some people sometimes confuse that with being hard. They say if you go round all these places, you don't have any feelings for it after a bit, you're different. Well, you must try never to be like that... but when you go to something, your feelings come very far down the line in any priorities and they mustn't get into your report.

I on one or two occasions have heard criticism of me saying, 'Oh well, because she's a woman, you know, it was an emotional report.' I'm going to say something: I defy anyone to

find the emotion in my reports. One of the single things I do, simply, is that my reports very rarely have adjectives in them. I know when everyone writes essays in schools, they always say, 'Come on, use some adjectives, give it some colour, give it some feeling, try and describe things.' Well, one of the things you often do with reporting is not to put adjectives in.

Interviewer: Do you think it's justified to interview bereaved people? It can do them quite a lot of emotional harm, I should think.

Kate Adie Reporters should never intrude where it's going to be hurtful, where it's going to be distressing to people, and where there are absolutely no grounds for going in – particularly where something is very, very private. On the other hand, having said that, there are matters of public importance where it is necessary, in the view of reporters, to get over some information. Now, this does not mean going up to bereaved people and saying, 'How do you feel?' That is totally unjustified. On the other hand, there are a number of occasions, a number of circumstances where reporters do ask questions and people who are watching are a bit worried, and sometimes I think those worries are a little unfounded. For example, I've been to a number of accidents where people have been in a bit of a state afterwards – you must never interview people when they're in shock; that's very important and it's not always easy to recognize that people are in shock. But there are people who have experienced sometimes very dramatic and very frightening things or very upsetting things, and they want to talk to you.

One of the problems we have as British people is that we have a stiff upper lip and we don't actually talk to each other, and we don't talk to each other about emotional things. Come on, you've all known it: somebody's in a terrible state, crying perhaps, particularly if it's a boy. It's embarrassing, isn't it? We don't actually go and ask questions; we just sort of keep ourselves to ourselves. As a nation we do that tremendously, and sometimes people are only too desirous – they want to tell someone what happened. They *want* to. Now you might say that television or radio is not the right place to do that, but a reporter has to judge that and make sure that it's not taking advantage of anyone or being unfair or intrusive. But at the same time I have interviewed many people who have said, 'Do you know, I wanted to tell someone and no one would listen to me, 'cos they're all a bit embarrassed.'

You must also never intrude in the way of asking questions where people are not capable of judging or making the right judgement. For example, as I've said, if they're in shock, or if they really don't know what has happened around them. Quite a lot of people, for example, who were involved in major disasters or very shocking events don't know there and then what's happened around them – they may not know that dozens and dozens of people may have been hurt. They often don't know. And therefore, again, it's unfair to ask them questions because they don't know really what's been going on.

You've seen things which have upset you. Do you take things home? Does it give you a different outlook?

Kate Adie: Oh yes, it makes you feel very strongly. Any reporter who goes through life without actually being affected by what they see might as well give up there and then. It really means that they're not very sensitive people and I think all reporters should be sensitive. Yes – I feel very strongly about some things that I see. I'll give you a very straightforward example. I've been to one or two accidents and I've wondered myself how people can help better...

I went to the Zeebrugge ferry disaster. One of the most impressive things about that was the number of young people who helped. They were all members of the Belgian Red Cross. The average member of the Belgian Red Cross is aged between 17, I think, and 23. It's the big trendy thing to do; everybody wants to join it, because it's incredibly important, and everybody who actually helps with the Red Cross says that the sort of things the Red Cross do, particularly in Belgium, is helping at major disasters, and all the young people are given responsibility – they are asked to do it. They all have two-way radios. They are all taught to drive. And they're all told, this is your responsibility – to set up radio communications, to help with survivors, to go round the hospitals and take messages, to get phone calls through to people back in England where people were desperate for information. These young people were told: this is your job...

Interviewer: So you do sometimes have some influence, try to have some influence, over the general public in things which you couldn't really be accused of being biased in?

Kate Adie: I think you have to be very careful. I suppose everybody should say that as a reporter you should try to influence for the good. But, now look, what's the good? Is the good what a government says? Is the good what a church says? Is the good what your parents say? Is the good what your teachers say? Or is the good what you say? I am not a person to be able to define that...

The other thing that a reporter's involved with influencing people about is purely to say – and it's a very, very basic reason why I do the job and so do my colleagues – people ought to know. Information is more important than ignorance. Education is more important than indifference. That's very fundamental and hiding things is very often wrong...

If you look at a newspaper, do you read all the stories?

Interviewer: No.

Kate Adie: But it's all going on, isn't it? So you are selecting, aren't you, things you find interesting. And at the same time if a story is quite interesting for a few days, along comes something else and – oh well – you read that instead or listen to something about that. We've all got rather short attention spans these days, and television news is part of that. I find myself, in the ten years I've been a television reporter, that we are spending a shorter and shorter time on every story now. Partly that's because we can go to more places and bring more news of different places and different people and different events – and there's only so much you can put on a screen. And at the same time we are

ourselves very worried about the fact that people think, 'Oh look, it's that again' because they're treating news as a form of entertainment. And after the same old story, you want a new story...

Interviewer: Picking up your point about entertainment, do you consider that tabloid papers should be called newspapers?

Kate Adie: I think that most of the tabloid papers in this country now are not very 'newsy'. I don't think they are about news and information and – this is a personal opinion – I think this has happened in the last few years. Whether it changes, I've no idea. Again, what you have to say is, what is news? A lot of people don't read about the more serious things in life – the politics, the economics, the finance, all those sorts of things. At the same time, we have now got a lot of tabloid newspapers which are not reporting news. Quite a number of them, they don't invent it, but they decide what they're going to pursue – in other words they say isn't it time we had a story about a pop star and a drug scandal, and they tend to sniff around for that sort of thing. Now that's not straightforward news, and there's quite a lot of that goes on – what you could call 'creative writing' rather than reporting...

Interviewer: Do you think the papers use too much loaded language, say as political propaganda?

Kate Adie: I do think what happens is not so much loaded language; I think there is extremely violent language used in reporting these days, which is

absolutely unjustified. Politicians are always having 'fights', people are always 'struggling'; people are always being 'blasted'; people are always 'hitting back'. I think this is appalling. I think the language of violence that's used to describe perfectly ordinary arguments, disagreements, different points of view is an extremely poor use of language in nearly all our reporting these days. I think language is far too violent.

Interviewer: If, when you were starting out as a reporter, you were offered a good job on a tabloid newspaper, would you have taken it?

Kate Adie: I don't think so. I don't think I would want to write for such a newspaper. I've never written for a newspaper – I've always been either in radio or television – so I'm not actually qualified. I don't think they would have offered me a job. I'll tell you one of the differences which I wouldn't have liked. In newspapers there's an editorial system, as there is in radio and television. But in newspapers it's considerably different. In newspapers nearly all reporters have their copy rewritten. 'Copy' is the word for the words they put down on a site and when they write their story... Their copy is usually edited. First of all it's edited to fit in to the amount of space the newspaper is going to give that story. Secondly it's often edited to fit the style of the newspaper. As we've said, it's a matter of language – the kinds of long words in some newspapers, short words in others and also the kind of style of the newspaper, the way it reads. And thirdly, it's often changed to fit the view of the newspaper, the political view or the stance it is taking on something.

Activities

An Interview with Kate Adie

Pair work

1 Read the interview through, making a list of any statements Kate Adie makes which you:

- a) strongly agree with,
- b) strongly disagree with.

2 Kate Adie makes the point that there is less bias in television/radio reporting than in newspaper coverage. Look again at her reasons for this statement. Then undertake a test of her remark. Video or record two of this evening's news bulletins on television or radio (choose different channels) and pick out one story that seems most likely to contain bias (in particular, a political story). Tomorrow bring in a number of different newspapers and compare their coverage of the story you watched or listened to on the news. Make a detailed comparison, looking for evidence of bias in language, viewpoint and in what has been cut. Feed your findings back to the rest of the class.

Written assignment

As an alternative to the previous assignment, watch one of this evening's main news bulletins. Make a list of the five main stories and time the number of minutes devoted to each one. Then, tomorrow morning, look at a tabloid and broadsheet newspaper and compare their selection of stories and the number of column inches they devote to the story. Are there any surprises in the coverage? Which version of the story is:

- a) most informative?
- b) most entertaining?
- c) most detailed?
- d) most authoritative?
- e) leaves most questions unanswered?

What does this suggest about the different media's values and audiences?

Following the Shining Path

Pair work

1 This is a copy of the script used on the BBC Nine O'Clock News in which John Simpson reports from Peru. Start by reading it through on your own but discuss any parts which you can't follow with your partner.

Blundell, W.E., 1986, 'The Art and Craft of
Feature Writing', Penguin, New York.

Notes on self-editing and style pp. 218-221.

NOTES ON SELF-EDITING AND STYLE

Your story is written. It's probably a little too long and rough in places, even if you've been tough on yourself, but the desire to get it off your desk is overpowering. You itch to dispose of it immediately.

Don't. Unless the piece is urgently needed by the editors, drop it in a drawer and take a long lunch. Have a beer. Have two. Pat yourself on the back for your achievement; it may be the only praise you get. When you return to the office, leave the story alone and do something else for a day or two, if possible. A piece still warm from the typewriter or VDT is one too close to the writer's heart, and can't be edited with the necessary detachment.

When you do put on your self-editor's hat and attack the story, take your time. I'm continually astonished by writers who spend weeks or even months on a major feature project and only an hour or two on final editing. The writer who doesn't spend at least a half-day editing such a piece is either a supreme craftsman or a masochist begging to see his work truncated and altered by others.

No set procedures govern editing, so again I can only tell you what works for me—a three-step process that in some respects turns the usual order on its head:

1. Editing for Content

Reading quickly through the story, I look first for ways to lengthen it, not shorten it. If I've omitted some bit of reporting that might buttress key sections that now seem a touch weak, some point of explanation that would make something clearer, I include them. At this point I just want to be sure that everything needed to make my story clear and convincing is in it. This doesn't take long.

2. Editing for Conclusiveness and Flow

I pay special attention to my conclusions and summaries, including my main theme statement—do they say exactly what I want them to say, and are they as forceful as the material that backs them up? I also pay close attention to all transitional material, attributions and explanations. If any are verbose or fuzzy, I pare them down and sharpen them up. At the same time, if I'm annoyed by the presence of a secondary character and get the sensation he is only slowing me up, I get rid of him or suppress him.

3. Editing for Pace and Precision

Many writers first try to cut their stories by removing entire sentences, paragraphs or even sections. Only after this do they look for smaller cuts. I do the opposite because I can usually save enough space with word-by-word cuts to preclude major surgery. The latter may create more trouble than it cures because some blood and bone usually comes away with the fat, and an unsightly wound is left that must be stitched together.

Word-by-word editing takes more time than any other step. Even though my self-critic has done much of this work already, he's had to labor in haste and has left enough fat so that I can cut most of my stories 10% to 15% without removing any of their elements.

I look for wasteful little constructions like "due to the fact that" (make it "because"); passive structures that could be made active to save space and add vigor ("he felt it was incumbent on

him" means "he felt obligated"); opportunities to use freight-train sentences and hook-ons; lurking redundancies; Siamese-twin sentences that can be combined, and so on. I also strip the lead of any extraneous elements.

Slowly a better, brisker story takes shape. It would be impractical to compare here an entire unedited story with its finished version and explain the reasons for every change and cut, but we can treat one innocuous paragraph:

Boomtowns often suffer severe personnel problems because city workers leave their jobs for better-paying ones with resource companies operating nearby. In Evanston, Wyo., an oil boom that has engulfed the community has given Mayor Dennis Ottley some king-sized headaches. He's lost half the police force to the oil companies, who are employing the men as security guards at 25% more than he can pay, and many teachers who can make much more as roustabouts than they could in the classroom.

This is not terrible, but it is rough. The self-editor first fixes on the blob—"severe personnel problems." What does that mean? It means turnover. Next, "leave their jobs." Let's make it "flee their jobs." When someone offers you a big raise to walk around a fence for a few hours instead of getting your head broken trying to settle bar fights all night, you don't leave the old job, you flee. "Resource companies." I don't know what a resource company looks like. Can I be more pictorial? How about mines and oil rigs? I can see *them*. "Operating nearby." Pure fat. If the place is a boomtown, the companies will have to be operating somewhere nearby.

Now, this Ottley chap. He is a nice guy, very cooperative, and has seduced us into using him. He is a talking head who isn't even quoted directly. Eliminate him and use his information as fact; as the mayor he ought to know what's happened to his own police force and school system. And the "king-sized headaches"—can we just say what they are? The next sentence does, so let's combine these Siamese twins.

The self-editor arrives at this:

Boomtowns often suffer severe turnover because city workers flee their jobs for better-paying ones at oil rigs or in mines. Engulfed by an oil boom, Evanston, Wyo., has lost half its policemen

to oil companies that pay them 25% more as security guards, and many teachers who make much more as roustabouts than they could in the classroom.

The first version uses 82 words to say what the second expresses in 59. Almost 30% of the paragraph has been pared away without loss of substance. Do this throughout a story and the effects will be bracing, to say the least.

If my story is still too long, I then remove elements. The first to go are in the secondary sections of the piece, where the reader won't miss the material as much. Here, I may be able to escape with a simple statement in place of a full set of proofs. If even this doesn't save enough space I'd be forced to take material out of primary story sections, but I've never had to go this far.

Michelangelo claimed that he didn't create images when he sculpted but only released the mighty figures, fully formed, that slept within his blocks of marble. The self-editor's work is a little like that. He refines and releases what the artist in him has already created. The result may be no stunning work of art, but it's better for his effort.

Your own finished piece, containing storytelling qualities and burnished to a gloss by this final step, may also have another quality we haven't addressed directly—style. It may be more than good. It may be you.

I can't teach style. Nobody can. In this context, it's easy enough to say what it is: the character and personality of the writer shining through his work so clearly that the reader senses them. But beyond mere definition is a territory every writer has to explore for himself.

A few years ago I stumbled on an entry in the personal journal kept by my daughter, then a college student majoring in English. The topic was unexceptional, an account of a visit she had made to her grandparents. This is the core of it:

... Last night at dinner Granddaddy said the grace; he thanked the Lord for the meal, for the day we all had together, and for having me there to share the weekend with them. Then there was a pause and I looked up at him. His head was still bowed but he was shaking it back and forth and rubbing one hand over the top of the other, as he sometimes does, and his chin was quivering. He stopped,

