

writing to persuade

Writing to persuade is a popular and important choice of exam question. If you choose this question in the AQA/NEAB syllabus exam (Paper One Part B), it will account for a quarter of your English exam marks. By carefully following the advice below you should be able to improve your grade.

PERSUASION OR ARGUMENT?

Persuasion and argument are very similar and use many of the same techniques; however, they do each have their own style and approach. Persuasion has the single-minded goal of changing your reader's mind, whereas argument provides a convincing point of view that recognises and tries to counter other equally reasonable and valid views. Compared to argument, persuasion tends to be more one-sided and personal and often succeeds by trying to gain an emotional response; argument, however, generally succeeds through reason alone.

EFFECTIVE PERSUASION

1. Effective Preparation

When you are given an essay question on writing to persuade, you will be writing about an artificial situation. The examiner is only interested in your persuasive skills, not real facts in the real world.

- Brainstorm to create a list of persuasive ideas "for" your point
- Now write a series of equivalent points against what you believe, i.e. what the "other side" might believe.
- Look carefully at the points in favour - are they truly ones that would persuade the kind of person you are writing for?
- Choose five of the strongest points in favour, and one or two against.
- Make up a very good reason (*keep it entirely reasonable and sensible*) why you and your views are worth listening to.
- Make up one or two anecdotes - interesting true accounts - that would support your case.
- Find some solid "common ground" between your views and the other side - an "end point" over which you both agree.

2. Effective Writing

- Open in a way that will attract your reader's attention. Go on to say who you are and - politely - why you are writing.
- Aim to be interesting and original to catch your reader's interest in you - sell yourself and your ideas will be much easier to sell, too. Show that you are a reasonable and trustworthy person.
- Show why you have an interest in and a knowledge of your subject.
- Now use each of the points from your list to open the body paragraphs of your essay.
- Use each paragraph to explore a single main point at length and in depth. Always make certain that you avoid stating the very obvious and never suggest that the opposition is foolish, nor ever "threaten" or appear to "blackmail" them.
- Try to use one or more of the strongest of the opposing points in your own argument by showing that whilst it may seem to be reasonable, your own view is even more so.

- Add authority to your points by supporting them with realistic and reasonable evidence, such as anecdotes, expert opinion or survey findings, etc.
- Use "rhetorical devices" such as the list of three, parallel structures and contrast, emotive language, personification, anecdotes, humour, irony, similes, and repetition.
- Use emotive language but take great care when expressing emotion. If the topic allows it, show how you have been "moved" by your research into it; but avoid excessive pleading.
- Conclude strongly and in an interesting way. You might restate your request, summarise your strongest points and end with a final plea.

3. Effective checking

In this part of the exam, you gain marks for writing in an accurate, clear and fluent way. Each year the examiner's report mentions that many students failed to achieve a higher grade because they failed to check and correct their work. Always give yourself time to check your writing thoroughly before handing in the exam paper.

Read each sentence after you have written it

Write using a variety of sentence types and styles but remember especially that shorter sentences are often more interesting because they are crisper and clearer. An occasional ultra-short sentence can add real impact to writing.

Never fail to re-read your sentences after writing them to check that they are **complete** in their sense, **accurate** in their grammar and spelling and follow on logically and smoothly from the last.

Check every paragraph.

A paragraph is a written discussion that covers a single topic - one topic among the many that are needed to cover the subject matter of the whole piece of writing. One of the sentences in the paragraph, and quite often the first one, is called the "topic sentence". This is the sentence that introduces, or tells "in a nut shell", what the paragraph is going to be about. The remaining sentences do no more than expand and explore the ideas raised by the topic sentence in more depth. No points that are unrelated to the main topic should be covered in the same paragraph.

Each paragraph should flow smoothly from its predecessor. This is achieved by the use of a subtle "hook sentence" at the end of the paragraph; this is a sentence that "hooks" into the new topic of the next paragraph.

To correct a missed paragraph simply put this mark where you want in to be: // then, in your margin write: // = new paragraph. The examiner will not mark you down for this so long as you have not forgotten all of your paragraphs.

Examine each comma

Over, or misuse, of commas is a common and important error that can lose many marks. Many of you will occasionally use a comma instead of a full stop to end some of your sentences. You are failing to recognise where the end of the sentence should have been. Too much of this leads to a dreary and difficult-to-read style because it destroys the clarity and crispness that is a necessary part of all good writing.

A sentence is a group of words that is about one main idea or "thought". It should seem "complete" to its reader. Sentences that drift into several ideas, or which seem incomplete, are less clear and interesting to read. Ending a sentence with a comma (or even nothing but a space) instead of a full stop will allow it to "run on" or drift in this way. Try to use commas only to mark off **parts** of a sentence so that the sentence reads more smoothly or makes clearer sense.

Look at every apostrophe.

Look at the words you have used that end in "s". Are they plurals? If so the chances are they do not need an apostrophe. Apostrophes are used to show when a letter has been missed out (as in: *shouldn't*) and when two nouns belong to each other (as in: *the school's entrance*). Also... make sure that when you write "it's" you do mean "it is" (as in *it's cold*) not "belonging to it" (i.e. as in: *its surface*).