Persuasive Essay

In this unit, you read selections in which writers expressed opinions and backed them with evidence and sound reasoning. What are some issues that matter to you? In this workshop, you will write a persuasive essay that argues your position on an important issue.

WRITE WITH A PURPOSE

WRITING PROMPT
What makes you upset or concerned? Choose an issue that you feel strongly about. Write a persuasive essay in which you persuade your audience to agree with your point of view.

Idea Starters
• protecting endangered animals
• rules that are unfair to young people
• ways to improve your neighborhood or school
• violence in video games

THE ESSENTIALS
Here are some common purposes, audiences, and formats for persuasive writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSES</th>
<th>AUDIENCES</th>
<th>GENRES/FORMATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• to influence people’s attitudes or actions</td>
<td>• classmates and teacher</td>
<td>• essay for class</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to persuade readers to agree with your opinion</td>
<td>• friends</td>
<td>• letter to the editor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• family</td>
<td>• speech</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• neighbors</td>
<td>• blog posting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Web users</td>
<td>• commercial or public service announcement (PSA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• school board</td>
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TEXAS KEY TRAITS

1. FOCUS AND COHERENCE
• includes an introduction that states a clear position
• maintains focus throughout the body of the essay
• ends with a call to action

2. ORGANIZATION
• has a logical organization
• uses transitions to show how ideas are related

3. DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS
• provides reasons to support the writer’s opinion
• supports reasons with detailed and relevant evidence
• addresses opposing viewpoints with counterarguments

4. VOICE
• reflects the writer’s strong belief in his or her position
• has an appropriate tone

5. CONVENTIONS
• correctly punctuates direct and indirect quotations
• employs correct grammar, mechanics, and spelling

Complete the workshop activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
Planning/Prewriting

**Getting Started**

**CHOOSE AN ISSUE**
First, choose an issue about which you feel strongly and can write effectively. An issue is a topic that people disagree on. Your issue should be one that you know something about and that will also interest your audience. Use the Idea Starters on page 988 to help you identify possible topics for your persuasive essay.

**ASK YOURSELF:**
- What are some issues that I feel strongly about?
- For each issue, what reasons can I think of to support my position?
- What are some opposing opinions that other people might have?
- Which issue would be the most interesting to write about in a persuasive essay?

**THINK ABOUT AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE**
In a persuasive essay, your purpose is to convince readers to share your point of view on an issue and, in some cases, to take action. You’ll need to determine who the audience is for your essay, as well as what they need to know to follow your argument.

**ASK YOURSELF:**
- Who is my audience?
- What interest does my audience have in my issue?
- What does my audience need to know about the issue? What aspects of it might they want to learn more about?

**STATE YOUR POSITION**
Write a thesis statement that clearly establishes your position on your chosen issue. You may revise this statement later, but having it written down will help guide your writing.

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

**Issue:** The impact that one person's actions can have  
**My position:** A big impact  
**Thesis statement:** It only takes one person to change a situation and make everyone's life a lot better.

**PROVIDE REASONS**
Once you establish a position on an issue, you have to support it with sound reasons. Reasons are statements that justify or explain your position to your audience. Use a chart to record some reasons that support your thesis statement. Then discuss your reasons with a peer to find out which ones are the most appealing and convincing.

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

**Thesis Statement:** It only takes one person to change a situation and make everyone's life a lot better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason 1</th>
<th>Some changes that seem small can actually make a big difference.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason 2</td>
<td>If one person does something good, other people may follow his or her example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason 3</td>
<td>If everyone behaves selfishly, the overall impact on the world can be disastrous.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning/Prewriting continued

**Getting Started**

**COLLECT EVIDENCE**

To persuade your readers that they ought to agree with your position, you’ll need to provide detailed and relevant evidence to support your reasons. Here are several types of evidence you might include in your essay:

- **Facts**: statements that can be proven true
  
  In 1976, Wangari Maathai had the idea of encouraging people to plant trees in Kenya. Her Green Belt Movement has now planted more than 20 million trees.

- **Examples**: specific instances that illustrate a general idea
  
  History has many examples of one person making a difference, such as Rosa Parks.

- **Expert opinions**: statements made by authorities on a subject
  
  Author Stephen R. Covey says individuals have enormous power to change the world.

- **Anecdotes**: brief stories that illustrate a point
  
  One class in my school began recycling. Every other class was participating by the end of the month.

**CONSIDER OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS**

Some people in your audience may disagree with the position you present in your essay. To persuade them to accept your position, you’ll need to consider alternative viewpoints and offer counterarguments. A counterargument is an argument that refutes an opposing viewpoint.

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

| My Position: One person can make a difference. |
| Possible Objection: The actions of just one person can’t change the world. |
| Counterargument: History has many examples of one person making a difference, such as Rosa Parks. |

**PEER REVIEW** Share with a peer the evidence you have gathered to support your position. Ask: Which evidence is most convincing? What opposing viewpoints might I need to address?

In your Reader/Writer Notebook, write your thesis statement and list reasons for your position. Then gather evidence to support each of your reasons. If necessary, do some research to collect specific facts, examples, and expert opinions. Then consider possible opposing viewpoints and plan the counterarguments you will make.
Drafting

The following chart shows how to organize your draft to create an effective persuasive essay.

**Organizing a Persuasive Essay**

**INTRODUCTION**
- Grab the audience's attention with a memorable statement, anecdote, or fact.
- State your position in a clear thesis statement.
- Provide any background information your audience may need to understand the issue.

**BODY**
- Provide clear reasons to support your thesis statement. Back up each reason with convincing evidence.
- Organize your essay in an effective way. Present your second strongest reason first, and then other reasons. End with your strongest reason.
- Consider opposing viewpoints and present counterarguments.

**CONCLUSION**
- Restate your position and briefly summarize your evidence.
- Conclude with a call to action urging your audience to do what you want them to do.

**Grammar in Context: Using Transitions**

Transitions are words and phrases that show how ideas are related to one another. Because persuasive essays often present reasons in order of importance, transitions that show this order can help make your essay's organization clear to your audience.

**Transitions That Show Order of Importance**
- best of all
- more/most important
- first
- primarily
- furthermore
- to begin with
- last
- finally
- mainly
- ultimately

**Example**

I believe that one person can make a difference. **To begin with,** small changes that might not seem to have a big effect can have a huge impact over time. **Furthermore,** if everyone just acts selfishly, no good changes will come to the world. **Most important,** one person's positive actions can inspire others to take action, too.

**Your Turn**

Develop a first draft of your persuasive essay, following the plan outlined in the chart above. Use transitional words and phrases to show the order of importance of ideas in your essay.
Revising

Evaluate the content, organization, and style of your essay and revise it as necessary. Ask yourself if you’ve achieved your purpose and effectively communicated your ideas to your audience. These questions, tips, and strategies will help you revise and improve your draft.

### PERSUASIVE ESSAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ask Yourself</th>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Revision Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the introduction include a clear thesis statement that establishes a position?</td>
<td>Underline the thesis statement. Ask a peer to read it and identify the position on the issue.</td>
<td>Add a thesis statement or, if necessary, replace the thesis statement with a clearer one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are there at least two sound reasons that support the thesis statement?</td>
<td>Circle the reasons that support the thesis statement.</td>
<td>Add reasons that support the thesis statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does at least one piece of detailed and relevant evidence support each reason?</td>
<td>Highlight evidence that supports each reason. Draw an arrow from the evidence to the reason.</td>
<td>If necessary, add evidence to support each reason. Elaborate on pieces of evidence by adding details or explaining their relevance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are the reasons listed in the order that is most persuasive?</td>
<td>Number each reason with a rank (1 for strongest, and so on).</td>
<td>Reorder ideas, putting the second strongest reason first, other reasons next, and the strongest reason last.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Does the essay respond to opposing viewpoints with counterarguments?</td>
<td>Underline opposing viewpoints. Circle the counterarguments that address them.</td>
<td>Add possible opposing viewpoints and respond to them with effective counterarguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the conclusion include a restatement of the position, a summary of the evidence, and a call to action?</td>
<td>Put a check mark next to the restatement. Circle the summary. Put a box around the call to action.</td>
<td>Add a restatement of the position, a summary of the evidence, and/or a call to action.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### YOUR TURN

Work with a peer to review your drafts, using the questions in the chart. Evaluate your partner’s essay and offer tips on how he or she could improve it. Be sure to take notes on your partner’s suggestions.
ANALYZE A STUDENT DRAFT

Read this student’s draft and the comments about it as a model for revising your own persuasive essay.

Makx a Diffxrxncx
by Elena Chen, Ridgely Middle School

1. As I start this lxttxr, thosx who rxad it might think somxthing is wrong and stop rxading at this point. But plxasx kxxxp on rxading.
2. As you can sxx, for onx lxttxr of thx alphabxt I havx substitutxd an x. Somx of you might find this strangx. Lxt mx xxplain.
3. A lot of pxoplx don’t think that onx pxrson in this world can makx a diffxrxncx. But lxt mx txll you this. In history wx havx all sxxn and hxard pxoplx who havx stood up for what thxy bxlixvx in. Thxy havx indxxd madx a diffxrxncx in our livxs. It only takxs onx pxrson to changx somxthing and makx xxvrxyonx’s lifx a lot bxttxr. Considxr rxycling: It only takxs onx pxrson to rxyclx; thxn xxvrxyonx xlsx will follow. If wx all thought only of oursxlvxs, thx world bx b a disastrous placx right now. Thx ozonx layxr would bx gonx and wx would all bx harmxd by thx sun.

LEARN HOW Use Anecdotes as Evidence
Elena’s third paragraph makes the point that individuals can make a major difference in the lives of others. When she revised her letter, she decided to strengthen this argument by adding an anecdote. Anecdotes, or brief stories intended to make a point, can make a persuasive essay more convincing by relating the issue to actual events.

ELENA’S REVISION TO PARAGRAPH 3

A lot of pxoplx don’t think that onx pxrson in this world can makx a diffxrxncx. But lxt mx txll you this. In history wx havx all sxxn and hxard pxoplx who havx stood up for what thxy bxlixvx in. Thxy havx indxxd madx a diffxrxncx in our livxs.

Onx such pxrson was Rosa Parks, an African American woman who livxd during sxgrxgation in Montgomxry, Alabama. On Dxcxmbxr 1, 1955, after a long day of work shx gratxfuly sxttlx into a sxxt on thx bus. Whxn ordxrxd to givx up hxr placx to a whix man, thx xxhavxd x Parks rxxfusxd. Hxr bravx act rallixd many to protxst and changx unjust laws of thx day. Rosa Parks is just onx of thx many individuals who...
ananalyze a student draft continued

It only takes one person to come right out and say his or her carx. What I’m saying is to let go of your pridx and do what you bxlixvx is right. If you arx confidxnt, thxn you will succxxd. You should know that you can makx a diffxrxcnx.

Now, what doxs all this havx to do with mx writing x’s instead of e’s? Did it vxxr occur to you that if onx lxttxr can makx a diffxrxcnx thxn so can onx pxrson? Xvxn though this is a small xample, it shows that if onx tiny lxttxr in thx alphabxt can makx such a diffxrxcnx in a pixcx of writing, thxn, of coursx, onx pxrson can makx a diffxrxcnx in thx world today.

Elena includes a call to action to urge readers to do something.

Elena ends by restating her position. She could strengthen her conclusion by adding an expert opinion.

LEARN HOW Use Expert Opinions as Evidence In her final paragraph, Elena connects her position on the issue with why she has written x’s instead of e’s. She wants to show that just as switching one letter of the alphabet can make a big difference, one individual can have a strong impact as well. To strengthen her conclusion even more, she decided to include an expert opinion by quoting a person who has demonstrated knowledge of the topic.

Elena’s Revision to Paragraph 5

Now, what doxs all this havx to do with mx writing x’s instead of e’s? Did it vxxr occur to you that if onx lxttxr can makx a diffxrxcnx thxn so can onx pxrson? Xvxn though this is a small xample, it shows that if onx tiny lxttxr in thx alphabxt can makx such a diffxrxcnx in a pixcx of writing, thxn, of coursx, onx pxrson can makx a diffxrxcnx in thx world today.

Elena includes a call to action to urge readers to do something.

Stxphxn R. Covxy undxrstands thx powxr of individuals to xffxct changx. Thx bxstsxlling author of Thx 7 Habits of Highly Xffxctivx Pxoplx has said hx bxlixvx “that individuals havx xnormous powxr to changx thx world.” Hx writxs I am persoanly convinxxd that onx pxrson can bx a changx catalyst, a transformxr in anymx situctxn, anymx organixation. If such a small xample as changing

Your Turn

Use the two “Learn How” lessons, as well as feedback from your peers and teacher, to revise your persuasive essay. Evaluate how well it convinces your audience of your position by including sound reasons and detailed and relevant evidence.
Editing and Publishing

When you edit, you review your essay to make sure it contains no grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors. Mistakes like these can take away from your essay's impact and even keep your audience from understanding your position.

GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: PUNCTUATING QUOTATIONS

Persuasive writing often cites the opinions of experts. In her letter to the editor, Elena summarizes author Stephen R. Covey's ideas about the power of individuals to change the world. Her summary is called an indirect quotation because she does not use the exact words of the author. Indirect quotations are not placed in quotation marks. When editing her letter, Elena corrected the punctuation of her summary.

The international leadership authority and bestselling author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People has said, "that individuals have enormous power to change the world."

In another sentence, Elena uses Covey's exact words—a direct quotation. She added quotation marks around these words so readers would know they were taken directly from another writer's work. She also added a comma to set off the quotation from the rest of the sentence.

He writes, "I am personally convinced that one person can be a change agent, a transformer in any situation, any organization."

PUBLISH YOUR WRITING

Share your persuasive essay with an audience.

• Make copies of your persuasive essay and distribute them to others who might be interested in the issue you address.
• Develop your essay into a speech that you deliver to your audience.
• Revise your essay into a letter to the editor of a local newspaper and submit it for publication.
• Post your essay on a school or community Web site or bulletin board.

Correct any errors in your essay by carefully proofreading it. Make sure direct and indirect quotations are punctuated correctly. Then publish your final essay where it is most likely to reach your intended audience.
Scoring Rubric

Use the rubric below to evaluate your persuasive essay from the Writing Workshop or your response to the on-demand prompt on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>TEXAS KEY TRAITS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>- <strong>Focus and Coherence</strong> Clearly states a position on an identified issue; maintains focus throughout the essay; ends with a compelling call to action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Organization</strong> Has a logical and effective organization; uses transitions that effectively show how ideas are related</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Development of Ideas</strong> Provides sound reasons; supports each reason with strong evidence; addresses opposing viewpoints with convincing counterarguments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Voice</strong> Reflects strong beliefs; has an appropriate and engaging tone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Conventions</strong> Shows a strong command of grammar, mechanics, and spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>- <strong>Focus and Coherence</strong> States a position on an issue; focuses on the argument with only a few unnecessary details; ends with a call to action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Organization</strong> Has a mostly logical organization with a few exceptions; includes some transitions that show how ideas are related</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Development of Ideas</strong> Could include more reasons and evidence to support the writer’s position; responds to at least one opposing viewpoint</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Voice</strong> Gives some sense of the writer’s beliefs; has a mostly appropriate tone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Conventions</strong> Includes minor errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>- <strong>Focus and Coherence</strong> Does not clearly identify an issue and/or a position; strays often from the focus on a position; has a weak call to action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Organization</strong> Shows some organization but with significant gaps; needs more transitions to show how ideas are related</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Development of Ideas</strong> Includes few reasons and little evidence to support the writer’s position; does not respond to some obvious opposing viewpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Voice</strong> Gives little indication of the writer’s beliefs; has a tone that is often inappropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Conventions</strong> Shows a limited control of grammar, mechanics, and spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- <strong>Focus and Coherence</strong> Does not identify an issue or a position; lacks focus throughout; does not include a call to action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Organization</strong> Lacks a logical organization; does not include transitions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Development of Ideas</strong> Presents no reasons or evidence to support the writer’s position; considers no opposing viewpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Voice</strong> Shows nothing of the writer’s beliefs; has an inappropriate tone</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Conventions</strong> Has major problems with grammar, mechanics, and spelling that make the argument ineffective</td>
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Preparation for Timed Writing

1. Analyze the Prompt

Read the prompt carefully. Then read it again, underlining the words that tell the type of writing, the audience, the position you must take, and the opposing viewpoint you must address.

**Prompt**
You want your parents to raise your weekly allowance. They point out that they raised it only eight months ago. Write a persuasive letter in which you convince your parents to support your request. Use specific reasons and examples.

**Type of writing**

**Audience**

**Position**

**Opposing viewpoint**

2. Plan Your Response

Brainstorm a list of reasons why your allowance should be raised. Use a chart to list the reasons and the evidence (such as examples, facts, and anecdotes) you will use to support each reason. Then number your reasons from most to least convincing. Plan to present your strongest reason last in your letter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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3. Respond to the Prompt

Using your notes, begin drafting your letter. Keep these points in mind:
- At the beginning, clearly identify the issue and state your position on it.
- In the body of your letter, present your reasons in the strongest order. Support each reason with detailed, relevant evidence. Don’t forget to include counterarguments to address opposing viewpoints.
- In the conclusion, restate your position, summarize the supporting evidence, and include a call to action.

4. Improve Your Response

**Revising**
Review key aspects of your letter. Do you identify the issue and state your position clearly? Do you provide supporting evidence for each of your reasons? Do you include a call to action?

**Proofreading**
Neatly correct any errors in grammar, spelling, and mechanics.

**Checking Your Final Copy**
Before you turn in your letter, read it one more time to catch any errors you may have missed.
Giving a Persuasive Speech

If you’ve ever asked a friend for a favor or tried to convince someone to do something, you’ve given a persuasive speech. To turn your persuasive essay into a speech, you’ll need to adapt it with your new audience (your listeners) in mind.

Adapt Your Essay

Giving an organized persuasive presentation may seem simple: just read aloud the persuasive essay you wrote in the Writing Workshop. But there is much more to it. Here are some guidelines for developing an effective speech:

- **Think about the audience and purpose.** Your teacher will give you details about who will be in the audience—classmates, students you don’t know, or members of the community. Your purpose is to persuade members of the audience.

- **Use your essay to create a script.** Underline or highlight important points you want to include. Express your point of view clearly and organize information in a logical way.

- **Emphasize key ideas.** Keep your sentences brief and to the point. Choose words that are strong and specific, so your point of view is clear. Repeat key words or phrases to emphasize their importance and help listeners remember your main ideas.

- **Include clear transitions.** To help listeners follow your presentation, you might need to add words that clarify the connections between ideas. Help your listeners by adding transitions such as however, therefore, and finally.

- **Include a visual aid.** Make your message memorable by showing it on a poster, a flip chart, or a power presentation.
Give Your Speech

Even the most persuasive ideas can fall flat if they aren’t delivered well. As you practice your speech, concentrate on using verbal techniques (what your voice does as you speak) and nonverbal techniques (what your face and body do as you speak) to communicate your ideas effectively.

USE VERBAL TECHNIQUES

• **Speaking Rate**  Speak at a slow rate so your audience can keep up with what you are saying. However, don’t speak so slowly that your voice sounds unnatural.

• **Volume**  Avoid shouting, but speak loudly enough so the people in the back of the room can hear you.

• **Enunciation**  Speak clearly to allow the audience to understand every point you make.

• **Vocal Modulation**  Vary your pitch—the rise and fall of your speaking voice—to help keep your audience interested in your message.

• **Conventions of Language**  Use standard English and correct grammar to show your audience that you are taking the issue you are discussing seriously. Avoid slang terms or informal language.

USE NONVERBAL TECHNIQUES

• **Eye Contact**  Remember to look at your audience throughout your speech. Glance down at your notes as needed, but always return your attention to your audience.

• **Natural Gestures**  Use your hands to emphasize key points and to make your speech seem less formal. Remember to refer to your visual aids at appropriate points in your speech. Point to specific information as you discuss it.

• **Facial Expressions**  Use facial expressions to convey your point of view on an idea. For example, you might raise your eyebrows to show your disapproval of a possible objection to your position.

As a Speaker  Deliver your persuasive speech to a partner. Be sure your speech is organized and you convey a specific point of view. Don’t forget to use effective verbal and nonverbal techniques to communicate your ideas.

As a Listener  Listen to your partner’s speech. Take notes on his or her main points. After the speech, share your notes to make sure you understood his or her message. Evaluate your partner’s delivery and give suggestions for improvement.