

There is no logical reason to write a persuasive essay for an English class. Persuasive essays definitely do not need to be a requirement for high school students.

The definition of "persuade" in Webster's New College Dictionary is: To induce one to believe or do something; to argue into an opinion or procedure; to plead with, urge. I have always thought that someone who let his own opinion be changed by someone else is a person who lacks a strong will. I understand that some people have a certain talent for convincing other people, but I personally would not change my mind about a subject unless I was unsure about that subject in the first place.

I became aware of one personal trait when writing this paper -- that is I do not really care about much. I have no intention of letting other people know about the few things that I do care about either. I found it pointless to try to write a persuasive essay about a subject for which I do not care. The only thing I could think to try to convince people to do was to refuse to write a persuasive essay ever again. I faced a kind of moral paradox with this, though. If I wrote a persuasive essay telling people not to write persuasive essays, what kind of example would I be? I was convinced that I was not going to do this paper, but in a showing of my own lack of will, I was bribed into writing this essay. (I find myself getting bribed into doing a lot of schoolwork these days.) I realize that teachers would be angry about this somewhat counterproductive essay, but nevertheless students should refuse to write persuasive essays unless their own will convinces them to do so.

People of my age do not really have many reasons to complain. Most persuasive essays written by adolescents are fluff in the eyes of authority anyway. Sure, you could write a persuasive essay about plenty of subjects. For example, "Kids should be allowed to skateboard anywhere they want." It's a perfectly fine essay for someone who really cares about it. The problem is that most of the authorities who would decide where a youth could skateboard feel that skateboarding is useless. Adults have a tendency to look at things in the long run, and fighting over skateboarding does not make any sense in the long run. How many 16 year olds have plans of skateboarding for the rest of their life? The idea of a 30 year old skateboarding around town causes me to laugh very loudly, even when I am by myself. It seems pointless, and maybe even infeasible, to argue about a subject you know you will not care about in a few years time.

Casino gambling has been a subject of many editorials in the major newspapers. If a teenager were to write an essay about casino gambling, it would be an utter waste of time. If you really want to gamble you do not need a casino to do it. The funds raised by casinos do not even reach the city where I live. So why argue about casino gambling?

Most normal teenagers should not care about abortion, assisted suicide, and topics of that nature, yet they write persuasive essays about these subjects. The reason is that they have to in order to get a good grade in that class. A teenager might care about a persuasive essay about legalizing hemp, but in that paper he would never express his real opinion. I do not think any teenager cares that hemp is a good cash crop, or that it can be used in rope, or to make clothes. The truth is that teenagers want to smoke weed, preferably in front of adults, and do it all legally. The driving privilege would seem to be a good thing to write about, but how many adults wake up in the morning excited because they get to drive to work?

Increasing your curfew would be a good thing to convince your parents to do. So why write a paper about it, then hand the paper to your English teacher? It does not make sense to write persuasive essays.

Aside from being senseless, writing persuasive essays can be strenuous on students and teachers. Essays have to be written in a certain way, but this can be a problem for people who are nonconformists. (On the other hand, not being able to wear a dog collar to school can be a problem for some nonconformists, but I will not delve into that because I don't want to anger myself.) It is hard to be creative in a five paragraph paper about controlling the pet population, yet students are asked to write a persuasive thesis about it, then refer back to the thesis numerous times.

Persuasive essays are also hard on teachers. I am sure teachers are thrilled to read 150 essays from seemingly dense students whose minds are focused on other things -- not to mention checking rough drafts too. I doubt most teachers care about their students' curfews or controlling the pet population anyway.

Teachers or parents may make the point that writing persuasive essays in high school is good practice for college English classes. But a persuasive essay is supposed to appeal mostly to the readers' emotions, and from what I've heard about college, most professors want you to make your points using logical arguments, not emotional ones. My mother, who happens to be an English teacher, made the point that writing persuasive papers is a good exercise in writing about relevant issues. That may be, but as I stated earlier in the paper, there are very few so-called relevant issues about which I care and about which most teenagers even should care. We can practice later, when the issues really mean something to us.

The next time a teacher assigns you a persuasive essay or speech, I suggest you recommend the teacher change his or her mind. If push comes to shove, I would recommend that you refuse to do the assignment. Cite points that I have stated before, or come up with personal reasons, but voice your opinion, and don't just say "awwww!" because this only makes teachers feel happy.

Teachers, there are other things to make the students do: creative writing, creative reading, cleaning up the classroom, going to historical places, and talking all come to mind. If you must have your students do something persuasive, tell them to get an editorial out of a newspaper that they agree with and have them talk about that. It is less work than writing or correcting a paper, and it accomplishes the same things. If this persuasive madness does not stop, adolescent angst may build up, and students may be forced to protest by writing 15 or 20 page papers -- and do not think that we cannot do it. Just imagine it: 150 papers, each of them twenty pages long featuring punctuation errors, bad grammar, teenagers' bad points and stupid topics. Sounds fun to me.

It is clear that writing persuasive essays is a useless waste of time. If as a student you feel compelled to write about something you feel strongly about, by all means do so. Write to your local paper, to your parents, to the Governor, to the President, to the Pope, or even to Reverend Jesse Jackson. Write if you think it is going to make a difference (odds are it will not), but do not write for a dumb class. Teachers, if you feel compelled to correct persuasive essays, I have a solution for you. Pick up the paper, read the editorials, correct any spelling errors, then send the editorials back to the people who wrote them, and suggest that they correct them so that they can get a good grade.

Persuasive essays are a bad assignment to require students to do, because they accomplish nothing, and they do not reflect the students' true feelings and opinions. Persuasive essays are pointless.

