



# Persuasive Writing Guide

A Comprehensive Guide

# Introduction



## What's a proposal?

An appeal to the reader to gain their agreement

Explaining your proposition to the reader and showing them how you can offer them a solution to their problems

This can be achieved through employing the art of persuasive writing

# What is Persuasive writing?



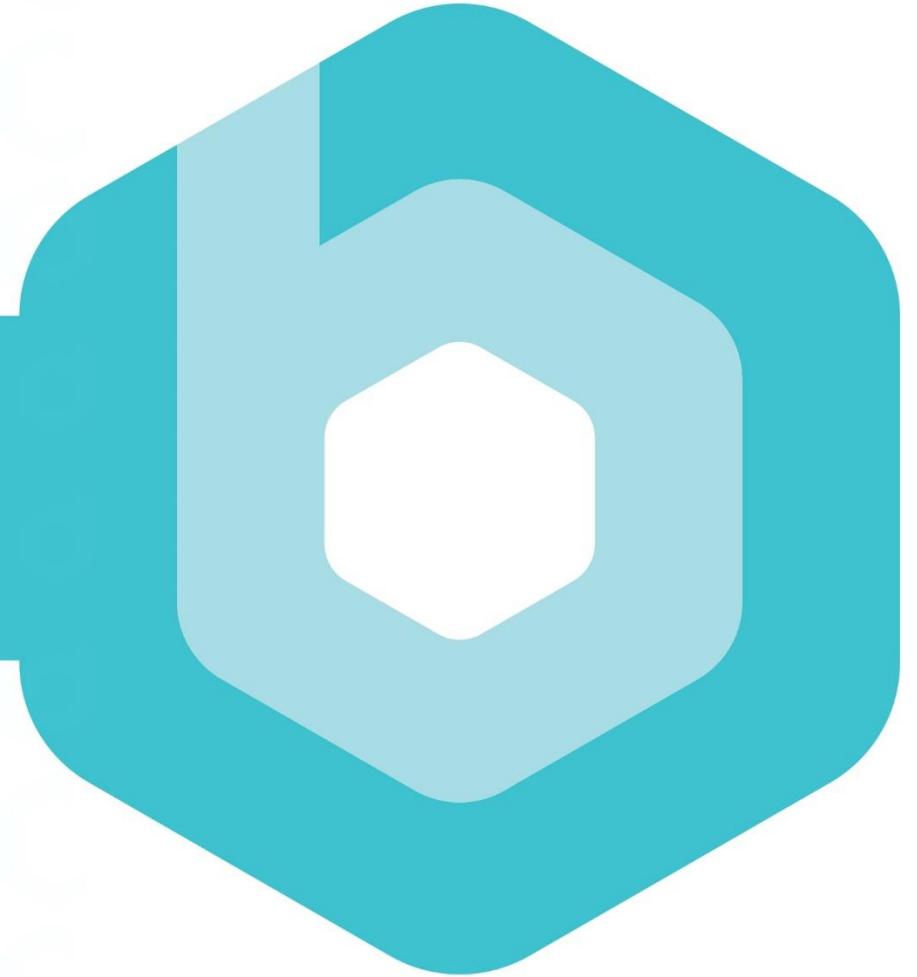
**There are three main components to persuasive writing:**

**Personal:** It is primarily focused on your reader's needs and preferences

**About probabilities:** Someone else's solution might be appealing, but your goal is to convince your reader that your solution is the more likely to succeed

**Conclusive:** It leaves no doubt as to the best course of action

# Best Practices





## 1. Know your audience so you can use the right techniques to match their perspectives

Persuasive writing is all about the audience.

To write clearly, you have to make sure that every sentence relates to the subject and filtered for your audience.



Be specific: Use real scenarios and precise statistics and measures to prove your solution is right

Make it personal: Make your solution an alternative to real, personal pain.

Find common values: Understand the audience's corporate and personal stances on business, social, and environmental issues to see if you have common ground.



## 2. Apply the traditional rhetorical principles of argument.

**Rhetoric** supplies basic techniques that proposal writers should consider.

### A. Structure your proposal like an argument

The following table shows that a simple, unsolicited proposal structure still carries echoes of the original rhetorical structure of argument.



Argument Structure	Proposal Structure
<b>Introduction</b> Informs audience of purpose, creates interest, explains approach, establishes credibility	<b>Executive Summary</b> Declares purpose, creates interest, forecasts approach, establishes credibility, summarizes offer
<b>Statement of Fact</b> Sets background of the situation, describes context, explains current conditions	<b>Current Environment</b> Identifies problem, demonstrates understanding of context, establishes needs/wants
<b>Confirmation</b> States position, presents proofs, expresses value	<b>Recommendation</b> States solution, validates solutions with proofs, describes benefits
<b>Refutation</b> Addresses gaps, responds to contrary positions	<b>Cost Proposal</b> Defines costs, expresses value
<b>Conclusion</b> Reinforces opinions, amplifies points, rouses emotion and urgency, summarizes	<b>Implementation</b> Reinforces solution and commitments, establishes timeline for delivery, allocates responsibilities, concludes



## A. Structure your proposal like an argument

The rhetorical structure makes perfect, logical sense:

**Introduce → State Facts → Prove → Refute → Conclude.**

One way of reinforcing the logic of your argument is to introduce your proposal sections with summaries that echo the preceding logical sequence.



## A. Structure your proposal like an argument

### Here's how that might work in your pricing section:

Paragraph 1 – Reintroduce your proposal's main idea, slanting it toward the financial value that you will explain in detail

Paragraph 2 – Restate the reader's needs and your benefits in summary form; perhaps in a table or bulleted list. Present each in the same order you used in the earlier sections. Anticipate the financial benefit for each tactical benefit

Paragraph 3 – State your complete costs as simply and directly as possible. Make sure you follow your customer's requirements, if provided. Present the bottom line here and refer to supporting details (line-by-line prices) in a pricing attachment

Paragraph 4 – Prove your value by showing total cost of ownership, return on investment, payback period, or other analytical methods (depict in graphical form if possible)

Paragraph 5 – Refute any of your reader's objections to your price, your rationale, or your approach

Paragraph 6 – Conclude your pricing section by summarizing the overall value of your solution or demonstrating the added value your solution offers beyond mere price



## B. Establish the validity of your proposal with logic

In proposals, we state claims and provide proofs to support them. The more objective our proofs are, the more compelling is our argument.

**Proofs take many forms, ranging from the definitive:**

Technical specifications | Test results | Certifications | Adherence to standards

**To the more anecdotal:** Baachu

Evidence of past performance | Testimonies of satisfied customers

Citations of awards and recognitions

To persuade, you must follow every claim with a proof and show how that proof will apply in your reader's world.



## C. Appeal to the emotions of your audience

A time-tested persuasive technique is to express how inaction or the wrong action can jeopardize your reader's well being. This is known as the "FUD factor" (fear, uncertainty, and doubt).

Another technique for eliciting an emotional response from readers is to use vivid language. You can bring vividness to your writing by using:

**Common words over their formal equivalents.**

**Concrete words instead of abstract terms.**

Some words are value laden in themselves. These words are emotionally charged across the spectrum of topics, from politics to religion to finance and beyond. Use them carefully.



## D. Express an ethical character

Ethical appeal means forging mutual respect with the audience by encapsulating your logical and emotional appeals with sincerity and honesty.

You can gain your reader's confidence and convey your strong ethics by:

Avoiding fallacies as you present your logical proofs

Acknowledging but not exploiting weaknesses

Admitting issues in the past, but explaining how they were resolved

Showing empathy for people that might be affected negatively by your solution

Expressing concern for the environment and a bias for sustainability

Using the ethical appeal provides added substance behind your argument and indicates that both sides will benefit through an agreement.



### 3. Anticipate your readers' questions so you can remove reasons for rejection

As a persuasive writer, make sure to take all the roadblocks to “yes” out of the way by anticipating every point at which your reader may become uncomfortable,

Always ask yourself the same questions your reader will ask you and be specific with your responses to these questions.

Details persuade; generalizations come off as hedges at best and smokescreens at worst.



#### **4. Apply Cialdini's Weapons of Influence to hone your arguments with lessons from modern behavioral science.**

Persuasion is presenting a case in such a way as to sway the opinion of others, make people believe certain information, or motivate a decision.

Influence is having a vision of the optimum outcome for a situation or organization and then, without using force or coercion, motivating people to work together toward making the vision a reality.

While proposal writers should write to persuade, they should also attempt to influence their readers.



Dr. Robert Cialdini's six principles are the result of research in human behaviour and describe techniques that take the traditional persuasive techniques a step or two further.

The table below lists and defines the techniques, known collectively as Weapons of Influence, and explains how you can use them in proposals.



TECHNIQUE	DEFINITION	PROPOSAL EXAMPLE
<b>Reciprocity</b>	Give something to your audience first, knowing their tendency to act in kind. How you give is important: the more personalized and unexpected the gift, the more effective it will be.	Refer to any free studies or analyses you have performed to get your customer to the point of purchase. Cite examples of free trials or beta versions given to your customer.
<b>Scarcity</b>	The scarcer something is, the greater its value. The value of its benefits and the uniqueness of those benefits are keys to success.	Emphasize the unique benefits of your products and services. Ghost your competition by pointing out clearly what you deliver that they don't.
<b>Authority</b>	Get credible, knowledgeable experts to substantiate your claims. For best effect, be introduced by or cite someone with credentials before you make your argument.	Gather or solicit positive reviews and testimonies for your projects and products. Cite awards prominently in your summaries.



TECHNIQUE	DEFINITION	PROPOSAL EXAMPLE
<b>Consistency</b>	Ask for small, initial commitments before you ask readers to take another, bigger risk. This reinforces the strategy of gaining quick, small wins to set the stage for major initiatives.	Propose a trial at an individual site before implementing across an enterprise. Create a staged implementation plan to reduce risk across the enterprise.
<b>Liking</b>	People say “yes” more often to people they like, to those who cooperate, and to those who are more like themselves. Find and state similarities you share before making your argument.	Leverage your relationships with the customer and his/her influencers. Remain customer-centric by assuming his/her voice and terminology. Drop names of people who have delivered good service to a customer.
<b>Social Proof</b>	When others do something, it makes it easier for us to follow. Capitalize on the herd mentality.	Provide examples of how other companies in your customer’s industry have adopted your solution.



## 5. Use graphics and multimedia to immerse your audience in the potential of your solution.

Graphics are powerful tools for persuading audiences. Graphic design influences:

**Credibility.** People equate visual design with professionalism

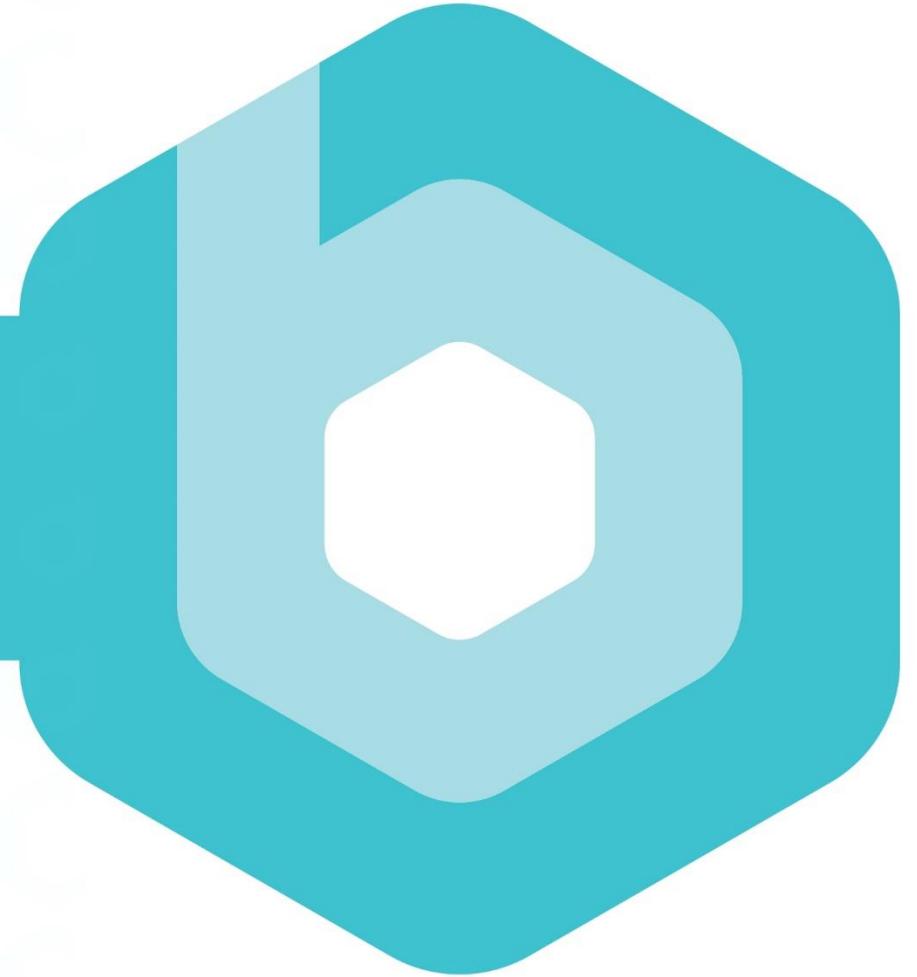
**Receptivity.** We tend to absorb main points faster when viewing images versus text

**Stickiness.** We recall information more readily when presented with images

**Responsiveness.** Images trigger emotional responses better than words

Creating a comprehensive visual strategy that reinforces and enhances your textual messages is a key way to ensure your reader sticks with your narrative and your narrative sticks in their minds.

# Application in Diverse Environments





Some persuasive techniques (especially the rhetorical and visual principles) are universal; some, like the social media-based techniques, will require your careful consideration before applying them in certain industries and especially in government procurements.

When writing to readers in the collectivistic locales, it would be more persuasive if you to write benefits according to their value to the group as opposed to an individual consumer.

# Recent Trends



## Applying persuasion techniques used on social media

Social media platforms share four key persuasive characteristics:

### **Brief:**

We can improve our persuasive appeal if each element of our proposal is as concise and direct as possible.

### **Personal:**

Decision makers' attention and then their trust can be gained by showing our connections with people or companies they know and respect.

### **Constant:**

Social media platforms are always on. Being there—present and available—builds trust, and trust is a key condition for persuasion. Tailor it to meet the personal information needs of decision makers and prepare them for upcoming engagements.

### **Free:**

Creating an added-value section of your proposal using “no-strings-attached” bonuses can help create a persuasive edge.

# Common Pitfalls and Misconceptions

# Recent Trends



## Importance of asking for what you want

Whether it is someone's business, someone's money, someone's time, or someone's help, you have to overtly ask for it.

### **“No” is the end**

An answer of “no” may be the end of your chances for a current piece of business, but what you learn about the reader and your persuasive and operational abilities will provide you another chance for “yes” down the road.



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**Baachu**

Sussex Innovation, No.1 Croydon, 12-16 Addiscombe Rd, Croydon CR0 0XT

[www.baachuscribble.com](http://www.baachuscribble.com)

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07718193599



[baskar@baachu.com](mailto:baskar@baachu.com)



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