

Finding Your Voice: Writing an Awesome Persuasive Essay

The Task: (You have 1 hour – *plenty* of time to do well!)

- Take a position on an issue and support it in a convincing, 5-paragraph response.
- Topics are usually school-related and somewhat controversial:
 - School uniforms: yes or no?
 - 12-month school year: yes or no?
 - Mandatory drug testing: yes or no?
- If you follow the formula, you will do well.

Step 1: Read the question (at least twice).

- Identify *the issue* you will be writing about:
 - mandatory drug testing
 - mandatory community service
 - physical education as a high school graduation requirement
- Decide *what* the question is asking you to do:
 - write an essay
 - write a letter to a particular person
 - write a letter to an organization, like a newspaper or company
- Circle or underline *who* you are writing to:
 - your school principal or Board of Education
 - your school newspaper or local newspaper
 - a friend or family member
- Circle or underline the *key terms* in the question.

Step 2: Decide on your position and reasons for your position.

- Use a t-chart to brainstorm possible reasons for each position
 - Make sure your reasons do not overlap in any way
 - If you can't think of at least 3 reasons to support your position, you cannot argue that side
- Pick the position that you can BEST defend, it may not be the one you most agree with
 - **Choose only one side**, not both
- Choose 3 good reasons to support your position; each reason will be a separate body paragraph

Step 3: Write your introductory paragraph.

- Use an attention-getting sentence to show why your reader should care about this topic:

With obesity on the rise in our country, physical education is more important than ever.

- State the current situation with the issue:

I understand that the Board of Education is considering removing physical education as a graduation requirement at North Hunterdon High School.

- State your position in a clear thesis using the word because to introduce the three reasons for your opinion:

*Physical education should remain a graduation requirement **because** students benefit from physical education by becoming part of a team, exercising regularly, and learning how to compete.*

Step 4: Write your body paragraphs.

- Topic sentences should focus on each paragraph's main reason
- Each body paragraph must include a transitional word or phrase:
 - "First," "secondly," "thirdly," "finally"
 - "One reason why . . .", "A second reason . . .", "In conclusion,"
- Body paragraphs should be at least 6 sentences
- Give evidence to support each reason:
 - Personal examples, facts, statistics, anecdotes, etc.
 - Statistics should be believable, but don't have to be 100% true:
 - Example: *Students who do not participate in any physical activity are 40% more likely to develop high cholesterol.*
- Explain how the evidence supports the reason
- Try to include at least 1 interesting, "sparkling" vocabulary word
- Finish each paragraph with a concluding sentence

Sample body paragraph:

One reason students should be required to take physical education is because they will learn how to be a part of a team. (**Topic sentence**) Most games played in gym class put students in teams where they have to work together in order to score points to win the game. (**Example of when/how teams are formed.**) Students must communicate with other students they may not know in order to achieve this goal, just like they will when they get a real job. (**Example of the relevancy of participating on a team.**) As an electrician, my brother has to work with the other electricians in his group to complete jobs safely and with **scrupulous** (**interesting vocab word**) detail. (**Specific example of a person who works on a team and the importance of him mastering this skill.**) If his team is not able to communicate with each other and work well together, people can get hurt and his company may not get re-hired for other jobs in the future. (**Possible result of not having had the opportunity to practice this team building skill.**) The ability to work with others is an

important real-life skill for success that gym class can teach everyone. (**Concluding statement – the “so what” of the paragraph.**)

Step 5: Write your conclusion paragraph.

- Restate your position clearly.
- Summarize each of the main reasons from your essay
- Use different words and phrases from the ones you used in the introductory and body paragraphs.
- Finish your essay with a sentence that clinches the argument

Sample conclusion paragraph:

In conclusion, (**Begin the conclusion with the words, “in conclusion”**) I believe every high school student should take gym class in order to graduate. (**Paraphrase of the thesis/position of the paper.**) Learning how to compete and work with other people are important skills that every person needs to be able to know in order to function in today’s world. In addition, the regular exercise will keep students healthier and able to deal with the stresses of high school and life. (**A few sentence summary of the main issues discussed in the essay.**) While you might be thinking that it will help lighten our load, in reality it will only weigh us down. (**Clincher statement – the final amen or “Ah ha” of the essay.**)

Step 6: Review and edit your work.

- For 5 minutes, carefully read what you have written.
- Check for correct capitalization, punctuation, spelling, subject-verb agreement, etc.
- Use the yellow “Writer’s Checklist” as a reminder
- You can erase or cross out mistakes, and correct them in the margins
- This essay is scored as a rough-draft