

Guide to Persuasive (Argumentative) Writing

Matthew Williams • English Language • May 3, 2026

Purpose

A persuasive (argumentative – interchangeable within a CSEC context) essay argues a point of view on a given topic, aiming to convince the reader to agree with your position. In CSEC, this appears in **Section D** of the English Language exam. For internal assessments, it is typically a pre-exam task worth **30% of your grade**.

The topic may come from any field but will only require general knowledge and straightforward critical thinking.

Structure

- **Introduction** — open with a hook, establish context, and close with a clear **thesis statement** that explicitly states your position
- **Body Paragraphs** — each focused on one argument; use at least two varied persuasive techniques per paragraph
- **Conclusion** — summarise your key arguments and close with a memorable final statement or call to action

A counter-argument (acknowledging the opposing view and refuting it) is **not a required section** — it is simply one persuasive technique among many. If it fits your argument and you can refute it well, use it. If not, leave it out.

Key Tips

- **Your introduction must end with a thesis statement** — a clear, direct sentence that tells the reader exactly what position you are arguing. Without it, your essay has no anchor.
- **Use at least two varied persuasive techniques per paragraph** — do not rely on the same device repeatedly. Combine techniques: a rhetorical question with a statistic, an anecdote with logical reasoning, etc. A useful mnemonic for core techniques is **DAFORESTI** (see below).
- **Choose a side** — you may argue for or against the given statement. Before writing, briefly outline points on both sides to identify which has the stronger arguments.
- **Plan before you write** — spend 6–8 minutes on a short outline before you begin. It does not need to be in full sentences. A clear plan means you will not stop mid-essay to figure out what to say next.

- **Counter-argument is optional** — it is one persuasive technique, not a required paragraph. Only use it if you can refute the opposing view convincingly; a weak refutation does more harm than no counter-argument at all.
- **Keep your tone measured** — be convincing without being aggressive, dogmatic, or overly emotional. Persuade with firmness and conviction, but also with grace and tact.
- **Manage your time** — aim to finish within 40 minutes. Do not spend more than 8 minutes on any one body paragraph. Write quickly and keep moving.
- **Word limit** — you are typically assigned 250–300 words, but you will **not be penalised for going over**. Write as much as your argument demands. Quality and completeness matter far more than hitting an exact count — do not cut a strong point just to stay within the limit.

DDAFORESTII — Persuasive Techniques

DDAFORESTII is a mnemonic covering the core techniques used in persuasive writing. Aim to use techniques from this list and vary them across paragraphs.

Letter	Technique	What it is	Example
D	Direct Address	Speaking directly to the reader using "you" to create a personal connection	"You have the power to change this."
A	Anecdote	A brief personal or illustrative story used to make a point relatable	"My grandmother walked five miles to school every day — and she never complained."
F	Facts	Information that can be verified and proven true	"The school day ends at 3:00 PM."
O	Opinion	A personal viewpoint presented with conviction to lead the reader	"This is the most innovative solution of the decade."
R	Repetition / Rhetorical Questions	Repeating a word or phrase for emphasis, or asking a question to provoke thought rather than receive an answer	"We must act. We must act now." / "Do we want our children growing up in a polluted world?"
E	Emotive Language	Words chosen to trigger a strong emotional response	"The vulnerable, defenceless puppy was abandoned."
S	Statistics	Numbers, data, or percentages that add credibility	"80% of people surveyed preferred the new approach."

T	Triples (Rule of Three)	Presenting ideas in groups of three for rhythm and impact	"It is fast, cheap, and effective."
I	Imperatives	Command verbs that tell the reader what to do, creating urgency or a call to action	"Stop ignoring the evidence. Act now. Demand change."

These are starting points — you can also use analogies, hyperbole, contrast, alliteration, and expert voices. The key is **variety**: never lean on the same technique twice in a row.

Annotated Example

*Sample question: Speaker A says children should learn strict obedience to their parents. Speaker B says the greatest revolutionaries in history were not obedient people. The essay below argues **for** strict obedience.*

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What if Mark Zuckerberg had sheepishly gone to school and pursued the life his parents had set out for him? What if Sam Sharpe had accepted the enslaved conditions of Africans in Jamaica? What if Rosa Parks had just gone to the back of the bus as she was told, or if Marcus Garvey and Nelson Mandela had simply accepted the oppression of Black people without a fight? Certainly, blind obedience never did a great revolutionary make. However, while thoughtful disobedience to societal standards has yielded some powerful transformative results, these cases have been the exception, not the rule. As a general guiding principle, obedience is necessary for the proper functioning of a family and a society, and it is especially necessary to keep children safe and balanced.

It cannot be denied that sound judgement and independent thinking are valuable qualities in a productive human being. Good parents strive to raise children who think for themselves rather than simply following the crowd. However, those same parents often become livid when these same children disobey them. Why is that? Realistically, children do not know everything and are often misguided by their lack of experience. Moreover, all of the "disobedient" revolutionaries cited by those opposing strict obedience were adults who disobeyed with clear purpose and moral conviction, not simply to assert their independence. Furthermore, these leaders had loyal, obedient followers, and without that obedience their movements would have failed. Imagine if, after Samuel Sharpe laid out the plan for the Christmas Rebellion, some of the enslaved Africans had chosen to disobey his instructions. They could have brought the entire plan to ruin. Thus, while children should be encouraged to think critically, a general spirit of disobedience should not be nurtured, as it leads to failure for both the individual and society as a whole.

Obedience is essential for the safety of children, and children must learn to obey promptly. Imagine a little boy, Johnny, told by his mother not to touch the electrical socket. After two

warnings, he receives a stunning electric shock and never goes near the socket again. Though Johnny eventually learns his lesson, would it not have saved him and his family considerable pain if he had simply obeyed the first time? Experience may be the best teacher, but it is a hard and cruel one, and its lessons can carry consequences that were easily avoidable. Many young people have lost their lives or caused serious harm to themselves and others simply because they would not heed the advice of those older and wiser. A child who learns to obey early is a child who is protected.

Many teenagers argue that rules are pointless, and perhaps some are. However, sometimes a rule carries value that a child, in their limited understanding, cannot yet see. Consider the humble stoplight. What if everyone decided to ignore red lights and drive out into the road whenever they pleased? We would not be free. We would be enslaved by anxiety and disorder, never knowing when we might be the victim of a fatal accident. The limitation of the stoplight, and the shared understanding that everyone will obey the same signal, is precisely what renders us truly free to use the road without fear. In the same way, obedience to rules teaches children humility: that the world does not revolve around any one person, and that we must all live by common standards to coexist peacefully. Adults are not perfect, and neither are the rules they make. But there is wisdom that comes with age, and that wisdom deserves respect. The bottom line is this: obedience is necessary for the proper running of society.

In conclusion, critical thinking is important, but obedience is more so. While an open and questioning mind is to be encouraged, obedience remains essential for the protection of children, the safety of those around them, and the orderly functioning of society as a whole.

Practice Questions

- 1. "Vegetarianism is the only way to be truly healthy and to live a long life." Write an essay expressing your views on the statement above.
- 2. "Supermodels and bodybuilders in the public eye promote unrealistic body expectations for young people and do more harm than good." Write an essay expressing your views on the statement above.
- 3. Some stakeholders at a local pre-school are campaigning to abolish homework for children under seven, arguing it is pointless and burdensome. Write a speech to the school community stating whether you agree or disagree.
- 4. A school in your community has begun offering condoms and birth control to students. Many in the community believe schools should promote sexual abstinence instead. Write a letter to the editor expressing your views on the issue.
- 5. **Speaker A:** Single-sex schools are problematic because they do not properly prepare students for real-world interaction between males and females. **Speaker B:** Co-educational environments create distractions and prevent children from receiving education tailored

to gender differences. Write an essay advocating for either single-sex or co-educational schooling.

- 6. **Speaker A:** Let's spend money on campaigns to ban foods high in sugar, fat, salt, and cholesterol. **Speaker B:** We should instead invest in research into better and cheaper medications for those already suffering from chronic non-communicable diseases. Write an essay agreeing with either Speaker A or Speaker B.
- 7. "Starting school and work at later times would benefit the entire society greatly." Write an essay expressing your views on the statement above.
- 8. "Skills pay the bills." Schools should focus on producing a more skilled population rather than placing so much emphasis on academics. Write a speech to your school board stating the extent to which you agree or disagree.

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