

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 clearly state your position (thesis)
- **Body Paragraphs** — each focused on one argument; include at least one persuasive device per paragraph
- **Counter-Argument** — acknowledge the opposing view, then refute it to strengthen your own position
- **Conclusion** — summarise your key arguments and close with a memorable final statement or call to action

Key Tips

- **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.
- **Include a counter-argument** — acknowledging the opposing view shows fairness and actually makes your position more convincing.
- **Use persuasive devices** — include at least one per paragraph and vary them. Devices include: statistics, facts, quotes, expert voices, rhetorical questions, anecdotes, similes, metaphors, hyperbole, contrast, repetition, emotional appeal, and logical reasoning.
- **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 will typically be assigned 300–400 words. Do not sacrifice quality chasing the limit, but stay reasonably within it. Time management matters more than word count.

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.*

DOCUMENT EXAMPLE

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 society, and it is especially necessary in a world where the quality of a parent is not the only factor in a child's life. 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 for the sake of their safety. They could have brought the entire plan to a halt, and the rebellion would have been crushed. In the same way, a child who disobeys a parent's instructions, such as not to play in the street, could be injured or worse. A child who disobeys a teacher's instructions, such as not to talk during a lesson, could be disruptive and cause a learning environment to become chaotic. In the end, disobedience leads to failure for both the individual and society as a whole. 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 have followed the rules. Obedience is a virtue, and it is one that should be taught from a young age. It is a 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 in that, and that wisdom deserves respect. The bottom line is this: obedience is necessary for the proper running of society, 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.