

## **Structuring Winning Arguments**

Why should we be concerned with the structure of an argument? Well, all effective persuasive messages have several vital pieces of information. Just as Plato stated that every message should have a structure like an animal (head, body and feet), so too must our arguments follow an understandable pattern. A confused mind says “no.” If the audience can’t follow your facts or the substance of your message, then their brains will not accept your message. That’s because there is no clear message to accept.

At one time or another, you have probably been in a classroom where the teacher has completely lost you. You had no idea where the topic was going or where it had been. When this happens, your mind stalls and the learning process stops. Confusion is a state of mind that creates tension. We all hate to be confused. When, as persuaders, we create this mental confusion in our audience, we are shooting ourselves in the foot. Most uneducated “rookie persuaders” follow Harry Truman’s advice: “If you can’t convince ’em, confuse ’em.” This manual aims to help you avoid making such a mistake in your persuasive efforts.

Before we jump into the meat of this topic, remember as you prepare your persuasive message that you want to focus on one defined issue. Keep in mind that you are not there to persuade your audience on ten different points. Stay focused and steer clear of sensitive issues that aren’t integral to your original agenda. In other words, don’t inadvertently offend your audience on one issue when your focus is on another. The structure of your persuasive message should follow the pattern discussed below.

### **1. Create Interest.**

You have to generate an interest in your chosen topic. Your audience needs a reason to listen to you. In other words, why should they care? What’s in it for them? How can you help them? A message that starts with a really good reason to listen will grab the attention of the audience, thereby enabling you to continue with your presentation. Without this attention, there is no hope of getting your message across.

## **2. State the Problem.**

You must clearly define the problem you are trying to solve. The best pattern for an effective persuasive speech is to: 1) find a problem and 2) relate to the audience how it affects them. In this way, you show them a problem they have and why it is of concern to them. That is, you illustrate why this issue is a problem to your audience and then you reveal to them how this problem affects them.

## **3. Offer Evidence.**

This is the support you give to back up your argument. Evidence validates your claims and offers proof that your argument is correct. It allows your audience to rely on other sources besides you. Evidence can include examples, statistics, stories, testimonies, analogies and any other supporting material that is used to enhance the integrity and congruency of your message. When you include different supporting material (examples, statistics, stories, testimonies, analogies) in your presentation, you can individually target different personality types. Everyone resonates with different supporting material, so the more pieces of evidence you incorporate, the more audience members you'll convince.

## **4. Present a Solution.**

You have gained your audience's interest and you have provided evidence in support of your message. Now you must solve their problem. In leading up to the resolution, you present the argument you want your audience to believe and then satisfy the need you have earlier identified or created. In so doing, you have created dissonance in your audience's mind and now you are providing them with the solution. How can your product meet their needs and wants? How can it help them achieve their goals?

## **5. Give a Call to Action.**

A persuasive message is not true persuasion if your audience does not know exactly what they need to do once they walk away from you. When presenting your call to action, be specific and precise. In order to complete the solution to your audience's problem, you must spur them to take action. This is the climax of your presentation, the peak of your

logic and emotion. Keep in mind that the prescribed actions must be feasible for your audience. Make your call to action as easy as possible.

Using this type of call-to-action structure facilitates people's acceptance of your message and clarifies what you want them to do. We all have a logical side to our mind, which results in our need for order and arrangement. If we don't sense some sort of structure, we tend to become confused. In response to this confusion, we create our own organizational flow—thus creating our own solution. If you can't be clear, concise and orderly in your call to action, your prospects will find someone else who is.

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