

Topic: Persuasive written texts

Examining persuasive language features

Today you will:

- understand language features used for purposes and effects in a persuasive media text.

Resources

Find and prepare

Sheet 7 — Individuality
(from previous lesson)
Exercise book

Key terms

abstract noun, allusion, evaluative language, figurative language, innuendo, irony, language features, metaphor, modality, persuasive device, rhetorical device, rhetorical question, tricolon

For definitions and explanations of terms, please see the [Glossary](#).

Lesson

Examine language features of a persuasive media



In the previous lesson, you examined an author's use of text structures such as repetition, nominalisation and lexical cohesion that persuade an audience to accept ideas represented in a text.

In this lesson, you will expand your understanding of persuasive texts by examining some language features of media texts that influence an audience.



The language used in constructing persuasive written media texts includes features and devices that have specific purposes and effects.

Language features which are used for specific persuasion-related purposes and effects in persuasive media texts include:

- evaluative language
- rhetorical language
- evocative vocabulary
- figurative language
- modality

1. Open **Sheet 7 — Individuality** and re-read the media article. As you read, focus your attention on how the author uses specific choices in language features to influence the audience to accept a point of view on the issue of individuality.

You will now spend time examining how each of these language features have been manipulated in the article on **Sheet 7** for specific purposes and effects.

Evaluative language can be used to express positive and negative opinions or ideas directly and indirectly. Examples of evaluative language include:

- precise choices in adjectives, adverbs and verbs to construct precise meaning and make inferences
- use of abstract nouns
- other devices such as irony, innuendo and allusion can also be used in an evaluative way by inferring meanings.

evaluative language: positive or negative language that judges the worth of something

It is used to persuade audiences and influence attitudes either positively or negatively about:

- emotions, feelings or opinions (Language of Affect)
- aspects of people such as their behaviour (Language of Judgment)
- the quality of objects such as art or literary works (Language of Appreciation).



abstract noun: a name for an idea, feeling, concept or quality that does not physically exist and therefore cannot be identified with any of the five senses, for example: courage, democracy, friendship.

2. The following evaluative words and phrases express the author's opinion towards ideas from the media article on **Sheet 7**. Indicate whether the words convey positive or negative evaluation about the topic by placing a tick in the relevant column.

Idea discussed in the article	Evaluative words/phrases	Meaning constructed	
		Positive	Negative
outside influences on individuality	'pressure of circumstances', 'threaten', 'diminish', 'nullify', 'encroaching'		
people who do not preserve their individuality	'give way to circumstances', 'too weak', 'easily allayed', 'superficial'		
preserving individuality	'desirable', 'strives to make it prevail', 'defend the possessions which we hold most dear', 'see that no-one robs us'		

3. Consider the following abstract nouns from **Sheet 7** that also convey evaluative meaning. For each abstract noun, explain the positive or negative meaning constructed by its use. The first one has been done for you, as an example.

Abstract noun	Evaluation expressed
individuality	A positive meaning is conveyed because the idea of being an individual is generally seen as a favourable trait.
threat	
courage	
aspirations	

4. Review your prior knowledge of the following language devices used to express indirect evaluation. Match each device with its definition.

Language device	Answer	Definition
irony		A A remark that can be taken in more than one way. The first meaning is obvious but the other, when thought about, can be a suggestive (rude) or disparaging remark (a put-down).
innuendo		B An indirect reference to someone or something that conveys or enhances a particular meaning.
allusion		C A device used for emphasis or humour; occurs when the reality or outcome is the opposite of what is intended or is actually happening.

5. The following is an example of irony in the media article on **Sheet 7**.

Explain the irony and how it has been used in an evaluative way to express positive or negative judgment or opinion. (3–4 sentences)

'Now, most of us would not stand idly by while our property was being taken from us, but should we, or do we, make as much exertion to see that no one robs us of our thoughts and feelings, our aspirations and ideas which go to make up what is called our individuality?'

Use of **evocative vocabulary** is another way to express evaluation or opinions indirectly.

Evocative vocabulary can be used to persuade and construct meaning by evoking or creating strong feelings or emotions in the audience through deliberate word choices.

evocative vocabulary: words or phrases that are purposefully chosen to evoke emotion, or bring strong images, memories, or feelings to mind

6. Examine the examples of evocative vocabulary below. For each example explain:

- the emotion or feeling evoked
- how its use helps to influence readers to accept the writer's perspective about the issue of individuality.

The first one has been done for you, as an example.

Evocative vocabulary	Emotion evoked	Effect
'assault'	fear — if you are assaulted, you are being harmed	It positions readers to accept that their personal possessions, including their individuality, are in danger of actual harm from 'circumstances'.
'see that no one robs us'		
'fight for it', 'guard it'		

Writers also use **modality** to add to precision and persuasion by deliberately choosing modal verbs, adverbs and adjectives to express degrees of meaning about:

- how likely something is — certain, likely, possible, potentially, unlikely
- obligation/permission associated with something — must, ought, should, supposed to, have to, may
- how important something is — vital, necessary, integral, essential, important, required
- how certain an aspect is — definite, will, could, might, undoubtedly, maybe, perhaps
- how frequent something is — always, usually, generally, often, sometimes, rarely, never
- to what extent — completely, totally, mainly, generally, partly, somewhat, almost, extremely, incredibly, moderately, slightly, scarcely
- how confident they are about an idea — convinced, positive, sure, believe, understand, suspect
- the emphasis of an idea — very, really, simply, quite

modality: an area of meaning having to do with possibility, probability, obligation and permission. Modality can be expressed by several different kinds of words:

- adverbs (for example: 'possibly', 'necessarily', 'certainly', 'perhaps')
- adjectives (for example: 'possible', 'probable', 'likely', 'necessary')
- nouns (for example: 'possibility', 'necessity', 'obligation')
- modal verbs (for example: 'permit', 'oblige')



7. Find five examples of modal words in the media article on **Sheet 7** that have been used to express the writer's level of certainty about their opinion.

Rhetorical devices are language features deliberately used in persuasive texts in order to persuade and develop layers of meaning. A few examples of these devices include:

- rhetorical questions
- repetition (as a language feature)
- tricolon
- personal pronouns.

rhetorical devices: language devices which are used in rhetoric (a term for the 'craft' of written or spoken persuasion) to persuade an audience

8. Match each rhetorical device with its definition by writing A, B, C or D in the answer column.

Rhetorical device	Answer	Definition
rhetorical question		A A group of three words or phrases placed together for specific effect, usually to emphasise or reinforce ideas.
repetition		B Words used to create a feeling of inclusion in the audience such as 'we', 'us', 'our'.
tricolon		C A question asked to provoke thought or emphasise an idea, rather than requiring a response.
personal pronouns		D The deliberate use of the same word (or word associations) a number of times in a text, for emphasis and persuasive effect.

9. Find an example of each of these persuasive devices at work in the media article in **Sheet 7** and explain the effect of its use.

Rhetorical device	Example from Sheet 7	Effect
rhetorical question		
repetition		

Rhetorical device	Example from Sheet 7	Effect
tricolon		
personal pronouns		

Figurative language can also be used to create indirect meaning through imagery. Figurative language devices (metaphors and similes) create comparative images that construct layers of meaning, by conveying indirect positive or negative associations.

figurative language: word groups or phrases used in a way that differs from the expected or everyday usage. They are used in a non-literal way for particular effect (for example, simile: 'white as a sheet'; metaphor: 'all the world's a stage'; personification: 'the wind grabbed at my clothes').



10. Match each figurative device with its definition by writing A, B, C or D in the answer column.

Figurative device	Answer	Definition
metaphor		A A comparison of two things using 'as' or 'like'; suggesting that one thing has the qualities of another one.
simile		B Giving human qualities or characteristics to non-human things such as animals, plants, objects or abstract ideas, to construct meaning.

Figurative device	Answer
alliteration	
personification	

Definition	
C	A comparison of two things, saying one thing is another; inferring that one thing has the features or qualities of the other.
D	The repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words to achieve an effect, for example <i>big, bold, booming brass</i> .

11. Find an example of each of the following figurative language devices on **Sheet 7**. Explain how the use of the device constructs meaning and influences readers to accept the writer's point of view about individuality. The first one has been done for you, as an example.

Figurative device	Example from Sheet 7	Effect
personification	'... in such cases our individuality ... was never robust enough to live out of its swaddling clothes.'	It creates an image of a 'weak' or 'easily allayed' individuality as being a sickly baby that did not live past its early months (when babies were generally swaddled or wrapped tightly).
metaphor (extended)		
simile		
alliteration		

Reflect on language features of a persuasive media text

By using a range of language features, an author can manipulate language to create particular effects and influence an audience to accept their ideas and point of view on an issue.

12. Write a paragraph reflecting on how well the author of 'Individuality' on **Sheet 7** has manipulated language features to create a precise and persuasive text.



Hot tip

Note: Your paragraph should include:

- a clear **topic sentence** that outlines the central idea of your paragraph
- **supporting sentences** that:
 - provide *examples* and/or *evidence* from the text
 - *explain* your ideas, elaborating on the topic sentence
- a **concluding sentence** that sums up the ideas in your paragraph and links back to the topic sentence.



So, words and the way they are manipulated through language features and devices are the tools of a writer's trade; the writer uses them purposefully to shape and craft ideas and meaning. Now I can see how they all work together to influence audiences.

That's right. No matter if you're writing an imaginative scene, a persuasive text or an analytical paragraph, text structures and language features work together to influence an audience.

Well, you've reached the end of the term. Did you enjoy 'Twelve Angry Men'? What about persuasive media texts? It's important that you now reflect on your experiences engaging with these text types. Consider their text structures and language features. Which do you prefer writing? Which do you prefer reading? Perhaps you'd like to read another play or a novel on your break? Perhaps it'll even be set in a different social, cultural or historical context.

