

# The Classical Pattern of Persuasion

*Developed by John R. Edlund*

## MINI-MODULE: STUDENT VERSION

### Module Texts

Edlund, John R., "The Classical Pattern of Persuasion." 2018.

### Reading Rhetorically

#### Preparing to Read

##### Activity 1: Exploring Key Concepts – Quickwrite

Think about the way you usually organize essays, whether it be the five-paragraph essay or some other formula, or if you just start writing and keep going until it seems finished. Describe what you usually do, then think about where you learned it, what you like about it, and what might be some disadvantages. Share your quickwrite with a partner and compare methods. What are the similarities and differences? Write those down too. Save this quickwrite for use in a subsequent activity.

#### Text – Edlund, "The Classical Pattern of Persuasion"

#### Reading Purposefully

##### Activity 2: Reading for Understanding

Read "The Classical Pattern of Persuasion." As you read, think of the question, "How can I use this?"

#### Questioning the Text

##### Activity 3: Summarizing and Responding

After reading the article:

- Try to write down the six key terms (the English ones) in order from memory.
- If you can't remember all of them, skim the article and try again.
- After you can do it, find a partner and test each other.
- After you both can remember the terms, write them down again and write down what goes in each section, once again from memory.
- If you can't do that, check the article once more.

The goal is to be able to remember these terms quickly in future writing situations, especially in timed writing.

#### Activity 4: Thinking Critically

This pattern is over 2,000 years old and it was developed by ancient Romans who spoke Latin and wrote on scrolls. Do you think it is actually useful today? Why or why not?

If you don't think it is useful as it is, how would you change it? Would some shorter version of the classical pattern work for a tweet on Twitter or for another kind of short social media post if you were trying to convince someone of something?

Write a short paragraph about your thoughts on this. Then form a small group of three or four and have a discussion about the usefulness of this pattern. Report on the conclusions of your group to the rest of the class.

#### Activity 5: Synthesizing Multiple Perspectives

Do real newspaper articles follow the classical pattern? You will find that some do and some not so much. The following example is from an online British publication called *The Register* that publishes technology news. You can read the whole article by following the URL:

[www.theregister.co.uk/2016/07/13/smartphones\\_arent\\_tiny\\_pcs\\_but\\_thats\\_how\\_we\\_use\\_them\\_in\\_the\\_west/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2016/07/13/smartphones_arent_tiny_pcs_but_thats_how_we_use_them_in_the_west/)

##### **Smartphones Aren't Tiny PCs, but That's How We Use Them in the West**

In China, they get it, QR codes are like money and mobile payments are everywhere.

By Mark Pesce

*The Register*, July 13, 2016

| Section      | Paragraphs | Comments |
|--------------|------------|----------|
| Introduction |            |          |
| Background   |            |          |

| Section            | Paragraphs | Comments |
|--------------------|------------|----------|
| Possible Positions |            |          |
| Support            |            |          |
| Counterarguments   |            |          |
| Conclusion         |            |          |

Other examples can be seen in this blog post by John R, Edlund where he analyzes three responses in the *New York Times* about whether a candidate for high political office should have military service: [textrhet.com/2016/08/11/descriptive-outlining-and-arrangement/](http://textrhet.com/2016/08/11/descriptive-outlining-and-arrangement/).

In my analysis, I find that one response follows the classical pattern, one is close to the five-paragraph essay though it has seven paragraphs, and one is similar to an exam response. (Guitarsophist)

After reading these examples, try doing your own analysis. Go to a newspaper site and find an editorial, an op-ed, or a feature article on problems with social media. (It is better to go to a traditional newspaper site such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Wall Street Journal* because other types of sites may have very short articles, blog posts, or pieces that are organized as lists with titles such as “5 Problems with Social Media and Technology.” There is nothing wrong with these. You just are unlikely to find the classical pattern.) Once you have found a likely article, do a descriptive outline of it.

You have probably already done a descriptive outline as part of another module, but in case you haven't try this:

- Print out the article.
- Draw a line where you think the introduction ends.
- Read the article until you find where the conclusion begins.
- Divide the rest of the article up into sections based on what each section is talking about or doing.
- For each section write down what it is about (the topic), what it is saying about the topic, and what it is doing for the reader.

That's your descriptive outline. If you can't print out the article, draw a box on a piece of paper for each paragraph, divide up the sections and write your topic, says, and does statements next to the boxes.

Now take the sections of the classical pattern and see how they match up with the sections you have defined for the article. If it does, great! If not, analyze how it is organized and decide whether it is effective or not. Share your results with your discussion group. Try to come up with some conclusions about what effective organization looks like.

## **Preparing to Respond**

### **Discovering What You Think**

#### **Activity 6: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation**

Think about a problem on social media you have noticed or experienced. You may have encountered one or more of these issues in doing the descriptive outlining exercise in Activity 5. Some common ones that people are talking about are "fake" news, cyberbullying, sexting, harassment, trolls, bots, loneliness, anxiety, privacy, and many others. Of course there are many positive aspects of social media too, but for this assignment, think mainly about a problem you think is important and what advice you would give for individuals or what you think that social media companies should do.

- Write an essay about this problem organizing it according to the classical pattern.

The object of this activity is to try the classical pattern at least once to see if it works for you.

(A side note: A teacher I know who teaches ninth grade taught the classical pattern to his students. Later in the semester, the school had an essay test and his ninth graders got higher scores than any of the twelfth graders.)

#### **Activity 7: Gathering Ideas and Materials**

You could write this essay relying entirely on your own experience of social media, whatever platform you use. After all, this is a problem that you have noticed or experienced yourself. However, even if we have experienced a problem, we may not understand the causes and we may not have the best solution. You have already done a bit of research about problems in social media, and done a descriptive outline of an article. You may want to do a bit more research on causes and solutions.

# Writing Rhetorically

## Composing a Draft

### Activity 8: Making Choices as You Write

For this first time using the classical pattern, you may want to try composing section by section.

#### Introduction

- What problem are you discussing?
- How can you establish your ethos?

#### Background

- How did this problem come to be?
- When does it happen?
- What kinds of users does it happen to?
- Why is it important now?

#### Possible Positions

- What is the core issue?
- What position does the company that runs the social media platform take on this problem?
- Do you agree?
- What are some other positions that people take?
- What position do you take?
- What is your solution to the problem? (This is your thesis.)

#### Support

- What are the arguments in favor of your position?
- How can you support them?

#### Counterarguments

- What do people you disagree with argue?
- Why do you disagree with them?
- How can you refute their arguments?

#### Conclusion

- What action should people take to solve this problem?

After you have made notes for each section using the above pattern and questions, write a draft of your essay.

## Revising Rhetorically

### Activity 9: Gathering and Responding to Feedback

Because your classmates probably include a lot of social media users, they can probably give you good feedback on whether your solution to the problem will work. However, part of your audience may be older people, such as your teacher, who may not understand social media as well as you do. Share your essay with a partner asking these questions:

- Will my solution work? Why or why not?
- What have I not taken into consideration?
- What background do I need to explain so that older readers will understand my points?

Revise your draft accordingly.

## Editing

### Activity 10: Editing Your Draft

Proofread your draft for typical errors. Then submit it to your teacher.

### Activity 11: Reflecting on Your Writing Process

Return to the quick write you wrote in Activity 1. How have your ideas about organizing essays changed? Will you organize future essays differently? In what ways?

Write another quickwrite explaining your current ideas about organization.

## Works Cited

- Pesce, Mark. "Smartphones Aren't Tiny PCs, but That's How We Use Them in the West." *The Register*, 13 July 2016, [www.theregister.co.uk/2016/07/13/smartphones\\_arent\\_tiny\\_pcs\\_but\\_thats\\_how\\_we\\_use\\_them\\_in\\_the\\_west/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2016/07/13/smartphones_arent_tiny_pcs_but_thats_how_we_use_them_in_the_west/).
- Guitarsophist. "Descriptive Outlining and Arrangement." *Teaching Text Rhetorically*, 16 Aug. 2016, [textrhet.com/2016/08/11/descriptive-outlining-and-arrangement/](http://textrhet.com/2016/08/11/descriptive-outlining-and-arrangement/).