

1. Persuasive Paragraph

A. Choosing a Topic

The first thing you need when you start writing an essay is a topic and some ideas.

TASK: Read the topics on the next page and highlight the ones you find most interesting (2-5 topics). If you like, write your own topic in the NOTES section.

TASK: Choose one of the topics you highlighted and make notes on these questions:

What is **your opinion** about the topics you chose?

What are **some reasons** for your opinion?

- At what age should children be allowed to have a phone at school?
- Should group work in university classes be done with friends or in random groups?
- Should both men and women do the cooking at home?
- Is it better to eat out in restaurants or to eat at home?
- Should there be a tax on sugary drinks?
- Should Japanese restaurants have more vegetarian options on the menu?
- Should more landlords allow pets in rented accommodation?
- Should students be allowed to bring their pets to university?
- Should pet shops be illegal?
- Should Japan introduce national service in the military?
- Do professional sports men and women get paid too much?
- Should men and women be paid the same for doing the same work?
- Should foreign movies be shown in the original language with Japanese subtitles or dubbed into Japanese?
- Should shy students be exempt from presentations and speaking activities?
- Should there be an option to do classes online for students who find it difficult to come to university?
- Should there be controls on violent video games?
- Should there be rules about what can and can't be posted on social media?
- Should it be easier/cheaper to get a driver's license?
- What's the best way to grade university students (e.g. final test, essays, evaluation of weekly performance, attendance etc.)
- Should Japan spend more money on its space program?
- Should companies be allowed to gather and sell your personal data?
- Should there be fast food restaurants on university campuses?
- Should people with unhealthy lifestyles (e.g. smokers) pay more for healthcare?
- Does the public have a right to know about the private lives of famous people?
- Is it okay to eat on public transport?
- Should AGU allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus?

NOTES

B. Stating Your Opinion

In order to write about your opinion, you first need to **state it** clearly.

TASK: Think about these questions:

What is your opinion?

How strongly do you feel about it?

How can you express your opinion in a single sentence?

Modal Verbs: In English modal verbs are used to show how strongly you feel about something. They are called '*modals*' because they *modulate* (change) the strength of a statement. Rank the following statements to show how strongly the writer feels.

AGU **could** allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus.

AGU **must** allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus.

AGU **ought to** allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus.

AGU **should** allow students to park their bicycles on the campus.

AGU **has no choice** but to allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus.

Some *modal verbs* can also be used to state the negative form of an opinion statement.

AGU **must not** continue to ban student bicycles from the Aoyama campus.

AGU **ought not to** continue to ban student bicycles from the Aoyama campus.

AGU **should not** continue to ban student bicycles from the Aoyama campus.

TASK: Now write a clear statement of your opinion about the topic you chose earlier (e.g. *AGU should allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus*)

C. Giving Reasons for your Opinion

In order to express your opinion clearly and make it more persuasive to others, it is necessary to give logical reasons.

TASK: Think about these questions and make some notes:

Why do I have this opinion?

e.g. I believe that cycling is healthy and good for the environment

If I get what I want, what will be the benefits?

e.g. Students will get more exercise and it will help reduce pollution

What has caused me to have this opinion?

e.g. Most universities in the UK encourage students to use bicycles

Opinion Paragraph: Bring Back the Bikes!

The trains are crowded and students don't get enough exercise, **so** AGU should build bicycle parking on the Aoyama Campus and encourage students to come here by bike. A few years ago there was an accident at AGU involving a bicycle, **so** the campus security banned bikes. This was an understandable response **because** it is their job to ensure the safety of students and staff. **However**, there is an environmental crisis in the world and many health problems are also being caused by a lack of exercise. **Therefore**, reintroducing bicycle racks and allowing a limited number of students to come to university by bicycle is an obviously good policy to adopt. The university ought to make this a priority and students shouldn't feel shy about demanding action to bring back the bikes!

TASK: Write answers to these questions:

1. What's the topic of this paragraph?

2. What is the writer's opinion?

3. How strongly does the writer feel about this opinion? How do you know?

4. What is the function of the words in bold (*connectors*)?

so	introduces a cause
because	introduces an effect
However	introduces an effect
Therefore	introduces a contrast

2. Persuasive Essay

Now you have a clearly stated opinion about your topic and some logical reasons to support it. It's time to write an essay to persuade others to agree with you and perhaps even take action! Your essay will be divided into three main parts: The introduction (1 paragraph); the body (2 or 3 paragraphs); the conclusion (1 shorter paragraph).

A. The Introduction

Your introduction should have four parts: Title/attention-getter; background; opinion statement; guide (to the body paragraph topics).

i/ Title/attention-getter

People have a lot of choice about what to read. If your title is not interesting nobody will look at your essay. If the first line of your essay is not interesting many people will just stop reading and look for something different.

TASK: A title such as *Bring Back the Bikes!* is likely to be interesting to someone who likes bicycles as it is a short and direct call to action. It also has *three Bs* in it! Write a snappy (short and interesting) title for your persuasive essay.

Your first line should also be as interesting as possible.

A bad (boring) example is:

“These days there is a lot of pollution in Tokyo and people have to wear a mask because the air is not clean to breathe.”

A good example is:

“We are living through the worst environmental crisis since the extinction of the dinosaurs 60 million years ago.”

TASK: Write an attention-getter for your persuasive essay:

ii/ Background

It's good to choose a specific topic and state your opinion concretely. However, topics/opinions don't exist in a vacuum (真空). Every opinion has a *context*. This means the social, historical, geographical situation. For example, air pollution and climate change are relatively new problems which are particularly urgent in the 21st century. The tsunami and nuclear accident in Fukushima in 2011 is part of the context for Japan's unique energy policy.

TASK: Find a partner and discuss the context of your opinion. Then make some notes:

iii/ Opinion Statement

You should already have your opinion statement.

TASK: Check now that it is clear, direct and that it reflects how you really feel about the topic.

iv/ Guide (to the body paragraph topics)

The final sentence of your introduction should state what the topics of your body paragraphs will be. In a persuasive essay each body paragraph will probably be focused on one of the reasons for your opinion. A good way to come up with these reasons is to restate your opinion as a question, e.g. *AGU should allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus* becomes:

Why should AGU allow students to park their bicycles on the Aoyama campus?

You can then simply answer the question 2 or 3 times:

AGU should allow students to park their bicycles on campus because...

...it will contribute to reducing pollution.

...it will improve the health of students and staff.

...it will set a good example for students, other organisations and the city as a whole.

TASK: Rewrite your opinion statement as a question. Then answer it three times.

Opinion statement as a question:

Answer 1:

Answer 2:

Answer 3:

TASK: Now write your guide sentence (e.g. *Bicycle parking should be reintroduced urgently because it will contribute to reducing pollution, improve the health of students and staff, and set a good example for students, other organisations and the city as a whole.*)

B. The Body

The main part of your essay is called the body. For this assignment 2 or 3 body paragraphs is appropriate. For longer essays you may decide to include more body paragraphs. Each body paragraph should include a *topic sentence* and several *supporting sentences*. It might also include one or two *acknowledgement sentences*.

i/ Topic sentences

As its name suggests, a topic sentence is a general sentence which states the focus (topic) of a body paragraph. It is very important that you are clear about the topic of each paragraph. For example, if I am writing a paragraph about how cycling reduces pollution, I *shouldn't* suddenly start writing about how it's good for health.

ii/ Supporting sentences

Your reasons give support to your opinion by showing that you have thought about *why* you believe what you say. Supporting sentences make your argument stronger by giving *evidence* for your reasons. The most common types of evidence are facts/statistics, quotations/ideas from published sources, examples from your own knowledge or experience.

iii/ Acknowledgement sentences

An acknowledgement sentence makes your argument stronger by showing that you understand the opposing position to your own opinion. It is usually followed by: "However....(why you believe your idea is better)"

e.g. "Banning bikes was an understandable response because it is the job of security staff to ensure the safety of students and staff. **However**, there are environmental and health crises in the world and more cycling will help with both of these problems."

(Body 1 Topic Sentence) Bicycle use does not cause pollution since there is no engine and therefore there are no emissions. A typical car emits around five tons of carbon dioxide a year and a moderate increase in cycling around the globe is estimated to reduce emissions by up to 14 million tons (UCLA, 2022). Since the majority of trips taken by car are less than three miles, a perfect distance for a cycle ride, it should be relatively easy for the average person to use a bike more often.

(Acknowledgement Sentence) Of course, many Aoyama students come to the campus on the train, so comparisons with driving may seem irrelevant. However, trains and buses also contribute to pollution and allowing bicycles on campus will give people environmentally friendly transport options. It will also encourage good habits that will reduce the pressure on public transport systems and, in the longer term, contribute to a reduction in the number of train and bus journeys.

Bring Back the Bikes!

(Background) We are living through the worst environmental crisis since the extinction of the dinosaurs 60 million years ago. A big part of the problem is pollution caused by internal combustion engines and in particular cars and buses. In addition, obesity rates have skyrocketed across the developed world and health problems caused by poor lifestyle choices including a lack of physical exercise have put a strain on already underfunded healthcare systems. (Main Idea/Opinion) Both of these huge problems could be improved if more people rode bicycles, so it is a disgrace that there are no bicycle parking facilities on the AGU Aoyama campus and, even worse, that cycling to university is discouraged by the powers that be. This situation should be reversed as a matter of urgency because it will (Guide) 1. contribute to reducing pollution, 2. improve the health of students and staff and 3. set a good example for students, other organisations and the city as a whole.

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(Acknowledgement Sentence) Of course, many Aoyama students come to the campus on the train, so comparisons with driving may seem irrelevant. However, trains and buses also contribute to pollution and allowing bicycles on campus will give people environmentally friendly transport options. It will also encourage good habits that will reduce the pressure on public transport systems and, in the longer term, contribute to a reduction in the number of train and bus journeys.

(Body 2 Topic Sentence) It goes without saying that riding a bicycle regularly is a great way to get some physical exercise. Less well known are the many health benefits it brings, including lowering cholesterol levels, reducing the risk of heart disease, strengthening your legs, improving your balance and posture, and even speeding recovery from cancer and boosting your brain power (Healthline, 2023). Cycling is a form of 'low impact aerobic exercise'. In other words, the bicycle frame supports your weight thus reducing strain on your joints (a problem for runners) while requiring that you exert yourself and increase your heart rate at least a little. One review of 300 studies showed that cycling may boost 'good' HDL cholesterol while lowering LDL cholesterol, too much of which is bad for you (Arney J. 2012).

(Body 3 Topic Sentence) The last big advantage I will discuss is that the habits that students develop during their education often influence the future direction of society, so encouraging a cycling habit can only be good in a world where, for our welfare and even survival, we need to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions. University is a place where young people form attitudes that they may keep for their whole lives. Isn't it the responsibility of a university to model the behaviours that science has shown to be the best for the long term well-being of our society? Some years ago there was an accident involving bicycles at the AGU campus and it is understandable that the university would make a rule to keep its staff and students safe. However, such an extreme response reflects short term thinking that doesn't take into account the longer term dangers of less than healthy travel choices such as using cars, trains and taxis. I strongly believe that AGU should have the courage to review their policy and come up with a solution that balances both short term safety and long term well-being.

In conclusion, because riding bicycles is good for the longer term well-being of our planet and societies and for the health of staff and students and because it is an excellent habit to take through life, I want the powers that be at AGU to do the right thing and bring back the bikes!

References

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