Revise Your Persuasive Letter for Voice

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn to revise persuasive letters to remove sarcasm and overly personal comments in order to make their arguments more effective and compelling.
- Revise sections of their own writing and share their revisions with the class.
- Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their own independent writing.

Explanation of Revising for Voice

Say: One of the most important steps in the writing process is revision. When you revise a persuasive letter, you review it and edit it to make your arguments even more effective and compelling. In a persuasive letter, you want to express a strong opinion without being overly personal, dismissive, or sarcastic. You want your voice to be persuasive in a way that respects the opposing point of view and your audience. Today we’re going to look at examples of sarcasm and overly personal opinions in a persuasive letter and learn how to revise them to make the writer’s arguments more convincing and effective.

Model Revising for Voice

Display the modeling text (without revisions) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read each sentence and model how you revise for examples of sarcasm and personal comments.

Dear Editor:

Personally, I could care less about a stupid old tree. And I have nothing against a nice new mall for our town.

I am convinced that the main issue in this debate is not about saving the tree versus building a mall. But I thought we lived in a democracy! Since when does the mayor get to decide what we do with the money our town makes from the sale?

Although the mayor is our elected official, I believe we need a special election to allow citizens to vote directly on this important and emotional issue.

Modeling Text

Reread sentences 1 and 2. Say: A persuasive letter should contain strong opinions, but they must be supported with facts and good reasons in order to be taken seriously by readers. The first sentence fails to show respect for the readers who might care about the tree. The second sentence is also the writer’s personal opinion. The words “I have nothing against a new mall” don’t present a persuasive argument since the writer fails to support his opinion with facts about why a mall might benefit the town. If he revised these two sentences by removing the sarcasm and overly personal feelings, he could express the same strong opinions in a way that readers could consider seriously. For example, he could say, “I am convinced that the main issue in this debate is not about saving the tree versus building a mall.” Now he has expressed himself respectfully, and I am eager to learn why he believes this.

Reread sentences 3 and 4. Say: The exclamation point at the end of the third sentence punctuates the writer’s mocking tone. He is continuing to be sarcastic.
The fourth sentence sounds almost angry. Again, the writer expresses a strong opinion without backing it up with any facts. For this reason, these sentences aren’t persuasive. The writer could sound more persuasive if he revised these sarcastic comments. For example, he could have written, “Although the mayor is our elected official, I believe we need a special election to allow citizens to vote directly on this important and emotional issue.” Revised this way, the writer shows his respect for the mayor’s authority, but points out that he believes there should be a vote on the issue.

2. Rehearse

Practice Revising for Voice

Write the practice text on chart paper or use the interactive whiteboard resources.

Whoever thought up this idea is an idiot! I’m shocked that the principal supports it.
The school needs a 3-D movie theater as much as pigs need wings.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with a partner to revise the sentences for voice. Each pair should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain how they made the writer’s voice more effective by revising the sarcastic, overly personal comments and including strong opinions backed up by good reasons and facts.

Share Practice Revisions

Bring students together and invite pairs to read aloud their revised sentences. Ask listeners to comment on whether the new sentences are more effective and why.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: A good persuasive letter expresses strong opinions backed up by good reasons and facts. No matter what your opinion, you should always show your reader respect. As you revise your persuasive letter, remember to check for sarcasm or overly personal comments, and revise these comments to make your arguments more convincing and compelling.

Encourage students to focus on avoiding sarcasm and overly personal comments when they revise their own persuasive letters during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite students to read aloud a section of their persuasive letters that they revised to improve the tone.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Beginning ELs may not be able to understand sarcasm in the English language. While other students collaborate on the small-group activity or write independently, meet one on one with students to support developmentally appropriate writing skills based on their independent writing and language levels.

Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: persuasive/persuasivo(a); sarcasm/el sarcasmo.