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U N I T 6

ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION

An argument is a process of reasoning in which a series of facts and judgements are arranged coherently to establish a conclusion for or against a proposition, opinion or a course of action. Any argument, however complex, expresses a relationship between one assertion and another. The first assertion may serve as a reason for the second. For instance, if I say: "Addis Ababa University entrance requirements are stiff; therefore, you have to work very hard to join the university," I am making an argument. The second statement is a conclusion based upon the first statement. Persuasion specifically focuses on convincing someone through the force of reason and appeal to prejudice, deep seated convictions, hoped and fears, etc. with the view to making the audience believe a set of ideas or situations and act accordingly.

You may follow the steps below in writing your argumentative essays:

(1) clearly define the proposition or thesis you wish to defend,

(2) collect all pertinent facts,

(3) analyze the facts and establish their relationships,

(4) examine the major issues that must be settled to win the argument,

(5) decide which is the most appealing way you can develop and present your points,

(6) construct an outline, and

(7) start writing your essay.

6.1 Vocabulary Building

6.1.1 Words with Concrete Meaning and Words with Implied Meaning

Some words are used to state simple objective facts whereas others imply the user's attitude or attempt to persuade the listener into forming an opinion.

e.g. (a) Hailu is a lecturer in the university.

(b) Hailu is an academic on the university staff.

'Lecturer' states a simple fact describing what a person does as a job. 'Academic' implies cleverness, erudition, etc. or in certain circumstances can show contempt for someone who is too intellectual and impractical.

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Exercise 1

Ten words are given below.

(a) Distinguish between those that state simple facts (neutral) and those which imply positive or negative attitudes or opinions. Write "O" for words which are neutral. "P" for positive and "N" for words that have a negative meaning.

(b) Find a similar word or phrase for each. For those where you have written "O", find a similar word or phrase which implies an attitude. For those where you have written "P" or "N", find a similar word or phrase which has a neutral meaning.

(1) Patriot: _____ (6) Soldier: _____

(2) Educator: _____ (7) Country: _____

(3) Rich man: _____ (8) Schclar: _____

(4) Chauvinist: _____ (9) Terrorist: _____

(5) King: _____ (10) Progressive: _____

e.g.: (1) Patriot: (a) P (b) Citizen

(c) Now, write five similar pairs of words where one is factual and the other implies an attitude.

Exercise 2

The following is a letter to the editor of The Ethiopian Herald. It was written by a member of SWAPO.

(a) Underline the words and phrases that express an attitude or attempt to influence the reader.

(b) Then rewrite the letter as if it were written by a neutral person. Keep as close as possible to the original content and sentences changing or omitting only the words that imply attitudes and opinions.

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Racist South Africa is continuing its occupation of Namibia in defiance of UN resolutions asking the racist regime to put an end to its illegal rule over the territory. Even the,the freedom fighters are continuing the struggle to free their country from the oppression of the racists and drive the aggressors out of Namibia. The intensification of the armed struggle by PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia), the military wing of SWAPO is a reminder that Namibian independence is not far. The collaboration of imperialist quarters with the aparthied regime will not deter the Namibian people from gaining their independence.

NOTE: Namibia is free now.

6.1.2 Figures of Speech

One may use various kind of figures of speech to add color and vividness to one's writing, especially in pursuasive writing. We shall briefly consider here four commonly used figures of speech: simile,metaphor, personification and irony.

(a) Simile expresses a comparison of two things which are very different from each other except that they have one thing in common. In this figure of speech, we use "like" or "as".
e.g. He was standing tall and motionless like the Obelisk of Aksum.

(b) Metaphor is like simile except that it is more direct and doesn't use "like" or "as".
e.g. In big cities, many people live in jungles of concrete.

(c) Personification attaches human attributes to things.
e.g. The angry waves lashed at the helpless ship.

(d) Irony - this is not strictly speaking a figure of speech but a way of expressing oneself by stating the opposite of what one intends to mean.
e.g. In the slums of Harlem, you can see the fruits of capitalist economic justice. (Harlem is a slum area in New York.)

Irony may also refer to an event, situation, etc, which is itself desirable. But,because of circumstances, it is of no value or even harmful, thus appearing to the directed by evil fate, e.g.

It is ironic that after a long life of poverty, the old man collapsed and died when he heard that he had won the lottery.

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Such figures of speech may enhance the descriptive or persuasive force of the language used. However, they have to be used with great care as it is easy to select inappropriate figures of speech which appear awkward or laughable, or to select figures of speech that have been so overused that they have become meaningless and are just cliches, e.g.,

as white as snow; as cruel as Nero

Some of the most effective uses of figurative language are found in literature.

Exercise 3

Look at these three examples from literature. State what kinds of figures of speech are used, and then underline the expressions.

(1) From the west
Clouds came hurrying with the wind
Turning sharply
Here and there
Like a plague of locusts.

(D. Rubadiri 'An African Thunderstorm')

(2) Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it.

(Shakespeare "Macbeth")

(3) It was the lovely moon - she lifted
Slowly her white brow among
Bronze cloud - waves that ebbed and drifted
Faintly, faintlier afar.
Calm she looked, yet pale with wonder,
Sweet in unwanted thoughtfulness,
Watching the earth that dwindled under
Faintly, faintlier afar.

(J.Freeman, "It Was the Lovely Moon")

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