

## The Convincing Case: How to Build Your Persuasive Skills

Persuasion is at the heart of graduate study. Yet many graduate and professional students find themselves hampered by less-than-stellar powers of persuasion.

Good persuasion comes out of the critical thinking process. The

more we weigh an issue's pros and cons, the better we can persuade others of our point of view.

“One of the main changes from undergraduate to graduate research is that students are expected to go beyond providing information to

### Persuasive Communication: Top Three Tips

*Michael Kramer, Ph.D. offers these tips for communicating in a more persuasive way.*

**Clarity:** Work on the clarity of your ideas. The more clearly you write and speak, the more persuasive you'll be.

**Credibility:** Look for opportunities to increase your credibility. Many students think that just because they are in grad school, they will be believable. Yet everyone else in grad school is at that same level. Keep up with current research so you can talk about it. Others make decisions about you based on what you can contribute to the discussion. They also look for peripheral, nonverbal cues, so demonstrate that you are paying attention, not daydreaming.

**Confidence:** In oral presentations, visualize your performance before you give it. Imagine what questions might come up, and think about which areas of your presentation are not as strong as others. That's something professional and Olympic athletes do all the time, and research shows it helps. Visualizing can help boost your confidence, quell anxiety and improve your ability to persuade.

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making arguments,” says Michael Kramer, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Communication Studies in the Department of Communication Studies, Dance and Theatre at Saint Mary's College. “I'm not sure many students appreciate or are ready for that. They might read an article and know what it says, but they haven't thought about it critically so they can join into the classroom conversation.”

Graduate students are more effective when they are able to communicate well in the classroom, Kramer continues. “A lot of that communication is discussion about scholarly ideas. It's a persuasive process. If you can enter into the conversation, you will be seen as having a lot more potential by professors than someone who cannot do that.”

Good persuasive skills can improve a graduate student's dissertation or master's thesis defense, and increase the chances that research will be published or presented, Kramer notes. “When students aren't as persua-

sive as they could be, there's a lot at stake. It can lead to additional work on the project. It may mean more writing, thinking or research. It can delay a student's progress, which means they may not complete their program or graduate on schedule.”

“Persuasive skills are necessary when students are processing arguments and teasing out the ramification of ideas,” says Rhoda Flaxman, Ph.D., director of Write Consulting.

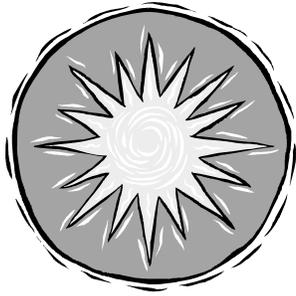
“In your teaching, if you can't get up and teach someone—and persuade them you know what you are talking about—you aren't going to be effective. Students

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## *The Power of Persuasion—Do You Have It?*

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practice writing arguments yet there's often a lack of skill when it comes to presenting an idea orally."

"We really don't see much attention paid to persuasive oral presenting skills," says Flaxman, who taught writing and rhetorical skills at Brown for 20 years and continues to present workshops there.

"There's a value placed on the ability to write, and the assumption is that anybody can speak. Oral skills are neglected."

In her oral presentation skills workshop at Brown, Flaxman helps students divide the task of speaking into three parts.

"We cover invention, which is the development of content; organization; and delivery," she explains.

When she discusses invention, Flaxman asks

students how many points can be made in a 20-minute speech.

"They're shocked when I say you can only make two or three key points. One main idea takes about five minutes to develop in a persuasive way. Each point should be accompanied by supporting material. The key thing is not to say too much."

The organization of an oral presentation is similar to a written paper in that it needs an introduction, body and conclusion to give it structure, says Flaxman.

Delivery can make or break an oral presentation. "This is where theater training can be helpful," says Flaxman. She advises students to speak from notes or an outline rather than text.

"Reading text is the kiss of death," she emphasizes. "A presenter can't be spontaneous if they're reading something. When your head is down, you are not connecting with the audience."

Visualization, a technique used in theater, can be helpful for graduate students, adds Kramer. "Try creating a 'grad student persona' for yourself. That persona is confident, outgoing, studious and serious. The more you can conform yourself to that persona, the more effective graduate student you can become." ■

### **Resources**

*Persuasion in the Media Age* by Timothy A. Borchers, Borchers, McGraw-Hill College, 2004

Write Consulting  
[www.writeconsulting.org](http://www.writeconsulting.org)

## *IRS Warns of Tax Scams*

Education is the best way to avoid the pitfalls of "too good to be true" tax scams. For a list of common scams, visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Be especially wary of these:

**Suspicious E-Mails and Identity Theft** - The IRS has issued several consumer warnings on the fraudulent use of the IRS name or logo by scammers trying to gain access to consumers' financial information in order to steal their identity and assets.

**Payday and Tax Refund Loans** - While payday lenders in Florida must adhere to some of the most stringent regulations in the nation, consumers can incur excessive annual percentage rates when they obtain payday or refund anticipation loans from sources outside the state, especially online lenders.

**Private Debt Collection** - Do not be fooled by scam artists claiming to be from the IRS. The IRS never asks people for the PIN numbers, passwords or similar secret access information for their credit card, bank or other financial accounts. If in doubt, check [IRS.gov](http://IRS.gov) or call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 for more information. ■