# Persuasion
# Textbook: Unit 9A

Week 8

Lessons 3

# Lesson objectives

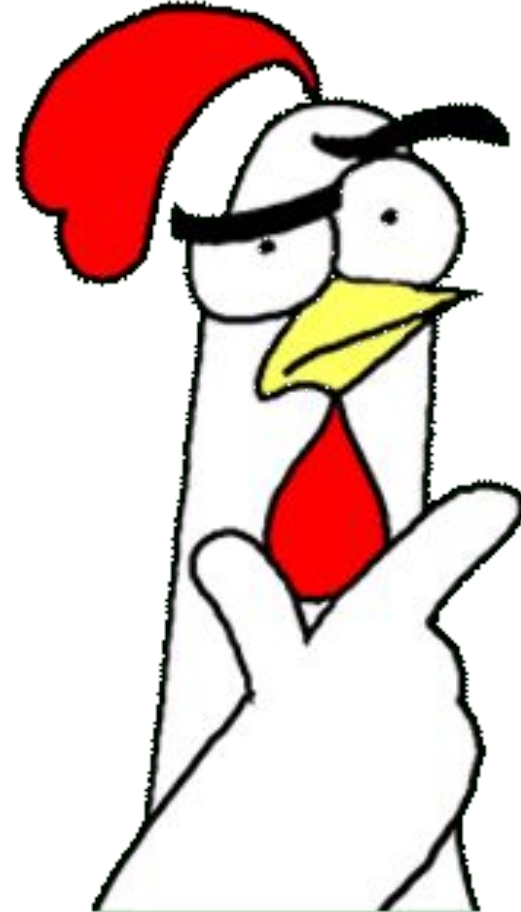Identifying the main and supporting arguments

Identifying persuasive language

Learning the conditional structures *if* and *unless*

# Warm-up

- Think of a time when you had to persuade someone of your point of view. Work in pairs and discuss how easy or difficult it was

# Discussion

2 Rank the following methods of persuasion from the most to the least effective.

- using persuasive language ☐
- using aggression and threats ☐
- presenting a logical argument ☐
- presenting supporting evidence and examples ☐
- appealing to the person's emotions ☐
- offering a reward such as money ☐

3 Work in pairs and compare your responses. Give reasons.

Work in groups and make a list of skills and qualities that persuasive people possess

The purpose of many academic texts is to persuade, and this is typically done through the use of **arguments**. An argument can be: (1) the **main argument**, which is either the main point for or against an idea (normally stated in the introduction), or a whole text; (2) a single paragraph, which is part of the main argument; (3) a **supporting argument** within a paragraph. The supporting arguments develop the points for or against by using evidence and examples. The main arguments and supporting arguments need to be logically structured, and end in a conclusion which convinces the reader that the points the author makes in their arguments are correct. Authors use persuasive language to add weight to their arguments. You need to be able to identify the main argument and supporting arguments in a text, as well as identifying the persuasive language used to express them. Once you have fully understood the arguments, you can then respond by deciding to what extent you agree with them.

# TASK 1 Critical thinking – evaluating voting systems

1 Work in groups. Discuss what you know about voting systems in different countries and how they work. Try to explain a particular voting system to other students. Is it easy or difficult to explain and understand?

# TASK 2 Predicting the logical structure of a text

1 You are going to read an extract from a text about different systems for assessing votes. Predict what order **a–d** occur in the text.

- [ ] **a** Supporting arguments and explanations for different systems
- [ ] **b** Evaluation and speculation
- [ ] **c** Contextualization, including definition; importance of and reasons for the issue
- [ ] **d** Supporting arguments against all the systems plus an alternative system

# The voting paradox

1 Voting is a mechanism for making collective decisions. It is also intended to be a means for ensuring that the majority preference for a candidate or a policy is reflected in the ultimate decision. It is another key ingredient in the concept of representation introduced in chapters one and ten. Determining this supposedly objective preference is extremely difficult. This is due to the mathematical problem known as the Arrow impossibility theorem, which asserts that when a group of people are asked to make one choice as their preference between three or more alternatives, it is impossible to conclude that one particular outcome is the one 'most preferred' unless over 50 per cent all vote for it. Let us see an example from Table 11.1 that illustrates this, where people are choosing between three alternatives (A, B, C):

| No. of voters | 1st choice | 2nd choice | 3rd choice |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | A | B | C |
| 4 | B | A | C |
| 6 | C | B | A |
| 4 | C | A | B |

Table 11.1  Hypothetical Distribution of Votes

2 None of the three alternatives wins a majority of first choices, but if we just count first choices, then C wins with ten votes out of twenty-two. If the first two choices are counted equally, then B

wins, with eighteen votes out of forty-four. However, it might be fairer to give extra weight to first choices over second ones, since that would reflect more genuine strength of preference. Suppose first choices are given two points, and second choices are given one. In that case, A wins with twenty-four points out of a possible sixty-six.

3    We can see that all three possibilities could win, depending on the counting system used, without the actual votes changing at all. None of the options ever achieved a majority of the total votes or points available, whichever system was being used, so it would be impossible to conclude that the general preference was 'clearly' in favour of one particular option. As you can easily imagine, this problem gets worse with a greater number of alternative choices, whether they are candidates or policy options. This means that the determination of preferences depends upon the particular procedure chosen for assessing the votes. Any procedure chosen is a compromise between theory and practicality. It also explains why referenda are usually reduced to a choice between two possible alternatives. In this way, even though it might seem artificially to constrain the choices that are being voted upon, it will result in an unambiguous outcome.

4    Therefore, the choice of method for assessing votes is crucial and really can alter the outcome. To give one famous example, Riker showed that when Lincoln won the presidential election in 1860 against three rivals, different methods of assessing the votes which are used in various parts of the world today could easily have led to either of two others winning equally well (Riker, 1982: 227–32). If that had happened, then the American Civil War might never have occurred and world history might have developed along quite different lines.

SOURCE: Garner, R., Ferdinand, P., & Lawson, S. (2009). pp.252-3. *Introduction to Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## GLOSSARY

**collective** *(adj)* involving a whole group or society

**referendum** *(n)* (pl referendums or referenda) an occasion when all the people in a country can vote on an important issue

**rival** *(n)* a person, company, or thing that competes with another in sport, business, etc.

**theorem** *(n)* a rule or principle, especially in mathematics, that can be proved to be true

**unambiguous** *(adj)* clear in meaning

# TASK 4 Identifying evidence in supporting arguments

1 **Match a–c to sections 1–5 of the paragraph.**

a extended definition   b supporting argument   c evidence / example / explanation

| 1 | 2,4 | 3,5 |

1   [1]Voting is a mechanism for making collective decisions. It is also intended to be a means for ensuring that the majority preference for a candidate or a policy is reflected in the ultimate decision. It is another key ingredient in the concept of representation introduced in chapters one and ten. [2]Determining this supposedly objective preference is extremely difficult. [3]This is due to the mathematical problem known as the Arrow impossibility theorem, which asserts that when a group of people are asked to make one choice as their preference between three or more alternatives, [4]it is impossible to conclude that one particular outcome is the one 'most preferred' unless over 50 per cent all vote for it. [5]Let us see an example from Table 11.1 that illustrates this, where people are choosing between three alternatives (A, B, C):

## Persuasive language  Adjective phrases

Adjective phrases (composed of one or more words) can be used to help persuade the reader:

Determining this **supposedly objective** preference is **extremely difficult**.

The above examples follow the pattern: adverb + adjective. Gradable adjectives can be modified with adverbs such as *very, somewhat*. If the adjective is ungradable, e.g. *different, crucial*, the selection of modifying adverb is restricted to 'extreme' adverbs, such as *extremely, absolutely*:

It is **very difficult** to assess the impact of the system.

Assessing the impact of the system is a **somewhat difficult** task.

The modifying adverb *quite* is unusual – when it modifies gradable adjectives it means *rather*; when it modifies ungradable adjectives it means *absolutely* or *completely*. Compare:

It is **quite difficult** to assess the impact of the system.

… world history might have developed along **quite different** lines.

## TASK 6  Building and analysing adjective phrases

1  **Look at the adjective phrases in the following sentence and answer the questions.**

   *Determining this **supposedly objective** preference is **extremely difficult**.*

   1  Why do the authors say the preference is *supposedly* objective?

   2  Are the authors arguing that it is objective, or not objective?

   3  If *supposedly* is omitted, how does this change the meaning?

   4  Rank the following adjective phrases in order of difficulty from least to most difficult:
      difficult   extremely difficult   very difficult   quite difficult

   5  Why do the authors say it is *extremely difficult*?

**2** **Work in groups and study extracts 1–6 containing single adjectives from the text. For each extract, decide which of the following modifying adverbs can be used. Discuss how adding each adverb changes the meaning.**

very   absolutely   even   quite   rather   particularly
supposedly   extremely   considerably

     *absolutely / quite*

**Example:**   *it is ⌃**impossible** to conclude*

1  To give one **famous** example
2  However, it might be **fairer** to give extra weight to first choices
3  that would reflect **more genuine** strength of preference
4  this problem gets **worse** with a greater number of alternative choices
5  the choice of method for assessing votes is **crucial**
6  It is another **key** ingredient in the concept

## Sample answers

1 The authors cannot say the preference is objective, because they are arguing that it isn't – they say *supposedly* to indicate that people suppose it to be objective, therefore they are mistaken.

2 As explained above, the authors are arguing that the preference is not objective. They go on to use evidence to back up this argument.

3 If *supposedly* is omitted, the meaning changes to become the opposite. The authors are in that case validating the claim, agreeing that it is objective.

4 quite difficult – difficult – very difficult – extremely difficult

5 In practical terms, the authors say it is *extremely difficult* because it is arguably impossible; but to say it is *impossible* opens them up to criticism. The authors go on to argue how difficult, indeed unresolvable, it actually is.

## Answers

1 To give one *very / quite / (rather) / particularly / (supposedly) / extremely* famous example.

2 However, it might be *even* fairer to give extra weight to the first choices.

3 that would reflect *even / rather / considerably* more genuine strength of preference

4 this problem gets *even / rather / considerably* worse with a greater number of alternative choices

5 the choice of method for assessing votes is *absolutely / quite / rather / particularly / supposedly / extremely* crucial

6 It is another *absolutely / (quite) / particularly / supposedly / (extremely)* key ingredient in the concept

Note: for instructors

# TASK 7  Recognizing persuasive language

1 Underline the persuasive language in the following extracts from paragraphs 2–4 of the text in Task 2. The first one has been done as an example. 🖉

  1 However, it might be fairer to give extra weight to first choices over second ones, since that would reflect more genuine strength of preference. (Paragraph 2)

  2 None of the options ever achieved a majority of the total votes or points available, whichever system was being used, so it would be impossible to conclude that the general preference was 'clearly' in favour of one particular option. (Paragraph 3)

  3 As you can easily imagine, this problem gets worse with a greater number of alternative choices, whether they are candidates or policy options. (Paragraph 3)

  4 In this way, even though it might seem artificially to constrain the choices that are being voted upon, it will result in an unambiguous outcome. (Paragraph 3)

  5 Therefore, the choice of method for assessing votes is crucial and really can alter the outcome. (Paragraph 4)

## Conditional structures  *If* and *unless*

Conditional structures with *if* and *unless* can be used to explain and speculate.

- To give an explanation or express a general truth, you use the present tense (in either the active or passive voice) in both the *if*-clause and the main clause:

    … **if** we just count first choices, then C wins with ten votes out of twenty-two.

    **If** the first two choices are counted equally, then B wins …

    … it is impossible to conclude that one particular outcome is the one 'most preferred' **unless** over 50 per cent all vote for it.

    The example with *unless* means that if 50% do not vote for one outcome, this outcome is not 'most preferred'.

- To speculate about unreal things in the past (i.e. things which did not actually happen), you use the past perfect + *if*-clause + modal verb(s):

    **If** that had happened, then the American Civil War might never have occurred and world history might have developed along quite different lines.

    This example speculates on possible alternative events following the unreal event, i.e. not Lincoln but a different winner of the election. In this kind of structure, *would* is the most certain, with *might, may*, and *could* used for less certain, but still possible, results.

**Unless** means **except if** or simply it means **if...not**.

"You will feel cold **if** you **don't** wear a coat."
"You will feel cold **unless** you wear a coat."

"I'll arrive at 10am **unless** there is traffic."
"I'll arrive at 10am **if** there **isn't** traffic."

"You can't go on vacation **unless** you save some money."
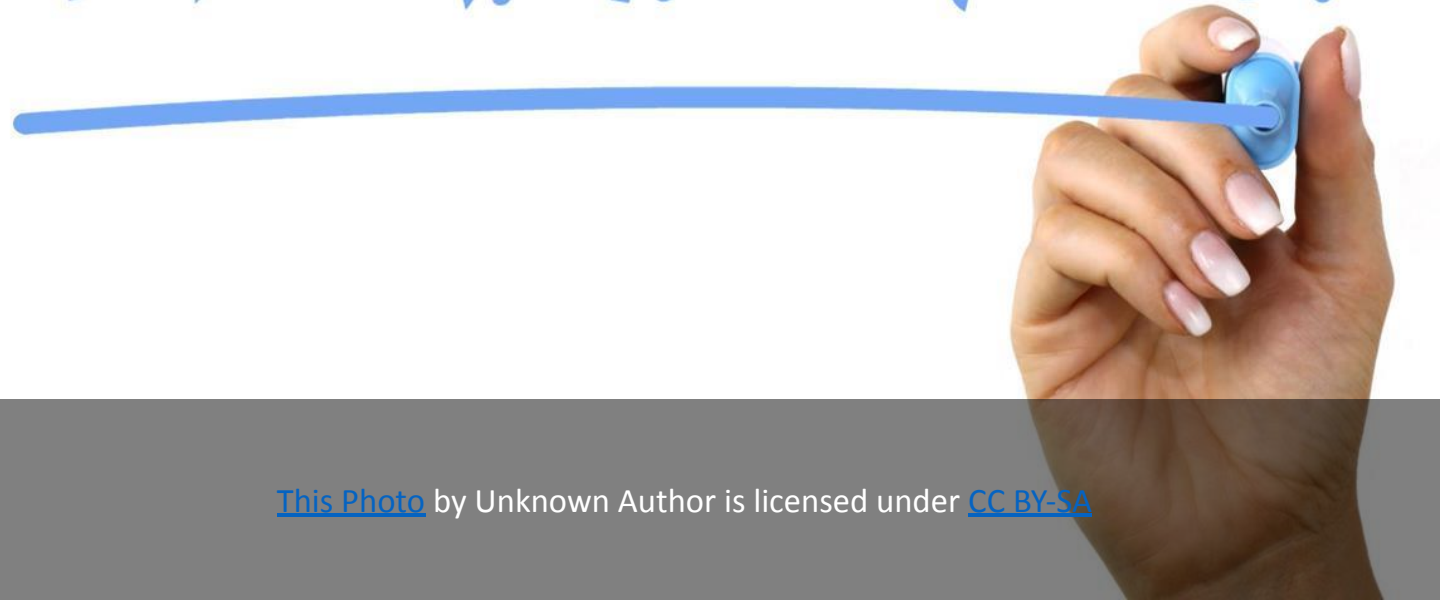"**If** you **don't** save some money, you can't go on vacation."

Thank you for your active participation!