

Are you persuasive?

Have you ever argued passionately with a friend and neither of you changes the other's mind even one little bit? That difficulty in getting someone to change how they think is the central problem in marketing communications. Whether a company is trying to get you to buy a new brand of shampoo or a nonprofit is vying for your donation dollars, marketing communications is at work trying to persuade you of why you should do what they want.

I picked up (and read) *Writing to Persuade* by Trish Hall to see if I could learn how to make my work more effective.

Hall's persuasion bona fides are that she was an editor of the *New York Times* op-ed page. The *New York Times* op-ed page regularly attracts high-profile and controversial viewpoints, and due to its influence, receives a high volume of submissions. Those submissions need to be culled and edited, and that was Hall's job. Having to make decisions on what pieces to run made Hall more aware of what makes an interesting and readable piece.

In the book, Hall discusses both what makes a persuasive op-ed, and presents writing tips.

To be persuasive, Hall says a piece should:

- Have a specific and strong point of view
- Tell a story, and personalize it
- Show knowledge of your audience and really listen to what they say
- Find common ground where possible
- Play on feelings more than statistics and facts
- Show empathy
- Not be argumentative.

Hall suggests that your writing should:

- Have proven/checked facts to bolster your viewpoint. Hall says you should always use reliable sources of information and have more than one source.
- Be specific
- Avoid jargon
- Cut unnecessary words.

The book is quite repetitious and is really geared toward op-ed writers looking to have their pieces accepted for publishing. Hall's writing tips are not really about being persuasive, but rather about being clear, something I endorse (I especially like her insistence on avoiding jargon). Hall discusses the psychology of persuasion in the last part of the book, something that would have been better put up front.

Although I found that Hall presents some solid ideas about persuasion, she gears it very specifically to submitting op-eds, even discussing how to butter up editors. I thought this book could have easily been a long article. Instead, she pads the book with the story of her journey to becoming a journalist/editor.

The bottom line is that I am not persuaded that this book should be your guide to better or more persuasive writing. You will pick up some good tidbits though. If I were recommending whether you should buy or borrow this book, I say definitely borrow it. That's what I did!