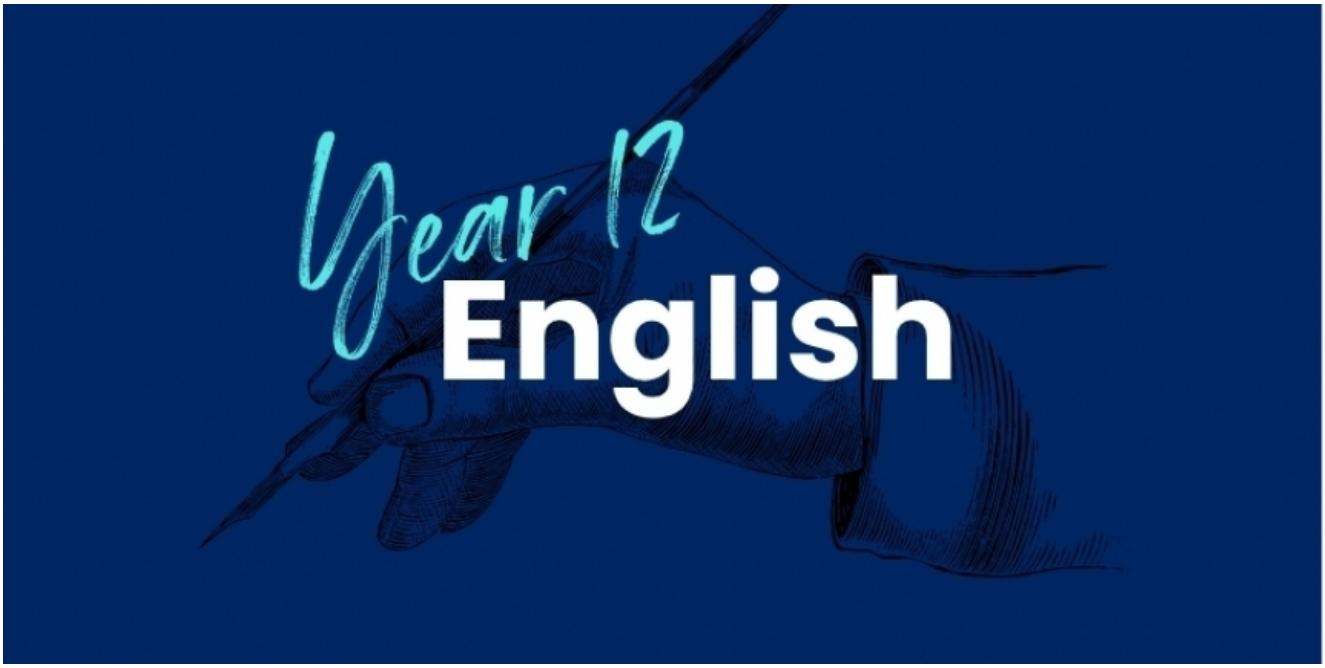
THE WAY

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YEAR 12 STUDENTS MASTER THE ART OF PERSUASION

Year 12 students have just completed a range of persuasive essays in their study of The Craft of Writing, which has also helped in preparing them for the HSC Examinations later this year. Something that younger students might note is how much persuasive writing develops from the days of the NAPLAN writing test to the end of Secondary English. For one thing, having the right structure becomes less important than having an authoritative voice, to give your audience confidence that you “know your stuff”. Included below are a couple of examples of how this works, from Alexia C. and Anna A. Though the views expressed are their own, the force of their voices cannot be missed.

A Flightless Bird

It's easier said than done. To send that message, to apply for that job, to build up the courage to move away from home and live your dream rather than marinating in your own comfortability – to break conformity. I’ve seen it in my own life, where I purposefully procrastinate assignments or homework, knowing it'll lead to more inevitable stress. It’s easy to complain about the stress, but that stress isn’t just a coincidence, it’s just a result of my own decisions.

Humanity has a tendency to pity themselves for particular circumstances that arise from their own choices like lining houses on winding roads – who thought that would be a good idea? However, when a mindset of self-pity takes over, it can become a lifestyle. Some people start to see themselves as helpless victims of supposed unchangeable circumstances, constantly blaming the world, others, or fate, practically anything and anyone but themselves – something known as

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victim syndrome.

Twenty One Pilots, an American band, cleverly explores this theme in their song, ‘Isle of Flightless Birds’. They compare humanity to an island of flightless birds who, despite being capable of great things, are ultimately weighed down by our desires for materialism, wealth or our tendency to live vicariously through others when our dreams seemingly become unattainable.

However, for us women, the victim syndrome is not a comfort zone, but a feeling that comes from a generational bleed from historical truths like the Cult of Domesticity, which internalised narratives of powerlessness psychologically in us in order to convince to remain a flightless bird as passively being grounded became safer than risking flight. As such, when women hesitate to indulge in positions of leadership or when stepping onto the soccer pitch isn't because we feel like it, but because it's a defensive mechanism socially induced from centuries of oppression.

The 19th century Cult of Domesticity believed in a set of four principles that women had to uphold in order to be considered a “true woman”: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. For me, submissiveness specifically stands out due to their presence manifested in contemporary cases of imposter syndrome, a feeling that People Management magazine found in 2025, 7 in 10 women have at some point in their careers, contrastingly significantly to only 58 per cent of men saying the same. The adoption of female submissiveness reinforced the fact men were the doers in life and in all political and social aspects while the “true woman” upheld her role as the passive bystander that submitted to God and fate – a perfectly biblical Eve.

While the walls of the Victorian parlour have dissolved, the societal stereotypes like the submissive housewife have become so deeply intertwined with the psychology of women that it has become a mental boundary. To appear ‘too bad’ or ‘unladylike’ is to trespass on the male-dominated archetype of leadership, which Margaret Atwood correctly identifies as being the “monopoly of men” to ensure women sustain an existence of ‘flightlessness’ and fear their potential for villainy or power that Atwood insists is undeniably “In us.”

Women have been conditioned to prefer the sterile safety of an “eternal breakfast” which represents a static order where the most dynamic event is the sound of the toaster popping or an accidental spill of coffee on a perfectly ironed white shirt. The fact Atwood’s child claimed that “something else has to happen” goes to show the perspective of an unconditioned eye that exposes men’s socially induced narrative.

But breaking from oppression doesn’t require eliminating femininity. In fact, crimson-red lipstick is invited and being more Harmon is crucial to finally flying and affirm autonomy. In the 2020 series The Queen’s Gambit, Beth Harmon showed the world through dominating the male dominated chess industry the capability of women to interrupt men’s monopoly and effectively refuses to wait for toast to ‘pop’ in the kitchen, but rather force herself into competitions for men to build her name. Harmon does not achieve a grandmaster title by adhering to the cult of domesticity, but breaks free from her victim syndrome and refuses to wait for permission to fly.

Women’s passion and ambition might be considered as “spots” so why don't we embrace them? To defeat psychologically induced flightlessness comes from being unashamedly difficult, flawed, angry, having the right to fail or fall. Our wings might be clipped but adopting our ability to fly like birds can disrupt the static order, because who cares if the breakfast table is messy?
-Year 12 Student

Sometimes While I Doomscroll

Sometimes while I doomscroll online, I check the comment section of a video — out of curiosity, of course, because who doesn’t want to see other people agree with their opinions on a certain

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video to solidify their beliefs? It’s a good feeling. But for some reason, a rise in misogyny within random TikTok comments has occurred, clearly from younger boys who’ve learned these phrases from their friends or older male figures. Is womanhood already something to be evaluated and publicly corrected this early on in their lives?

And the young girls are reading it, they’re absorbing these seemingly meaningless words that boys their age spew out and allowing it to make an impression on themselves, allowing them to be conscious of their every move and to not slip up and say something that might hurt the fragile egos of insecure men. Because social media is not just where young people communicate it’s where they are quietly taught who they are allowed to be and what’s acceptable in society

Spend enough time online and you can see a clear pattern emerge. Women are simultaneously hyper-visible and relentlessly critiqued. Every feature becomes negotiable. Every flaw is pointed out and there seem to be new flaws developing every day. I’ve seen women be insecure about having a “long philtrum” which was a feature basically nonexistent until TikTok became mainstream. This is honestly one of the main reasons that I agreed with the Australian social media ban in the first place, stopping impressionable young minds from being rewired before it’s too late and their insecurities have already taken over.

Confidence, for many women, is even treated less like a trait and more like a transgression. We hear the word empowerment constantly now. It’s printed across tote bags, folded into brand campaigns, spoken in captions beneath carefully curated photos. Women are told they are powerful, but only if that power remains aesthetically pleasing and non-threatening. The moment confidence stops looking palatable, it is recast as arrogance.

The same men preaching “feminism” to sell their merch are the ones refusing to hire or respect them as equally to men. This is the contradiction of modern feminism: empowerment is celebrated in theory, yet often policed in practice. The quiet danger of online culture is that it trains women to participate in their own diminishment. Filters promise improvement. Trends promise desirability. Comment sections promise judgment. Over time, the surveillance becomes internal, until women begin monitoring themselves even in the absence of an audience.

A girl stops posting because she thinks her nose looks wrong or her teeth are crooked or she doesn't think she’s tanned enough. And the truth is that none of this is accidental. A self-doubting woman is easier to silence than a self-assured one. That’s why radical feminism is so frowned upon in the current day

True empowerment, then, cannot simply be the permission to be seen. Visibility means very little if you are still shrinking within it. Real empowerment is psychological before it is public. It’s little freedoms of being able to walk down the street without being either catcalled or criticised. It is existing without constantly negotiating your likeability.

So perhaps the question is no longer whether misogyny exists online, but whether women will continue absorbing it quietly, mistaking endurance for strength. It’s the decision to stop making yourself smaller for the comfort of others and to understand that people are going to dislike you no matter what, especially in today’s male run society.

Imagine how threatening it would be to a culture that profits from female insecurity for women to thrive and be comfortable with themselves. To be able to speak to me without being belittled or have someone ‘mansplain’ a topic you already know about to you. As a society, women should learn to fight back, because the strongest women are not the ones who never encounter hatred; they're the ones who were never convinced to turn it inward.
-Year 12 Student

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