



# Principles of Persuasive Writing

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MARY C. CURTIS

*“Words are also actions and  
actions are a kind of words.”*

- RALPH WALDO EMERSON

# Why public thought leadership?

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- Op-eds are not the end goal, but the beginning
- Ideas drive influence and resources (academia, politics, business, philanthropy)
- Sign of leadership
- If you don't tell your story, someone else will
- If you aren't part of the conversation, you can't be part of the solution

# An Igniter

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An issue, an event, a quote, an idea. Generally, you need an igniting thought.

Sometimes you find it; sometimes it finds you.

Then you frame it. That's the key – you don't just repeat it, but you get a chance to get ahead of it, anticipating the counter arguments and turning their objections to your advantage.

# Context

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You have to provide it.

You should never put an issue, particularly a controversial one, out there, assuming it's something that anybody and everybody should know about.

Explain it.

# Teach Something New

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Get those who agree with you to say, “Amen, you know life. That’s just what I’ve been thinking though I have not made those connections.”

It’s a chance for possible opponents to say: “I never knew that, or I never thought of it that way.”

It’s also a chance to start to show links— universal truths, and foster empathy between people and groups.

# “Yes, But ...”

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You anticipate and articulate opposing views.

And you talk back with reason.

# Values

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You always encourage people to look to our better angels.

Never miss a chance to wrap what you're taking about in values, universal values no one could argue with.

(Kindness, charity, generosity, recalling things your mom and dad and church taught you but you may have forgotten...)



# Personal Insight

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Chance to reveal oneself: your emotions—your bias—your strengths and vulnerabilities.

It's the difference between a story and a journey.

# Call to Action

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Always connect the dots to the bigger so what.

Why does it matter, to you and to the world?

# Jargon vs. Metaphor

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Don't let your knowledge get locked into jargon.

Be “bilingual.”

Innovation happens when different kinds of knowledge collide.

# Elements of Persuasion

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- Lede
- Newshook
- Argument
- Evidence
- “To Be Sure”
- Conclusion

# Pitching Secrets

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- So What?
- Why Me?
- Why Now?
- Aha Point of View
- Economy of Words
- Mind the Power of Words

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