



The persuasion plot hole goes like this: At some point in your story one character has to convince another character of something or persuade him to do something.

The plot derails when a character agrees to something or accepts something "because the plot called for it." There is no rational discourse that shows the character being persuaded or coerced.

For example, Dick hates the ocean. He hates the smell of it and the movement of it. He would never, ever in his wildest dreams agree to go out on a boat, in the middle of the night, with a complete stranger. Miraculously, in Chapter Ten, he does just that because a blonde bombshell says, "Let's take a ride."

Dick might be tempted. He might think he will receive sexual favors. But would a rational human being ever go on a midnight cruise with a total stranger into a vast body of water where no one will ever know they've disappeared based on a loose assumption of fleeting gain? Not unless that is the only way he can rescue someone he is deeply in love with, the only way to catch the drug lord at his game, or because the bombshell has a gun. Even then it will take some convincing. Why should he trust this person?

There is a saying that you always have a choice unless you have a gun pointed at your head. I would argue this further. If someone has a gun pointed at your head, you actually have three choices. You can call their bluff. You can fight back and hope they are a crappy shot. You can believe that dying is a better alternative to doing whatever they want you to do.

Persuasion is an art form. Toddlers learn it early. They widen their eyes, brighten their smiles, and ask, "Pretty please?" They hammer you with, "Why?" They stun you with the logic of, "But I don't want to." Your characters will be much the same when they attempt to persuade or dissuade another character.

Characters follow certain patterns.

1. They are more likely to believe someone they like.
2. They are more likely to support ideas that fall in line with their own.
3. They worry about what other people think, especially people they admire or look up to.



4. They are more willing to trust someone who sounds the same over someone who looks the same as them.
5. They look to other people when they aren't certain.
6. They respect authority, though what constitutes authority is variable. They will accept an authority or sources they agree with over ones they don't.
7. They expect people to keep their word and finish what they start.
8. They value that which is rare.

The situation and character personalities will dictate which persuasion tactics are used and whether they are successful.

The value of the objective will determine how intensely a character will fight to obtain it.

Every conversation should offer some kind of tension. Key turning points require intense discussion.

The following tools will help you fill in your persuasion plot holes.

1. **Ask for More:** If Dick wants something, he can start off intentionally asking for too much so he can settle for something in the middle. This makes him seem like a reasonable kind of guy, except the part where he manipulated Jane by asking her to do something she'd never allow to get her to agree to something she mildly objected to. Children are masters of this technique.
2. **Appeal to Authority:** Dick may be getting nowhere in his conversation with Jane. He can play the authority card. The authority can be real or imagined. "They say" is so random. Who are they? "Authorities on the subject state..." Who are the authorities? Jane won't have time to verify them. Adding jargon and psychobabble gives his argument more power. Dick can flip this tactic and discount the authority Jane uses to support her argument. He can press her to come up with an answer as to who "they" are. He can refute the validity of the authority.



3. **Assume Concession:** Dick can circle around the point he is trying to make or the consensus is he trying to achieve. He can talk at cross purposes and end the conversation with, "Well, I'm glad we all agree then." Except no one really agreed, but they will doubt themselves. Did we agree? Maybe we did. If Dick pushes on in a confident manner, they may be bluffed into silence.

4. **Attack the Posse:** Dick can tear down Jane's objectives by attacking the basis for her assumptions. He can attack her friends, her coworkers, her group members or the social, political or religious body as a whole. He can deride her documents or the source of her information. Jane will be derailed into defending herself as apart from the group or into defending actions by the group she does not agree with. She will be sidelined into defending her source rather than her point.

5. **Baffle them with Bull:** If Jane seems unconvinced, Dick can bring in random and completely unrelated evidence to bolster his argument. Jane will be forced to respond to each unrelated thread, rather than arguing the main point. He can sum up his argument as if everything he just said supported it. Jane will either be confused enough to give in or will call him on it.

6. **Bait and Switch:** Dick wants to achieve C. He argues the merits of A. Jane fights back with B. Dick offers C as a compromise, which was his intention all along. Dick wants Jane to agree to a vacation at a golf resort. He starts off with suggesting they go fishing. Jane says, uh, no. She suggests they go to a bed and breakfast in Amish country. Dick says, uh, no. Dick suggests a spa resort in Arizona. Jane agrees to the compromise. Dick had already planned to meet up with his buddies in Arizona so it's a darn good thing Jane agreed. He doesn't tell her about that until they are on the plane or happens to run into his buddies at the hotel, setting up a new conflict.

7. **Call Their Bluff:** Characters all make blanket statements and threaten things they'd never back up. Dick has a date with Jane for dinner. He needs to get out of it. He suggests Hooters. She reacts negatively and says she'd rather eat at a motorcycle dive bar. Since the motorcycle dive bar is exactly where Dick needs to meet his contact, he calls her bluff. Jane



is forced to either go with him or refuse to go with him, which suits him just fine. The date is called off. Next time, Dick needs to make a reservation at her favorite five-star restaurant to make up for it. Jane may bravely state that she is willing to do something against her better judgment to exaggerate a point. Dick agrees to do it. Jane has a problem. She has to wriggle out of it, change her tactics, or end or derail the conversation entirely.

8. **Change the Name:** Changing the name of a thing can render it less objectionable because it changes the set of objections that accompany it. Dick asks Jane to steal something. She objects, naturally. So he convinces her it isn't really stealing. It's borrowing. Or it's returning something to its rightful owner. Fanaticism can be religious freedom. Anarchists become freedom fighters. This is used rampantly in terms of political correctness and to justify what would otherwise be considered psychopathic behavior. Jane is likely to object to some things more than others. This also works if Jane refuses to grant Dick any ground and he switches to getting her to disagree with his point's polar opposite. It might confuse her into agreeing with him.

9. **Concede Then Deny:** Dick can listen to Jane rattle on and agree with her points, but refute her conclusion. This will frustrate Jane into arguing her points all over again or stating them a different way so that Dick will accept her conclusion. He can either fight the conclusion, agree to disagree, end or derail the conversation.

10. **Cut It Off:** If it is clear to Dick that he can't win, his best solution is to cut the the conversation short or abruptly change the topic. Jane can use this tactic as a defense if Dick attempts to bludgeon her into agreement.

11. **Everyone Does It:** This is a teenager's favorite ploy. They drag in people they've never met to support their side of the argument. Everyone is doing it, why can't I? It isn't really illegal if everyone is doing it. You've done it, why can't I? Aunt Sally did it. My friend Ted says he does it all the time. These statements are either true or completely made up. They may be effective or fall flat depending on the audience.



12. **Exaggerate It:** To effectively tear down Jane's argument, all Dick has to do is get her to exaggerate it. The simpler her logic is, the harder it is to refute. If Dick pushes her into generalizations, he has more ammunition to work with. He can compare apples to oranges. He can derail the conversation by arguing the generalities rather than the specifics.

13. **Finish What He Started:** Dick wants Jane to do something, so he starts it off then asks her to finish it for him. He can start a chore, a story or a diversion tactic and ask Jane to finish it. It also works if Dick is in the middle of something and forces Jane to do the other thing he wanted out of. He would take care of it if he could, but he's in the middle of something else. Would she be a dear and do it for him? This is a problem if the package he wants delivered contains cocaine.

14. **Give Then Take:** If Dick does something wonderful and unsolicited for Jane, she will feel like she owes him one. She will be more likely to accede to his next request even if she is resistant. He can play the guilt card, "But I did X for you, why can't you do Y for me?"

15. **Go For The Kill:** Jane has argued point after point. When she tries to change the subject or deflect the conversation, Dick knows he hit a weak spot. He may not know exactly what her weak spot is, but he was successful in his attempt. Dick can go in for the kill and drive the point home. He can give her some ground and restore equal footing. He can back away, satisfied that he met his objective: he made Jane rethink her position, question something she believed or agreed to something she resisted.

16. **Jolly Her Into It:** Dick makes a request. Jane says no. Dick teases her. He pushes the boundaries of his request into the realm of stand-up comedy. He amplifies her objections to get her to laugh. She realizes the over-inflated objections are kind of silly and agrees to his request.

17. **Leave them Laughing:** If Dick needs to get out of an awkward or undesirable conversation, he can derail the situation by telling a joke, making everyone laugh and forget what they were discussing in the first place. If Jane is furious with Dick and he can



make her laugh, she might forget what she was angry about. If Jane wants something Dick doesn't want to deliver, he can make her laugh and forget her request.

18. **Praise Then Please:** Dick wants Jane to do something she hates. He butters her up first by telling her how much he loves her and appreciates her. He gets her feeling all warm and snuggly then pops the question. She will feel like a heel for refusing.

19. **Question Their Authority:** Jane may have an opinion but may not be an authority on the subject. Dick may not be either, but all he has to do is instill reasonable doubt that she is accurate. He can state facts or invention to support his argument. Jane will be forced to defend her authority rather than her idea. She does not have the time or opportunity to investigate his counterclaims or sources.

20. **Shoot the Messenger:** Dick can publically discount everything Jane says simply because it is Jane saying it. He does not have to disprove what she is saying. All he has to do is cast sufficient doubt on her veracity. He can question her motives. He can insist that she is only saying what she says to further her own self-interest and it is not in the best interest of the situation. He can belittle her in front of other people.

21. **The Spider Web:** Jane can draw Dick in slowly. Get him to agree to little things. Then hit him with her real request. If he has agreed that he likes popcorn and soda and time spent together, he will have a difficult time wriggling out of taking her to a chick flick.

22. **Their Words Against Them:** Dick can take something Jane says out of context and run with it. She will waste time trying to get him back to the original topic or become completely derailed and flustered defending his detour. He can take a key word and catapult the conversation onto something else entirely, perhaps the item he wanted to talk about all along.

23. **Tick Them Off:** This is particularly effective as a counter measure. If Jane is grilling Dick about his alibi or strange behavior, he can start an argument about something else. He can insult her or goad her into losing her temper. Rationality will fly out the window.

24. **Timing is Everything:** When persuading Jane, Dick should keep in mind the time, place and her mindset. She may be more willing to agree to something after a romantic weekend than after a fight. If he asks her over a candlelit dinner, she might be more receptive than she is while cleaning baby spit off her t-shirt.





25. **Turn the Table:** The best defense is a good offense. If Dick feels he is being targeted, he can turn the argument around on his opponent. He can latch onto inconsistencies and chip away at the logic. If Jane asks, "Why do you think we're having this problem?" He can turn around and ask, "Why do you think we're having this problem?" Answering a question with a question is a good deflection technique. This is especially useful if Dick has backed into a corner and cannot defend his choice or behavior with logic. He forces Jane to come up with viable justifications for him. He can also use Jane's arguments against her. Liars often use this tactic. The questioner often supplies a valid answer for them.

26. **We're A Team:** When asking Dick to do something he does not want to do, Jane emphasizes that they will be doing it together. She isn't asking him for a favor. She is asking him to spend time with her and help her achieve something. He will in fact curry her favor by agreeing and will receive a reward for it. He is likely to give in.

27. **Win-Lose:** Rather than harp and complain, Jane can reinforce with Dick what he will be missing out on if he doesn't comply. She explains how complying means he wins and not complying means he loses. This is time to sweeten the kitty, not bludgeon the other person into submission.

28. **Win-win:** The best way to achieve success is to offer Dick a win-win scenario. The action benefits both Dick and Jane equally and no harm is done in the process. This method eliminates rational objections. It may overcome irrational objections.

For these and other fiction tools, you can pick up a copy of the Story Building Blocks: Crafting Believable Conflict in [paperback](#) or [E-book](#).