

Persuasion Discussion Questions

1. *Persuasion* is often described as “autumnal.” Why? How does “autumnal” describe Anne Elliot’s situation? Jane Austen’s?
2. Consider the opening of the novel. What does it tell the reader about both the characters in the novel and the condition of Britain in 1814, the year *Persuasion* is set?
3. What values do Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth represent? Captain Wentworth, the Crofts, the Harvilles and Benwick?
4. How are Sir Walter’s values displayed through his words and actions? Consider his relationship with his tenants, those who work for him, and each of his daughters.
5. What do Sir Walter’s fiscal problems suggest about the condition of the upper class and aristocracy in Britain? Does Sir Walter recognize his failures? How are Elizabeth and Mary like their father? How are Mary Musgrove’s values displayed through her words and actions?
6. What does the navy represent in the novel? Compare and contrast the two worlds of the novel: the aristocracy and upper class on one hand and the British navy on the other.
7. What is Austen’s own view of the two, and how is it conveyed?
8. Jane Austen described her heroine in a letter to her niece Fanny Knight (23-25 March 1817), “You may *perhaps* like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me.” Do you agree?
9. What arguments are there for Anne’s having listened to Lady Russell eight years earlier? How does Anne view this persuasion by the end of the novel?
10. What are the results of eight years of waiting for Anne? For Wentworth?
11. How are Anne Elliot’s values displayed through her words and actions? Is Anne Elliot a passive or an active character?
 - Consider her actions when the family leaves Kellynch;
 - During the stay in Lyme Regis;
 - During the concert in Bath;
 - After reading Wentworth’s letter.
12. Reread aloud the conversation Anne has with Harville in Bath. Did she mean for Wentworth to overhear the conversation? What does she say that influences Wentworth?
13. Does Anne go through the growth that Austen’s other heroines do, to self-knowledge and moral and intellectual improvement? What does Anne need to learn? Does Anne become more independent near the end of the novel?

14. Does she mature emotionally? Would she have stood up to Lady Russell at the end if needed? Is Anne a Cinderella figure?
15. What role does Mrs. Smith play in the novel? What is the effect of Mrs. Smith's revelations to Anne?
16. Does Wentworth go through a process of self-discovery? Does he change? If so, how?
17. How is he shown to be well suited to Anne?
18. Why are Wentworth and Harville upset by Benwick's inconstancy to the memory of Fanny Harville? How are Benwick and Louisa similar?
19. Why is this novel set in so many different locations? What do these places represent: Kellynch, Uppercross, Lyme, Bath? How does Bath reveal Sir Walter's true nature?
20. The characters are subject to different types of persuasion. Who is persuaded by rank/class/family connections? Who is persuaded by self-interest? Who is persuaded by self-importance?
21. Does the novel embody a feminist viewpoint? Consider Anne's conversation with Harville. Consider Mrs. Croft's character and actions.
22. The cancelled final chapters of *Persuasion* are a glimpse into Austen's writing process. What do they show? How do they differ from the revised ending?