

Discussion Questions for *Persuasion*

1. Duty was an important concept to men and women of Jane Austen's time. For example, women had a duty not to travel alone in order to protect their reputation and to live up to the idea of a true Regency gentlewoman. What are some of the duties that characters in "Persuasion" strive towards? Are there examples of characters who shirk their duties? What is the author's opinion of always following the dictates of duty?
2. The novel begins with references to several instances of persuasion, some more successful than others: Anne attempts to convince (via Lady Russell) that retrenchment is the best solution to the Elliott's financial woes, whereas Mr. Shepherd does win Sir Elliott over to the idea of leaving Kellynch Hall. How are both Anne Elliott and Captain Wentworth persuadable and unpersuadable at different points in the story and why? How does persuasion affect Louisa Musgrove, Captain Benwick, Henrietta Musgrove, Mrs. Clay, and Mr. Walter Elliott?
3. Time and the passing of seasons plays a key role in the story. Early in the novel, Austen lets us know that Anne and Frederick first met in the summer eight years before the main action begins. In what other instances does the passing of time support the plot?
4. What is the turning point of the story that propels several characters to reverse roles? After these role reversals, do the affected characters fit or not fit into traditional male/female stereotypes?
5. The Norton Critical edition of the novel presents two endings; the original ending which was discarded by Jane Austen, and the second ending, which appears in the published work. Which edition do you prefer (assuming you have access to the Norton edition)?
6. Does the ending of the novel seem contrived to you? Why or why not? Do you see Mrs. Smith as a fully developed character, or does she seem to serve as a plot construction to bring Mr. Elliot's past to life? Does the treatment of Mrs. Smith make any difference to the plot of the novel?
7. Some critics regard *Persuasion* as a novel of manners. This view tends to downplay the psychological aspects of the novel, and emphasizes the mannerisms of the times. Do you agree with the assessment of the novel as a novel of manners? Why or why not?
8. At the time the novel was written, strict class distinctions existed in Britain, although they were not as rigid as in earlier periods. What is your opinion of the class distinctions presented in the novel? How do these distinctions affect the interaction of the characters within the novel? Do such distinctions exist today in Britain as well as the U.S.? How do you think Jane Austen viewed class distinctions?