‘We are double-plus unfree’ by Margaret Atwood is an opinion article which argues that ordinary citizens are restricted by government, assuming a critical stance on the government’s actions. The article attempts to persuade the reader into acknowledging the lack of freedom that we hold underneath authority figures, ultimately obliging the readers to speak out against this oppression to government authoritarianism. In her article, Atwood employs reference to other literary works to corroborate the importance of freedom and adopts analogies to urge readers in recognising their inalienable rights. The targeted audience are older and naïve English-speaking Western democratic who fear and threats of terrorism and are limited of citizen liberties and autonomy.

By alluding to other literary texts, Atwood builds up ethos to strengthen her argument. Atwood begins her essay with quotes from famous pieces of literature. For example, Atwood quotes William Blake, “A Robin Redbreast in cage, Puts all Heaven in a Rage”. The entrapment of the bird in a cage is the embodiment of the universal symbol imprisonment. This is followed by the assertion “Heaven” is “in a rage” due to the bird’s lack of freedom, implying that a bird caged up is in disagreement with god’s envisage of our world. The rhythming of consonances “rage” and “cage” suggests that the caging of animal can only be met with anger, further illustrating how deprival of freedom is incompatible with God’s vision of our world. The allusion to Blake’s poetry lends ethos to Atwood’s argument, as she demonstrates how her viewpoint of freedom is corroborated by other authors. Atwood then refers to her own text “Handmaid’s tale” where she distinguishes between “freedom from” and “freedom to”. The dichotomy between passive and active modes of freedom, freedom from and freedom to, suggests that active mode of freedom is more desirable, which is supported by Blake’s initial assertion that although the redbreast is ‘safer in the cage’, it has lost its freedom to live in nature ‘where it belongs’. Such doing further reinforces Atwood’s credibility as “passive” safety that we, the citizens, are subjected to by the government is condemned by Blake and herself, both notable authors. Furthermore, the title the Atwood’s article “we are double-plus unfree” is an allusion to George Orwell’s 1948 where “double-plus” defines very or extreme, and “unfree” replaces confinement. The reference to 1984, a story set on the backdrop of totalitarianism and bemoaning of citizens when Joseph Stalin rose to power in Soviet union, conflates the idea of government authoritarianism with Big Brother is watching you in 1949 novel that carries a harrowing connotation, which illustrates how the lack of freedom is an urgent and disturbing issue.