

# rhetorical appeals: logos, ethos, pathos

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**Rhetoric** is the art of influence, friendship, and eloquence, of ready wit and irrefutable logic. And it harnesses the most powerful of social influences: argument. The ancients considered rhetoric the essential skill of leadership—knowledge so important that they placed it at the center of higher education. It taught them how to speak and write persuasively, produce something to say on every occasion, and make people like them when they spoke. After the ancient Greeks invented it, rhetoric helped create the world's first democracies. It trained Roman orators such as Julius Caesar and Marcus Tullius Cicero and gave the Bible its finest language. It even inspired William Shakespeare. Every one of America's founding fathers studied rhetoric, and they used its principles in writing the Constitution (4-5).

Argument's grand prize is consensus. It means more than just an agreement, much more than a compromise. The consensus represents an audience's commonsense thinking. In fact, it *is* a common sense, a shared faith in a choice—the decision or action you want (9).

## Artistotle's Three Most Powerful Tools of Persuasion

**Logos** is argument by logic. If arguments were children, *logos* would be the brainy one, the big sister who gets top grades in high school. *Logos* is not just about following rules of logic; it is a set of techniques that use what the audience is thinking (37-38).

**Ethos** is argument by character. It employs the persuader's personality, reputation, and ability to look trustworthy. (While *logos* sweats over its GPA, *ethos* gets elected class president.) In rhetoric, a sterling reputation is more than just good; it is persuasive. An audience is more likely to believe a trustworthy persuader, and to accept his/her argument (38).

**Pathos** is argument by emotion. It is the sibling the others disrespect but who gets away with everything. You can persuade someone logically but getting him out of his chair to act on it takes something more combustible (38).

*Logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* appeal the brain, gut, and heart of your audience. While our brain tries to sort out the facts, our gut tells us whether we can trust the other person, and our heart makes us want to do something about it. They form the essence of effective persuasion. They usually work together to win an argument. By using your opponent's logic and your audience's emotion, you can win over your audience with greater ease. You make them happy to let you control the argument (38-39).

# logos

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In writing or analyzing an argument, use or look for the following uses of *logos*:

- facts and statistics
- logical reasons and results
- examples and anecdotes
- analogies

You can assess the effectiveness of *logos* in an argument by asking the following questions:

- Does the argument have a clear thesis? In other words, can you identify the main point the writer is trying to make?
- Does the argument use the above uses of logic needed to support the thesis?
- Is the argument well organized? Are the points the argument makes presented in logical order?
- Can you detect any errors in logic (fallacies) that undermine the argument's reasoning?

Appeal to Reason Example:

Among young people, the dangers of smoking are clear. According to the World Health Organization, smoking can cause a variety of problems in young people—for example, lung problems and shortness of breath. Smoking also contributes to heart attacks, strokes, and coronary artery disease (72). In addition, teenage smokers have an increased risk of developing lung cancer as they get older (CDC). According to one study, teenage smokers see doctors or other health professionals at higher rates than those who do not smoke (Ardly 112). Finally, teenagers who smoke tend to abuse alcohol and marijuana as well as engage in other risky behaviors (CDC). Clearly, tobacco is a dangerous drug that has serious health risks for teenage smokers. In fact, some studies suggest that smoking takes thirteen to fourteen years off a person's life (American Cancer Society).

# ethos

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Aristotle knew that the character and authority of a speaker writer could contribute to the persuasiveness of an argument. If the person making the argument is known to be honorable, truthful, knowledgeable, and trustworthy, audiences will likely accept what he or she is saying. If, on the other hand, the person is known to be dishonorable, audiences will probably dismiss his or her argument—no matter how persuasive it might seem. Whenever you analyze an argument, you should try to determine whether the writer is worth listening to—in other words, whether the writer has credibility.

You can assess the effectiveness of *ethos* in an argument by asking the following questions:

- Does the person making the argument demonstrate knowledge of the subject?
- What steps does the person making the argument take to present its position as reasonable?
- Does the argument seem fair?
- If the argument includes sources, do they seem both reliable and credible? Does the argument include proper documentation?
- Does the person making the argument demonstrate respect for opposing viewpoints?

Appeal to Character Example:

My advice to those who are starting to smoke is to reconsider—before it’s too late. I began using tobacco over ten years ago when I was in high school. At first, I started using snuff because I was on the baseball team and wanted to imitate the players in the major leagues. It wasn’t long before I had graduated to cigarettes—first a few and then at least a pack a day. I heard the warnings from teachers and the counselors from the D.A.R.E. program, but they didn’t do any good. I spent almost all my extra money on cigarettes. Occasionally, I would stop—sometimes for a few days, sometimes for a few weeks—but I always started again. Later, after I graduated, the health plan at my job covered smoking cessation treatment, so I tried everything—the patch, Chantix, therapy, and even hypnosis. Again, nothing worked. At last, after I had been married for four years, my wife sat me down and begged me to quit. Later that night, I threw away my cigarettes and haven’t smoked since. Although I’ve gained some weight, I now breathe easier, and I am able to concentrate better than I could before. Had I known how difficult quitting was going to be, I never would have started in the first place.

# pathos

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Aristotle knew that an appeal to emotions could be very persuasive because it adds a human dimension to an argument. By appealing to an audience's sympathies and by helping them to identify with the subject being discussed, emotional appeals can turn abstract concepts into concrete examples that can compel people to take action.

Although an appeal to emotions can add to an already strong argument, it does not itself constitute proof. Moreover, certain kinds of emotional appeals—appeals to fear, hatred, and prejudice, for example—are considered unfair and are not usually acceptable.

You can assess the effectiveness of *pathos* in an argument by asking the following questions:

- Does the argument include words or images designed to move readers?
- Does the argument use emotionally loaded language?
- Does the argument include vivid descriptions or striking examples calculated to appeal to readers' emotions?
- Are the values and beliefs of the writer apparent in the argument?
- Does the tone seem emotional?

Appeal to Emotions Example:

Every day, almost four thousand young people begin smoking cigarettes, and this number is growing (Family First Aid). Sadly, most of you have no idea what you are getting into. For one thing, smoking yellows your teeth, stains your fingers, and gives you bad breath. The smoke also gets into your hair and clothes and makes you smell. Also, smoking is addictive; once you start, it's hard to stop. After you've been smoking for a few years, you are hooked, and as television commercials for the nicotine patch show, you can have a hard time breaking the habit. Finally, smoking is dangerous. In the United States, one out of every five deaths can be attributed to smoking (Teen Health). If you have ever seen anyone dying of lung cancer, you understand how bad long-term smoking can be. Just look at the pictures on the Internet of diseased, blackened lungs, and it becomes clear that smoking does not make you look cool or sophisticated, no matter what cigarette advertising suggests.