

The goal of argumentative writing is to persuade your audience that your ideas are valid, or more valid than someone else's. The **Greek philosopher Aristotle** divided the means of persuasion into three categories—**Ethos, Pathos, Logos**.

**Ethos, Pathos** and **Logos** are tools of persuasion that can help writers make their argument *appeal* to readers; this is why they're known as the argumentative *appeals*. Using a combination of appeals is recommended in each essay. Make sure to consider carefully your audience and to stress the kind(s) of appeal that will be the most effective with each audience.

### **Ethos (Credibility), or ethical appeal**

means convincing through the character of the author. We tend to believe people whom we respect. One of the central problems of argumentation is to project an impression to the reader that you are someone worth listening to, in other words making yourself as author into an authority on the subject of the paper, as well as someone who is likable and worthy of respect.

### **Pathos (Values), or emotional appeal**

means persuading by appealing to the reader's emotions. We can look at texts ranging from classic essays to contemporary advertisements to see how pathos, emotional appeals, are used to persuade. Language choice affects the audience's emotional response, and emotional appeal can effectively be used to enhance an argument.

### **Logos (Support), or evidential appeal**

means persuading by the use of reasoning. This will be the most important technique we will study, and Aristotle's favorite. We'll look at deductive and inductive reasoning, and discuss what makes an effective, persuasive reason to back up your claims. Giving reasons is the heart of argumentation, and cannot be emphasized enough. We'll study the types of support you can use to substantiate your thesis, and look at some of the common logical fallacies, in order to avoid them in your writing.

#### **1) Ethos (think ETHICAL Appeal of the Writer)**

This appeal involves convincing your audience that you are intelligent and **can be trusted**. Writers cannot simply say to their audience "I can be trusted because I'm smart and a good person." This appeal is perhaps the most difficult to establish; you have to prove yourself by demonstrating that you understand what you are arguing because:

You are **providing**

- personal experience or
- know someone else who has personal experience,

You are using **expert support**

- through extensive research,
- through up-to-date research
- through recognized authorities in the field (this will also help to prevent your appeal from seeming too personal),

You are using appropriate **writing style**

- by means of professional and strong words that carry appropriate connotations; be sure that you don't sound overly emotional,
- by using mostly 3rd person. Only use 1st person when providing a *specific personal experience*

You are treating your **audience** with respect by

- establishing some common ground in a refutation section.
  - Find some mutual ground for both sides of the argument by acknowledging that your opinion and the opinion of the opposite side agree on at least one aspect. This is essential in establishing your ethos (or credibility) and your ability to treat the topic fairly.
- However, be careful not to over-do this; remember which side you are supporting.

Appeals, or arguments, about *Ethos*, often turn on claims like these:

- A) A person (or group or institution) is or is not trustworthy or credible on this issue.
- B) A person (or group or institution) does or does not have the authority to speak on this issue.
- C) A person (or group or institution) does or does not have unselfish or clear motives for addressing this subject
- D) A person (or group or institution) does or does not bring authoritative, credible sources to the discussion to supplement the areas in which their own credibility is insufficient.

## 2) **Logos (think LOGICAL Appeal)**

You appeal to logic when you rely on your audience's intelligence and when you offer credible evidence to support your argument. That evidence includes:

- **FACTS**- These are valuable because they are not debatable; they represent the truth
- **EXAMPLES**- These include events or circumstances that your audience can relate to their life
- **PRECEDENTS**- These are specific examples (historical and personal) from the past
- **AUTHORITY**- The authority must be timely (not out-dated), and it must be qualified to judge the topic
- **DEDUCTIVE/INDUCTIVE**- Deductive reasoning is when you pick apart evidence to reach conclusions, and inductive reasoning is when you add logical pieces to the evidence to reach conclusions.

**Logical Fallacies (See separate handout)**

Writers use evidence, data, facts and examples to provide support for their ideas. Often, logic and rational arguments are also used to make a point. While the use of reason is completely appropriate in supporting arguments, often the presence of logical fallacies can weaken an argument and call the credibility of the writer into question.

**3) Pathos (think PASSIONATE or emotional appeal)**

This kind of appeal can be very effective if it's not over-done, especially if your topic is an emotional one. Because your audience has emotions as well as intellect, your argument must seek to engage the audience emotionally. However, using emotional appeal alone is not as effective as when it is used in conjunction with logical and/or ethical appeals.

- Pathos should be used to build bridges to your evidence, not to cover up the fact that you don't have any.
- With pathos, we must either show the reader that our thesis is in line with their existing values and beliefs or that the values and beliefs supporting our thesis are superior to those of others for the reasons we will explore in the body of the argument.
- Pathos in the form of humor can be very effective but be careful when it descends into ridicule. Surely, using over-the-top humor to expose hypocrisy or undue bias in a subject is quite effective. But because ridicule is a double-edged sword, it requires deft hand to wield it. Humor that reflects bad taste discredits a writer, as does satire that misses its mark. Unless your target really deserves the blasting and you are sure you can pull it off, it's usually better to avoid using ridicule, in academic arguments in particular.

**Denotative vs. Connotative Words**

The BEST way to incorporate pathos (or emotional) appeals is by using words that carry appropriate connotations. Denotation refers to the dictionary definition of a word. Connotation on the other hand refers to words that carry secondary meanings, undertones, and implications. For example, if you were to ask a person how they'd like to be described from the following list of words, what do you think their answer would be?

**Slender**

**Thin**

**Scrawny**

The answer to this is most likely the word *slender*. While all the words carry the same denotation (they all mean lean, and not fat), the word *slender* carries more positive undertones. A slender person is graceful, elegant, and perhaps even sexy. *Thin* on the other hand is a fairly neutral word, and it leads people to prefer the word "slender" as it carries the more positive connotation. Finally, the word *scrawny* brings an unhealthy, overly thin, or bony person to mind, and people generally do not want to be described in this manner. Over time, words shift in their connotative meanings, and writers should be up-to-date on the current connotations of a word.

Once again, the BEST way to incorporate pathos (or emotional) appeals is by using words that carry appropriate connotations. Consider the following part of the first statement of an article titled "A Case of Severe Bias":

*"I am not a crack addict. I am not a welfare mother. I am not illiterate..."*

The words *crack addict*, *welfare mother*, and *illiterate* carry strong connotations. It makes the above statement (while already logical) more powerful. Imagine if the writer used words that carried weaker connotations:

*"I am not a person who abuses substances. I am not a parent who needs government assistance. I can read."*

Notice how the emotional appeal is weakened. Even though the logical appeal is present, the statement no longer carries the same strength. When using words with strong connotations, make sure they are appropriate for the purpose, occasion and context of the argument you are making (or analyzing).

### **Final Thoughts**

The rhetorical appeals are foundational to establishing and proving relevance and credibility in argument. These elements can be misused as much as they can be used appropriately so we must be careful to always let the data guide our conclusions and to compensate for personal bias and blind spots by looking even further into the relevant, authoritative evidence on the topic under investigation. All sound arguments are built on a combination of these appeals but rest mostly on the foundation of authoritative, relevant and reliable information.