

# PERSUASIVE DEVICES: ETHOS, LOGOS, PATHOS

The **modes of persuasion** are devices in rhetoric that classify the speaker's appeal to the audience. They are: **ethos logos**, and **pathos**. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* describes the modes of persuasion thus:

Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated.

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. [...] Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's *personal character* when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. [...] Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the *speech stirs their emotions*. [...] Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the *speech itself* when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question.

Whenever you read an argument you must ask yourself, "is this persuasive? And if so, to whom?" There are several ways to appeal to an audience. Among them are appealing to logos, ethos and pathos. These appeals are prevalent in almost all arguments.

To Appeal to Logic (logos)	To Develop Ethos	To Appeal to Emotion (pathos)
Theoretical, abstract language	Language appropriate to audience and subject	Vivid, concrete language
Literal and historical analogies	Restrained, sincere, fair minded presentation	Emotionally loaded language
Definitions	Appropriate level of vocabulary	Connotative meanings
Factual data and statistics	Correct grammar	Emotional examples
Quotations		Vivid descriptions
Citations from experts and authorities		Narratives of emotional events
Informed opinions		Emotional tone
		Figurative language
	<b>Effect</b>	
Evokes a cognitive, rationale response	Demonstrates author's reliability, competence, and respect for the audience's ideas and values through reliable and appropriate use of support and general accuracy	Evokes an emotional response

# Ethos

**Ethos is appeal based on the character of the speaker.** An ethos-driven document relies on the reputation of the author. *Ethos* (plural: *ethe*) is an appeal to the authority or honesty of the speaker. It is how well the speaker convinces the audience that he or she is qualified to speak on the particular subject. It can be done in many ways:

- By being a notable figure in the field in question, such as a college professor or an executive of a company whose business is that of the subject.
- By having a vested interest in a matter, such as the person being related to the subject in question.
- By using impressive *logos* that shows to the audience the speaker is knowledgeable on the topic.
- By appealing to a person's ethics or character.

**Ethos** is related to the English word ethics and refers to the trustworthiness of the speaker/writer. Ethos is an effective persuasive strategy because when we believe that the speaker does not intend to do us harm, we are more willing to listen to what s/he has to say. For example, when a trusted doctor gives you advice, you may not understand all of the medical reasoning behind the advice, but you nonetheless follow the directions because you believe that the doctor knows what s/he is talking about. Likewise, when a judge comments on legal precedent audiences tend to listen because it is the job of a judge to know the nature of past legal cases.

## Example of Ethos:

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely."...Since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable in terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in."...I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

# Logos

**Logos is appeal based on logic or reason.** Documents distributed by companies or corporations are logos-driven. Scholarly documents are also often logos-driven. *Logos* (plural: *logoi*) is logical appeal or the simulation of it, and the term *logic* is derived from it. It is normally used to describe facts and figures that support the speaker's topic. Having a logos appeal also enhances *ethos* (see above) because information makes the speaker look knowledgeable and prepared to his or her audience. However, data can be confusing and thus confuse the audience. Logos can also be misleading or inaccurate.

The Greek word logos is the basis for the English word logic. Logos is a broader idea than formal logic--the highly symbolic and mathematical logic that you might study in a philosophy course. Logos refers to any attempt to appeal to the intellect, the general meaning of "logical argument." Everyday arguments rely heavily on ethos and pathos, but academic arguments rely more on logos. Yes, these arguments will call upon the writers' credibility and try to touch the audience's emotions, but there will more often than not be logical chains of reasoning supporting all claims.

## Example of Logos:

Let us begin with a simple proposition: What democracy requires is public debate, not information. Of course it needs information too, but the kind of information it needs can be generated only by vigorous popular debate. We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our ideas about the world to the test of public controversy. Information, usually seen as the precondition of debate, is better understood as its by product. When we get into arguments that focus and fully engage our attention, we become avid seekers of relevant information. Otherwise, we take in information passively--if we take it in at all.

~Christopher Lasch, "The Lost Art of Political Argument"

# Pathos

**Pathos is appeal based on emotion.** Advertisements tend to be pathos-driven. *Pathos* (plural: *patha* or *pathea*) is an appeal to the audience's emotions. It can be in the form of metaphor, simile, a passionate delivery, or even a simple claim that a matter is unjust. Pathos can be particularly powerful if used well, but most speeches do not solely rely on pathos. Pathos is most effective when the author connects with an underlying value of the reader. In addition, the speaker may use pathos to appeal to fear, in order to sway the audience.

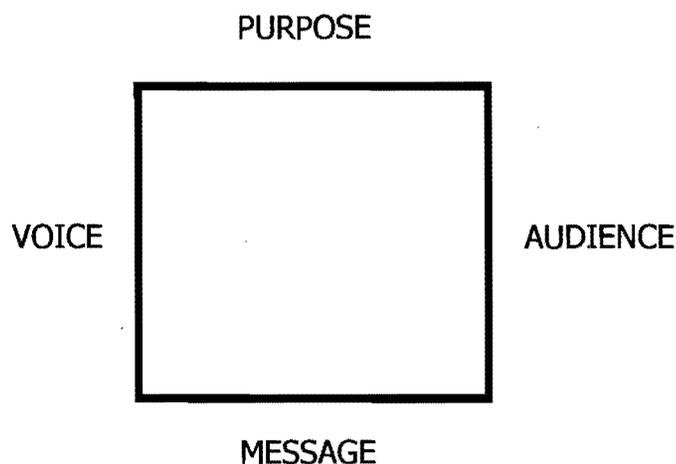
Pathos is related to the words pathetic, sympathy and empathy. Whenever you accept an claim based on how it makes you feel without fully analyzing the rationale behind the claim, you are acting on pathos. They may be any emotions: love, fear, patriotism, guilt, hate or joy. A majority of arguments in the popular press are heavily dependent on pathetic appeals. The more people react without full consideration for the WHY, the more effective an argument can be. Although the pathetic appeal can be manipulative, it is the cornerstone of moving people to action. Many arguments are able to persuade people logically, but the apathetic audience may not follow through on the call to action. Appeals to pathos touch a nerve and compel people to not only listen, but to also take the next step and act in the world.

## Example of Pathos:

For me, commentary on war zones at home and abroad begins and ends with personal reflections. A few years ago, while watching the news in Chicago, a local news story made a personal connection with me. The report concerned a teenager who had been shot because he had angered a group of his male peers. This act of violence caused me to recapture a memory from my own adolescence because of an instructive parallel in my own life with this boy who had been shot. When I was a teenager some thirty-five years ago in the New York metropolitan area, I wrote a regular column for my high school newspaper. One week, I wrote a column in which I made fun of the fraternities in my high school. As a result, I elicited the anger of some of the most aggressive teenagers in my high school. A couple of nights later, a car pulled up in front of my house, and the angry teenagers in the car dumped garbage on the lawn of my house as an act of revenge and intimidation.

James Garbarino "Children in a Violent World: A Metaphysical Perspective"

## The Rhetorical Square



Adapted from <http://courses.durhamtech.edu/perkins/aris.html> by nsc 8/2011