Aristotle’s Appeals: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

When you write an argument, you can connect with your audience logically, emotionally, and ethically. By using a combination of these strategies known as “appeals”—logos, pathos, and ethos—you can effectively persuade your reader. Of the three, logos is most essential to a strong, valid argument.

LOGOS (“logic”): Persuade your readers by using logical reasoning.

Logos is the strategic use of claims supported by effective evidence and reasoning. Especially important are the clarity of your claim, the logic of your supporting points, and the relevance of your supporting evidence. Logos is your key to creating a strong argument.

**Do the following:**

- Create clear claims
- Qualify your claims, when necessary: (for example, use “some” and “often” rather than “all” and “always”)
- Create valid reasoning (commentary or warrant) about the evidence that you present
- Provide strong evidence (facts, statistics, personal experience, expert testimony, interviews, observations, anecdotes, etc.)
- Acknowledge the opposition and respond to opposing views

**Avoid the following:**

- Claims that are too general or vague
- Reasons that do not relate logically to the claim
- Misusing evidence—for example, presenting evidence that does not accurately represent an author’s views
- Weak or absent commentary or warrant
- Ignoring important evidence
- Ignoring opposing viewpoints
- Logical fallacies

PATHOS (“emotion”): Persuade your readers by connecting with their feelings and imagination.

Pathos can be a powerful appeal to add to your argument. For example, if you have used statistical evidence (logos) to support a claim (which may be persuasive, but somewhat dry), you can add descriptions, case studies, and visual images to show your readers the human and emotional impact of the issue you are discussing. Excessive use of pathos, however, can mislead readers or attempt to hide an argument that lacks logos—as in some commercial and political advertisements.

**Do the following:**

- Use pathos to reinforce logos, not substitute for it
- Use images, descriptions, and case studies to create an emotional connection to your reader
- Present the above in a fair manner—not to conceal or deceive your reader
- Appeal to your reader’s appreciation of idealism, beauty, compassion for others, nostalgia, and humor

**Avoid the following:**

- Pathos that substitutes for relevant evidence and clear, logical reasoning
- Manipulation of the reader’s emotions through appeals to their patriotism, fear, hate, prejudice, pity, etc.
- Oversimplified, unthinking reactions to complex problems
- Use of stereotypes or prejudices that pit one group against another
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ETHOS (“credibility”): Persuade your readers through your credibility as a writer.

Ethos is essential to a persuasive argument. Through the ethical appeal, you demonstrate that you are fair, thoughtful, open-minded, honest, and knowledgeable. Your reader will sense that you are trustworthy and credible.

**Do the following:**

- Show that you are well-informed about the topic—that you have researched broadly and used the best sources from experts
- Show that you are confident about your position but understand the reader’s concerns
- Show that you are willing to listen to other views and present them to your reader
- Demonstrate that you are sincere and honest
- Show that you are responsible by representing others’ views accurately and fairly

**Avoid the following:**

- Dishonesty
- A close-minded approach
- Lack of fairness
- Distorting or misrepresenting information
- Use of insults *(ad hominem* fallacy) to degrade those who hold opposing views
- Ignoring opposing views
- Insufficient research on the topic/issue
- Lack of citations in your essay
- Use of sources that are biased or outdated
- Use of sources that do not cite studies or provide a list of references

Adapted from the University Writing Center (UCW) at the University of Central Florida
http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~uwc/Writing%20Resources/Handouts/appeals.htm

Video on Aristotle’s Appeals

TedX: The Art of Debate