



The Three Appeals of Argumentative Writing (Transcript)



The Three Appeals of Argument Podcast, Click here: <http://www.screencast.com/t/8gyyeFs27>

Greetings everyone. This is Kurtis Clements from Kaplan University's Writing Center with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to discuss the three appeals of argumentative or persuasive writing. Before I begin, I want to point out that while some make distinctions between argument and persuasion, this podcast will be using the terms synonymously.

Many college writing assignments will ask you to persuade or to argue, and while it may seem relatively easy to express your view on an issue, doing so effectively actually takes skill and careful planning.

To this end, you will want to utilize a thoughtful combination of the three appeals of persuasive writing--logos, ethos, and pathos. Haven't heard of logos, ethos, or pathos? Well, if you were a Greek some three thousand years ago, you would likely have grown up with these terms, for it's at that time that Aristotle first shared his ideas on persuasive rhetoric. But the truth is you've probably been exposed to Aristotle's ideas for effective persuasion even if the language used to talk about such techniques was different.

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Logos

Logos is simply an approach to argument that appeals to the readers sense of logic. When using this appeal the writer uses examples, facts, statistics, expert testimony, and/or personal experiences. Here's a brief example from a paper arguing for public smoking bans:

Few would disagree that smoking cigarettes is harmful to one's health. Smoking can cause cancer and emphysema. Smoking is known to cause heart disease. Smoking also contributes to birth defects. Smoking cigarettes is so harmful to one's health that the Surgeon General of the United States has a warning on every package of cigarettes informing consumers of the hazards of using the product. If smoking cigarettes is bad for the smoker then it must be bad for anyone inhaling the smoke-whether a smoker or not. This is why some states have laws against smoking cigarettes in a car with minors or not allowing smoking in restaurants: inhaling second-hand smoke is also not healthy for an individual. Since it's hard to dispute the harmfulness of cigarette smoking and smoke, then it stands to reason the public should be protected from the dangers of this product by not allowing individuals who choose to smoke to do so in public places.



Whether you agree or disagree with what the writer is trying to argue in this example, it's hard to dismiss the logic the writer uses. Right?

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Ethos

Another of the three appeals is ethos. Ethos is an approach to argument that attempts to show the writer as a fair-minded, concerned, and reliable individual. It's the reader's sense of the writer as trustworthy and credible that makes what he/she says convincing. One way writers generate ethos is by offering a level-headed discussion of the topic and using sound reasoning.

In an argumentative essay, if the writer bashes the "other side" without tact, then the writer's credibility--ethos--will sink. To this end, always avoid name-calling or any kind of direct put-down of the other side. If, for example, you find fault with a position, refute that position and carefully develop your rationale. Instead of writing that anyone who does not like black licorice is narrow-minded, write something like this: Granted, while black licorice is not for everyone and may very well be an acquired taste, those who enjoy black licorice really enjoy black licorice and represent the kind of people who march to the beat of a different drummer.

Ethos is also created when the writer is an expert and/or the writer uses evidence from reliable sources--and thus the writer comes across as someone fair-minded and deserving of respect. If you were writing a paper in favor of a vegetarian diet and used evidence from sources such as The Vegetarian Digest, The Journal of Vegetarianism, and Paul McCartney (the ex-Beatle and a famous vegetarian), how much ethos do you think you would have in the eyes of a carnivorous audience? The sources may very well contain reliable information, but they are also all clearly biased, right? What if you were going to make the same argument, but you used evidence from the Journal of American Medicine, The Harvard Medicine Review, and the Surgeon General of the United States, how much ethos would you have?

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Pathos

The last of the three appeals of argumentative writing is pathos. Pathos is an approach that appeals to the audience's emotions. The idea is to stir up the feelings of readers as a way to to gain their support for what the writer claims to be true about a subject.

Let's say you were writing an essay on the need to adopt and enforce a national mandatory seatbelt law. To stir the emotions of readers in an attempt to convince your audience that what you have to say has merit, you could use pathos in this way:



Teddy Biro wasn't wearing a seatbelt when the car he was driving skidded on an icy road and hit a utility pole; Biro was catapulted through his front windshield and died of blood loss from a severed jugular vein. The coroner reported he had no other injuries besides minor abrasions. Bob Nettleblatt wasn't wearing a seat belt when a car rear-ended him at a stop sign. Nettleblatt slammed his head into his front windshield and required 137 stitches to close up the laceration; investigators at the scene said if he had been wearing a seat belt, he would have been virtually unhurt from the 2 mph rear end collision.

When you are writing to persuade, you need to recognize that in order for you to argue your position successfully, you need to balance the way you appeal to your audience. While it may be easy to appeal to your audience emotionally, getting readers weepy-eyed or boiling with rage, you need to ask yourself if that is the best way to make your case, if, in the end, using emotionally-charged content will ultimately help you win over your audience. Most arguments use some emotion, but the use of such content needs to be kept in check, and the way that is done is by using what Aristotle thought to be the most effective appeal--logos, an appeal to your audience's sense of reason. Beyond this you need to consider your ethos – the sense of you as a fair-minded, credible writer. If you rely exclusively on emotional content, do not recognize that opposing views exist, or commit one or more logical fallacies, you will not have much ethos, and without ethos your argument will fall on deaf ears. A well-structured persuasive essay will utilize all three appeals in appropriate doses.

Please keep in mind that writing an argumentative essay requires, as I am sure you recognize, careful thought and preparation. You have to keep in mind that you are expressing an opinion that your audience does not share (or does not feel strongly about) and your purpose is to convince your audience that your opinion is valid. To do this you need to structure your argument effectively and appeal to your audience in ways that will best help your case.

Thanks for listening, everyone. Happy writing.

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