

Moving Your Audience

Ethos and Pathos as Persuasive Appeals

Adapted from chapter 6

Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings, by John D. Ramage, et al.

ETHOS: THE APPEAL TO CREDIBILITY

Main idea:

An argument is more persuasive if the audience trusts the speaker.

The impact of the speaker's credibility is called the appeal from ethos.

Ethos: The Appeal to Credibility

Writers create credibility in four ways:

They're Knowledgeable

They're Fair

They Know Their Audience

They're Professional

KNOWLEDGEABLE

Comments:

If you have “done your homework” (research, gathering of evidence, thinking through the opposing views and coming up with responses to rebuttals), you will earn the respect of your reader.

FAIR

Comments:

Your ethos is strengthened if you demonstrate that you understand and empathize with other points of view.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Comments:

What does your audience value?
You can tailor your argument to those values.

Our text refers to this as “the power of audience-based reasons.”

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

You are making an argument that the government should build a dam on a local river. Environmentalists are opposed to the project out of concerns for the impact the dam will have on the environment. Which of the following arguments might you use to address this hostile audience:

Argument # 1: The government should build a hydroelectric dam on the river because this area needs cheap power to attract heavy industry.

Argument # 2: The government should build a dam on the river because the only alternative power sources are coal-fired or nuclear plants, both of which pose greater risk to the environment than a hydroelectric dam.

Clearly, the assumption behind Argument 2 (“choose the source of power that poses the least risk to the environment”) is rooted in the values and beliefs of environmentalists, whereas the assumption behind Argument 1 (“growth of industry is good”) is not likely to have an impact on them.

However, argument 2 would probably appeal to a business-oriented audience, to whom new industry like building a dam would mean more jobs and a stronger local economy.

PROFESSIONAL

Comments:

From the standpoint of document preparation, you enhance your ethos as a writer by the care you take in adhering to genre conventions, proofreading, editing, and formatting to a high level of perfection.

PATHOS: THE APPEAL TO BELIEFS/EMOTIONS

Main idea:

Arguers create “pathetic” appeals whenever they connect their claims to the readers’ values, thus triggering positive or negative emotions depending on whether these values are affirmed or transgressed.

For example,

Pro-life proponents appeal to pathos when they focus on the unborn baby, either positively in order to emphasize the unborn child's humanity (pictures of developing fetus that show tiny fingers and toes; evidence that prove unborn babies feel pain) or negatively in order to graphically illustrate the physical effects of abortion on an unborn baby (dismemberment from suction; burned flesh from saline abortions).



For example,

Pro-choice proponents appeal to pathos when they focus on the emotional and physical needs of the mother, particularly women in poverty or under-developed parts of the world; women who are victims of rape; women who are subjected to unprotected sex with men who are infected with AIDS; single mothers, and so on.



When are Emotional Appeals Legitimate?

- If they intensify and deepen our response to an issue rather than divert our attention from it.
- Pathos can give access to non-logical but not necessarily non-rational, ways of knowing.
- Pathos helps us see what is deeply at stake in an issue.
- Appeals to pathos help readers walk in the writer's shoes.

EXAMPLE

Most people are annoyed by telemarketers, but this writer wants to create sympathy for them. In an op-ed piece, she writes:

“The next time an annoying sales call interrupts your dinner, think of my 71-year old mother, Laverne, who works as a part-time telemarketer to supplement her social security income.”

Bingo! By putting a human and sympathetic face on previously anonymous telemarketers, this author creates an emotional connection with her audience.

When are Emotional Appeals NOT Legitimate?

When they confuse an issue
rather than clarify it.

EXAMPLE

The case of a student who tries to convince his professor to change his grade from a D to a C lest he lose his scholarship and shatter the dreams of his grandmother.

Injecting his weeping grandmother into the discussion is an **illegitimate** emotional appeal since the issue is the student's performance in the class and **not** whether or not his grandmother will be disappointed.

HOW WRITERS CREATE PATHOS

Writers create an effective pathos in four ways:

- They Use Concrete Language
- They Use Specific Examples
- They Use Narratives
- They Use Words, Metaphors and Analogies with Positive or Negative Connotations

CONCRETE LANGUAGE

COMPARE THIS FIRST DRAFT:

People who prefer driving a car to taking a bus think that taking the bus will increase the stress of the daily commute. Just the opposite is true. Not being able to find a parking spot when in a hurry to be at work or school can cause a person stress. Taking the bus gives a person time to read or sleep, etc. It could be used as a mental break.

WITH THIS REVISION:

Taking the bus can be more relaxing than driving a car. Having someone else behind the wheel gives people time to chat with friends or cram for an exam. They can balance their checkbooks, do homework, doze off, catch up on news, or get lost in a novel rather than foam at the mouth searching for a parking space.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

COMPARE THIS (BORING) FIRST DRAFT:

Another advantage of a multicultural education is that it will help us see our own culture in a broader perspective. If all we know is our own heritage, we might not be inclined to see anything bad about this heritage because we won't know anything else. But if we study other heritages, we can see the costs and benefits of our own heritage.

WITH THIS REVISION:

Another advantage of a multicultural education is that it raises questions about traditional Western values. For example, owning private property (such as buying your own home) is part of the American dream. However in studying the beliefs of American Indians, students are confronted with a very different view of private property...(etc.)

USE NARRATIVES

Narratives (stories) can be used as an opening to an essay or to illustrate portions of your essay.

OPENING FROM “AMNESTY,” BY JOHN KAVANAUGH

Let's call her Maria. She was illegally brought into the United States at the age of 2. Now 27, she is a vital member of her parish and has three young children. Maria was recently deported to Ciudad Juarez....

POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS

Word choice often creates an emotional response in an audience. For example,

Is a politician “bold and decisive” or “shrill and domineering”?

Is a tax bill “good medicine” or a “poison pill”?

Is a person “cheap” or “thrifty”?

REVIEW:

PATHOS THE APPEAL TO VALUES/BELIEFS/EMOTIONS

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YOUR TURN: PRACTICE

Rewrite one or more paragraphs from a recently-written college essay to include more emotional appeals.

Use any of the strategies for giving your argument pathos: concrete language, specific language, narratives, metaphors, analogies, connotative words.

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Spring 2013