

# ETHOS, PATHOS, AND LOGOS

The goal of a lot of academic writing is argumentative: a successful paper can convince its readers to change their minds, to look at a problem differently, or to consider a new solution. Readers, however, can be hard to convince! So, more than two thousand years ago, Aristotle described three different strategies (sometimes called **rhetorical appeals**) that writers and speakers can use to make their arguments more convincing.

Be careful, however, because not every appeal is appropriate for every kind of argument. For example, there's no place in a scientific research paper for an "appeal to emotion." In many essays and speeches, however, teachers will ask you to practice using all three appeals. As you can see, some of them overlap, while others conflict. Used wisely, however, they can work together to make your argument as convincing as possible.

## ■ Ethos: Establishing Character

Arguments using ethos (sometimes called **ethical appeals**) emphasize your trustworthiness. *This reasonable, well-informed person believes this, they imply, so maybe the reader should, too.* They make an effort to establish your **authority**, **fairness**, and **connection** with readers. To show that you are someone whose ideas are worth listening to, you might:

- State your experience and credentials directly: "As a trained paramedic with six years of experience, I have seen....."
- Use specific, concrete examples which display the depth of your knowledge. Anyone can say that drinking and driving is bad, but someone who's been at the scene of many crashes knows details that the readers don't. Use those details!
- Choose words that show how knowledgeable you are. If your readers know the subject you're writing about, make sure you use the terms associated with that subject. If your readers are unfamiliar with it, use a few of the terms and make sure to define them.
- Show that your opinion is shared by other expert authorities: "in 2012, researchers at Harvard found that even *more* accidents involve alcohol...."
- Use evidence from the most unbiased sources you can find.
- Refer respectfully to people and positions with which you disagree.
- Avoid words and ideas which may offend some readers unnecessarily.
- Show what you have in common with people and positions with which you disagree.
- Mention your opponents' strongest arguments, not just their weakest ones, and respond to those arguments carefully and thoughtfully.
- Show how your own perspective has changed over time, if it has.
- Show your own respect for your argument by carefully proofreading your paper.

## ■ Pathos: Appealing to Emotion

Arguments based on pathos (sometimes called **emotional appeals**) encourage readers to make a decision based on emotions like anger, pity, or fear. Many people who won't change their minds based on logical argument are willing to do so when their emotions are involved, which is why so many political advertisements use them. Appeals to emotion are usually discouraged in formal academic writing, but there are many essays and speeches in which they're appropriate. To appeal to your audience's emotions, you might:

- Use vivid, concrete language in telling a story about a specific example.
- Focus on the example of someone who is especially vulnerable or appealing, such as a toddler or honor student killed in a car accident.
- Connect those examples to particularly startling or uncomfortable facts and statistics that you've found in your research ("her experience was not unusual; 60% of the drivers on the road that night were legally drunk")
- Use language that emphasizes the positive ("hardworking," "law-abiding," "helpful") or powerless ("frail," "tiny," "terrified") qualities of people you perceive as victims.
- Use language that emphasizes the negative ("irresponsible," "careless") qualities of people or institutions you believe to be at fault.

## ■ Logos: Appealing to Reason

Arguments based on logos (sometimes called **logical appeals**) involve claims and evidence that establish your skill in reasoning. Logos is the most "academic" of the three kinds of appeals, and it's an important part of every college writing assignment. To show that you have carefully thought through the topic you're exploring, you'll want to:

- Look carefully at your own assumptions: are there any circumstances under which they might not be true? If so, you may not want to base an argument on them.
- Avoid logical fallacies.
  - Don't assume that one even caused another event just because it came first.
  - Don't assume that one person's experience is typical of other peoples' experiences.
  - Don't assume that there are only two options.
- Word your claims carefully: don't make statements about "everyone" or "everywhere" or "always" unless there are no possible exceptions.
- Back up each of your claims with quotations, statistics, or examples.
  - Make sure your evidence comes from respected experts and authorities.
  - Use recent sources (less than five years old) whenever possible: newer research may contradict some older sources.
- Use historical or scientific comparisons when appropriate.