



Rhetoric, Logic, & Argumentation:

A Guide for Student Writers



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Introduction

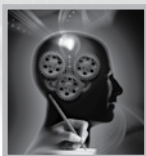
Rhetoric, Logic, & Argumentation



IN THE MODERN LANGUAGE-ARTS CLASSROOM, students are trained in the basics of grammar, writing, and reading comprehension, but they are often left to fend for themselves when it comes to the more difficult tasks of analysis and persuasion. Students are often required to form and analyze arguments without ever having been taught the basic rules of reasoning, and they're asked to express their arguments in a compelling style without having learned any of the established techniques of rhetorical persuasion.

Taking a cue from the classical approach to education, with its emphasis on rhetoric and logic, *Rhetoric, Logic, and Argumentation* explains some of the essential approaches to communication and reasoning that any student writer should understand. Beginning with an introduction to the three rhetorical appeals (ethical, pathetic, and logical), the book goes on to explain the basics of logic, introducing students to deductive and inductive reasoning, and a variety of common logical fallacies. This guide provides students with the tools they will need to both analyze the arguments they encounter and compose their own persuasive messages. After completing this book and the accompanying exercises, students should find that they have a greater command of the techniques of argumentation and a more purposeful approach to writing.

Reader's Notes: Terms that appear in bold italics on their first occurrence are defined in the glossary at the back of the book. Many of these terms have been used in past AP Language and Composition Examinations.



Rhetoric in Argumentation

*“the art of ruling the
minds of men”*

PLATO



Rhetorical Appeals

THERE ARE MANY DEFINITIONS for the term *rhetoric*, but Plato may have put it best when he described it as “the art of ruling the minds of men.” In more literal terms, **rhetoric** can be defined as “the technique or study of communication and persuasion.” The study of rhetoric is an immense topic, but this book will cover the basic modes of persuasive communication.

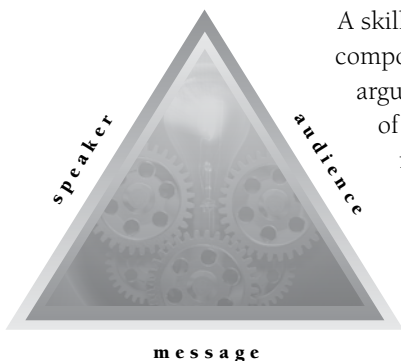
First, there are three main elements to consider in crafting an argument: the **speaker**, the **audience**, and the **message**. All efforts at communication focus on one or more of these elements. In this book, we use the term “speaker” for the individual who is delivering the message, whether in writing, speech, or another medium. The “audience” is the person or group of people who will receive the “message”—the information the speaker attempts to convey to the audience.

speaker: the individual who is delivering the message, whether in writing, speech, or another medium (i.e., the writer, orator, or presenter)

audience: the person or people who receive the message (i.e., the readers, listeners, or observers)

message: the information the speaker wishes to convey to the audience (i.e., the argument, topic, or thesis)

Etymology: The English word “rhetoric” is derived from the Greek *rhetor*, which means “orator.” It is also closely linked to the term *rhema*, which means “that which is spoken.” In its modern usage, “rhetoric” describes any form of persuasive verbal communication, whether oral or written.



A skilled communicator will keep each of these three components in mind while formulating and presenting an argument. The three elements are often depicted as parts of a triangle, which illustrates their mutually supportive relationship. Just as a triangle has three sides, a well-crafted message will consider each of these three factors.

The Three Rhetorical Appeals

The communication triangle we've just discussed was derived from Aristotle's fourth-century B.C. *Treatise on Rhetoric*, which describes three different modes of persuasion—one focused on the sender of the message, one on the receiver, and one on the message itself. We categorize these classical appeals that Aristotle describes using the Greek words **ethos**, **pathos**, and **logos**.

In Aristotle's words,

*Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the **personal character of the speaker** [ethos]; the second on **putting the audience into a certain frame of mind** [pathos]; the third on the proof, or apparent **proof, provided by the words of the speech itself** [logos].¹*

ethos: moral character. In an **appeal to ethos**, also known as an ethical appeal, the speaker emphasizes the strength of his or her own moral character and experience in order to establish personal credibility.

pathos: emotion. An **appeal to pathos** attempts to elicit an emotional response from the audience.

logos²: reason, logic, words. An **appeal to logos** relies on the use of rational analysis and persuasive language.



Earlier, we arranged the elements of communication around the three points of a triangle. We can now replace the elements of speaker, audience, and message with their corresponding classical approaches. Ethos is an approach that's focused on the speaker, pathos on the audience, and logos on the message.

Although we describe each of these appeals as a separate mode of persuasion, the most effective communications are those that subtly and seamlessly combine all three of these approaches. Ideally, an argument should establish the speaker's credibility (whether directly or implicitly), engage the emotions of the audience, and be founded in solid logic, eloquently expressed. To gain a better understanding of each of the three rhetorical appeals, we'll discuss each appeal separately in the following chapters.

¹From Aristotle's *Treatise on Rhetoric*. The words "ethos," "pathos," and "logos" have been added.

²The word "logos" has a variety of meanings, but we have limited our definition to fit the context of rhetorical appeals.



Exercise: Identification

Identify the term from the word bank that best matches each description.

logos, pathos, rhetoric, audience, ethos, message, speaker

1. Related to the audience's feelings.
2. "The art of ruling the minds of men."
3. Emphasizes reason and proof.
4. The individual(s) on the receiving end of the communication.
5. The individual presenting the argument in speech, writing, or another medium.
6. The ideas being communicated.
7. Emphasizes the speaker's character.

Appeal to Ethos

An appeal to ethos (ethical appeal) calls attention to positive characteristics of the speaker as a means of adding credibility to an argument. The speaker attempts to appear principled, competent, authoritative, and likable. In creating this image, the speaker gains the audience's favor, increasing the likelihood that the message will be accepted and believed. Forming an ethical appeal is similar to the process of creating a "reliable narrator" when writing fiction—it is the process of developing a trustworthy and believable persona.

In the following quote from Congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul, we see a clear and straightforward example of an appeal to ethos.

As an O.B. doctor of thirty years, and having delivered 4,000 babies, I can assure you life begins at conception. I am legally responsible for the unborn, no matter what I do, so there's a legal life there. The unborn has inheritance rights, and if there's an injury or a killing, there is a legal entity. There is no doubt about it.

Here, Paul prefaces his argument against legalized abortion by highlighting his background as an obstetrician who has delivered thousands of babies. By mentioning his thirty years as a medical doctor, Paul establishes his credibility and authority on the topic at hand. Identifying with the medical profession also allows Paul to benefit from the positive stereotypes that label doctors as people of considerable intelligence and character.

The quote from Ron Paul is an example of an overt appeal to ethos, in which the speaker explicitly describes his or her credentials or other positive personal traits to gain an audience's trust. However, many appeals to ethos are made in a subtler manner. For example, in some cases, a speaker will candidly confess some negative trait to appear honest and humble, hoping to gain an audience's trust. Perhaps the subtlest form of ethical appeal is simply using proper grammar and polite conventions of speech or behavior in order to appear well educated, intelligent, and likable.

The appeal to ethos is a tool that all speakers should use; it has considerable persuasive power, and when used properly, it can add useful information to a debate. Ethical appeals must be made with great care, however, because they can sometimes be misleading. In some cases, an ethical appeal can turn into a fallacious **argument from authority**,³ in which a speaker insists that an argument is true simply because a so-called expert affirms it. This approach is illogical and should be avoided. To determine whether an ethical appeal is being used correctly, ask yourself whether the information that's provided about the speaker is presented honestly, without exaggeration, and whether the information is adequately supported by a logical argument.

The following speech presents an example of an ethos-centered approach to expressing an argument. In this brief address, delivered spontaneously by Sojourner Truth at a women's convention in 1851 and transcribed by an observer, Truth argues that women should be treated as equals with men and uses her own experience and her own character to illustrate her argument. Observe the techniques she uses and the impressions they create.

³This is a logical fallacy that will be discussed in greater detail later in the book.