

Rhetorical appeals essay examples

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Rhetorical appeals

When writing with an intention to persuade an audience, it is vital to employ the elements of persuasion of such writing. These means of persuasion were set forth by Aristotle, the Greek philosopher. The three elements of persuasion include ethos, pathos and logos. Ethos refers to the credibility of the author towards his or her audience. Pathos is the emotional appeal of the audience by an author while logos refer to persuasions by means of logic and reasoning (Shafaei & Nejati, 2009). Using logic helps to strengthen one's claims.

Martin Luther King Junior's letter meets all the elements of persuasion. King's "letter from Birmingham Jail" was a response to the letter "A call for unity" which was in the news paper by the eight Alabama clergymen which criticized King's action of leading a civil activist demonstration. Martin Luther King Junior was an established Baptist church minister and a civil rights activist and was very well educated. This position gives King as a church minister and a civil rights activist gives him credibility as the author of this letter. The credibility of King is therefore a force to reckon with and thus fulfills the first element of ethos. He was also at the time of writing this letter the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference which had organized the Birmingham campaign "I have the honor of serving as president of the southern Christian Leadership Conference (King & Lillback, 2003)"

The use of pathos is the most used element in "letter from Birmingham Jail". This was a characteristic style of King of persuading his audience. The use of emotional appeal is also evident in all of King's speeches. The use of pathos

had a ripple effect to the large audiences that he addressed. King craftily uses this element to stimulate the emotions of those it was addressed to. For instance King says that “ we are caught in an escapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. (King & Lillback, 2003)” This statement not only is an eye opener but also gets one to considering how one’s actions in one way or another contributes to the consequences of another individual. King here was trying to tell his critics that they were part and parcel of the society as a whole and that the wrong actions of one group will affect them in way or another. A point to note here is that King does not put any element of complaining solely for the black community, but carefully uses the collective term pronoun “ we” showing that he considered the white community and the black community as a whole. This shows his audience that he considers their importance and only wants a peaceful integration.

King also aptly employs the element of logos in this letter. This is persuasion by using reasons and logical arguments. King does not just criticize the regime or his critics by rude words, but carefully lays down the reasons for his actions and for the campaign as a whole. He goes ahead to state clearly the reasons that led to the Birmingham campaign “ In any nonviolent campaign, there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustices engulf this community. (King & Lillback, 2003)” King says that the blacks were left with no alternative due to these injustices and segregation and were thus forced to action. The manner

in which King lays his argument leaves no doubt to the critics that he has a logical point.

There is no one time that king uses any abusive language. He also does not criticize his being in jail but rather clearly lays down his points in a way that one could ignore him. This letter has a personal touch that the one reading feels as if he or she is being addressed directly and is compelled to flow with King's thoughts and ideas. The letter was no doubt a master piece in the art of argumentative and persuasive writing.

References

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