

Ethos, logos, pathos: three ways to persuade essay

[Business](#), [Strategy](#)



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Over 2,000 years ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that there were three basic ways to persuade an audience that you were right: ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos: The Writer's Character or Image [presenter] The Greek word ethos is related to our word ethics or ethical, but a more accurate modern translation might be "image." Aristotle uses ethos to refer to the speaker's character as it appears to the audience. Aristotle says that if we believe that a speaker has "good sense, good moral character, and goodwill," we are inclined to believe what that speaker says to us. Today we might add that a speaker should also appear to have the appropriate expertise or authority to speak knowledgeably about the subject matter. Ethos is an important factor in advertising, both for commercial products and in politics. For example, when an actor in a pain reliever commercial puts on a doctor's white coat, the advertisers are hoping that wearing this coat will give the actor the authority to talk persuasively about medicines. Of course, in this case the actor's ethos is a deceptive illusion.

In our society sports heroes, popular actors and actresses, and rock stars are often seen as authorities on matters completely unrelated to their talents.

This is an instance of the power of image. Can you think of some examples?

A writer's ethos is created largely by word choice and style. Student writers often have a problem with ethos because they are asked to write research

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papers, reports, and other types of texts as if they have authority to speak persuasively, when in fact they are newcomers to the subject matter and the discourse community. Sometimes students try to create an academic image for themselves by using a thesaurus to find difficult and unusual words to sprinkle throughout their texts. Unfortunately, this sort of effort usually fails, because it is difficult to use a word correctly that you have not heard or read in context many times. Logos: Logical Arguments [subject] In many societies, especially Western, logic and rationality are highly valued and this type of persuasive strategy is usually privileged over appeals to the character of the speaker or to the emotions of the audience.

However, formal logic and scientific reasoning are usually not appropriate for general audiences, so we must rely on a more rhetorical type of reasoning. For Aristotle, formal arguments are based on what he calls syllogisms. This is reasoning that takes the form: All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. However, Aristotle notes that in ordinary speaking and writing we often use what Aristotle calls a “rhetorical syllogism” or an enthymeme. This is an argument in which some of the premises remain unstated or are simply assumed. For example, no one in ordinary life would think that Socrates could be immortal. We would simply assume that Socrates could be killed or that he would die of natural causes after a normal lifespan.

Not all assumptions are as trivial as this one, however. Rhetorical arguments are often based on probabilities rather than certain truth. Persuasion, to a large extent, involves convincing people to accept our assumptions as

probably true. Similarly, exposing questionable assumptions in someone else's argument is an effective means for preparing the audience to accept your own position. Pathos: The Emotions of the Audience Most of us think that we make our decisions based on rational thought.

However, Aristotle points out that emotions such as anger, pity and fear, and their opposites, powerfully influence our rational judgements. Due to this fact, much of the advertising we experience is directed toward moving our emotions. Many advertisements for consumer goods aim at making us insecure about our attractiveness or social acceptability, and then offer a remedy for this feeling in the form of a product. This is a common strategy for selling mouthwash, toothpaste, chewing gum, clothing, and even automobiles. Appeals to the emotions and passions are a very effective rhetorical technique, and very common in our society.

You may find it necessary to use them yourself.