

Reasoning Persuasively: Logical, Emotional, and Ethical Appeals

The purpose of written argument is to convince a skeptical audience about a matter of opinion. One of the questions you must ask about your audience is “What degree of agreement do I expect?” The degree to which an audience might be friendly or hostile should influence which strategies you use to try to convince that audience. As you consider the material below, keep in mind the academic audience that you will encounter in many forms throughout your academic career: which types of appeals will be best for that audience?

An argument of good quality relies on one or more of three types of appeals to reason: the logical, the emotional, and the ethical.

The Logical Appeal (LOGOS)

The most widely used appeal in written argument is the logical appeal, called *logos* by the ancient Greeks. The **logical appeal** requires that evidence be provided and clearly linked to analytical or persuasive claims.

EXAMPLE

According to a recent publication of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, at the present rate of “progress” it will take forty-three years to end job discrimination-- hardly a reasonable timetable.

If our goal is educational and economic equity and parity-- and it is-- then we need affirmative action to catch up. We are behind as a result of discrimination and denial of opportunity. There is one white attorney for every 680 whites, but only one black attorney for every 4,000 blacks; and one white dentist for every 1,900 whites, but only one black dentist for every 8,400 blacks. Less than 1 percent of all engineers-- or of all practicing chemists-- is black. Cruel and uncompassionate injustice created gaps like these. We need creative justice and compassion to help us close them.

--Jesse Jackson, "Why Blacks Need Affirmative Action"

The Emotional Appeal (PATHOS)

The **emotional appeal** can be effective when used in conjunction with logical appeals. The word “emotional” has a specific meaning in this context. It means arousing and enlisting the emotions of the reader. Often it arouses the “better self” of the reader by eliciting sympathy, civic pride, and other feelings based on values and beliefs. Effective emotional appeals use description and examples to stir emotions, but restraint is more effective than excessive sentimentality, especially in academic writing. The emotional appeal is also called the **pathetic appeal**, from the Greek word, *pathos*.

EXAMPLE

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

I sincerely believe that. . . it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused-- a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love-- then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response.

--Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

The Ethical Appeal (ETHOS)

The **ethical appeal**, called *ethos* by the ancient Greeks, means establishing the ethics, credibility, and authority (Aristotle's "good sense, virtue, and goodwill") of the writer. Credibility is gained if the author possesses extensive personal experience, uses correct facts and undistorted evidence, considers and rebuts opposing viewpoints fairly, and interprets events accurately. Credibility is lost if the author draws conclusions from limited personal experience, presents irrelevant material as evidence, ignores or fails to anticipate opposing viewpoints, or provides simplistic generalizations.

EXAMPLE

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: when will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing, because only this is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed-- love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

--William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech"