



## The Writing Center

RealWriting™ Handouts



# Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Whenever you read an argument, you must ask yourself, "Is this persuasive? And if so, to whom?" There are several ways to appeal to an audience. Among them are appealing to logos, ethos, and pathos. These appeals are prevalent in almost all argument.

## Definitions

### **Logos**

The Greek word "logos" is the basis for the English word "logic." Logos is a broader idea than formal logic—the highly symbolic and mathematical logic that you might study in a philosophy course. Logos refers to any attempt to appeal to the intellect, the general meaning of "logical argument." Everyday arguments rely heavily on ethos and pathos, but academic arguments rely more on logos. Yes, these arguments will call upon the writers' credibility and try to touch the audiences' emotions, but there will be more often than not be logical chains of reasoning supporting all claims.

### **Ethos**

Ethos is related to the English word "ethics" and refers to the trustworthiness of the speaker/writer. Ethos is an effective, persuasive strategy because when we believe that the speaker does not intend to do us harm, we are more willing to listen to what he/she has to say. For example, when a trusted doctor gives you advice, you may not understand all of the medical reasoning behind the advice, but you nonetheless follow the directions because you believe that the doctor knows what he/she is talking about. Likewise, when a judge comments on legal precedent, audiences tend to listen because it is the job of a judge to know the nature of past legal cases.

### **Pathos**

Pathos is related to words "pathetic," "sympathy," and "empathy." Whenever you accept a claim based on how it makes you feel without fully analyzing the rationale behind the claim, you are acting on pathos. They may be any emotions: love, fear, patriotism, guilt, hate or joy. A majority of arguments in the popular press are heavily dependent on pathetic appeals. The more people react without full consideration for the WHY, the more effective a argument can be. Although the pathetic appeal can be manipulative, it is the cornerstone of moving people to action. Many arguments are able to persuade people logically, but the apathetic audience may not follow through on the call to action. Appeals to pathos touch a nerve and compel people to not only listen, but to also take the next step and act in the world.

**Effective writing and argumentation thus depends on the inclusion of appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos. Balancing these three appeals in your writing contributes to a stronger, more persuasive argument.**

To Appeal to Logic (Logos)	To Develop Ethos	To Appeal to Emotion (Pathos)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theoretical, abstract language</li> <li>Denotative meanings/reasons</li> <li>Literal and historical analogies</li> <li>Definitions</li> <li>Factual data and statistics</li> <li>Quotations</li> <li>Citations from experts and authorities</li> <li>Informed opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language appropriate to audience and subject</li> <li>Restrained, sincere, fair-minded presentation</li> <li>Appropriate level of vocabulary</li> <li>Correct grammar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vivid, concrete language</li> <li>Emotionally loaded language</li> <li>Connotative meanings</li> <li>Emotional examples</li> <li>Vivid descriptions</li> <li>Narratives of emotional events</li> <li>Emotional tone</li> <li>Figurative language</li> </ul>
Effect	Effect	Effect
Evokes a cognitive, rationale response	Demonstrates author's reliability, competence, and respect for the audience's ideas and values through reliable and appropriate use of support and general accuracy	Evokes and emotional response

**For additional help with Logos, Ethos, and Pathos, please see the software program in the lab, I-claim.**

**Also, for help with logical fallacies, please see our handout.**

## Examples of Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

### **Logos**

Let us begin with a simple proposition: What democracy requires is public debate, not information. Of course it needs to be generated only by vigorous popular debate. We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our ideas about the world to the test of public controversy. Information, usually seen as the precondition of debate, is better understood as its by product. When we get into arguments that focus and fully engage our attention, we become avid seekers of relevant information. Otherwise, we take in information passively—if we take it in at all. **-Christopher Lasch, “The Lost Art of Political Argument”**

### **Ethos**

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely” . . . Since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable in terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against “outsiders coming in.” . . . I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond the Macedonian call for aid.” **-Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”**

### **Pathos**

For me, commentary on war zones at home and abroad begins and ends with personal reflections. A few years ago, while watching the news in Chicago, a local news story made a personal connection with me. The report concerned a teenager who had been shot because he had angered a group of his male peers. This act of violence caused me to recapture a memory from my own adolescence because of an instructive parallel in my own life with this boy who had been shot. When I was a teenager some thirty-five years ago in the New York metropolitan area, I wrote a regular column for my high school newspaper. One week, I wrote a column in which I made fun of the fraternities in my high school. As a result, I elicited the anger of some of the most aggressive teenagers in my high school. A couple of nights later, a car pulled up in front of my house, and the angry teenagers in the car dumped garbage on the lawn of my house as an act of revenge and intimidation. **-James Garbarino, “Children in a Violent World: A Metaphysical Perspective”**