

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

The art of persuasion is the art of balancing logical and emotional appeals and presenting yourself as trustworthy and knowledgeable. First imagine your audience—its probable interests, level of education, hopes, aspirations, and fears. Based on how you perceive your readers, you construct an appeal that you hope will be convincing.

- Logos appeals to reason using logical arguments and rationality.
- Ethos appeals to the reader's desire for trustworthy facts by establishing credibility and authority.
- Pathos appeals to the readers' emotions.

Logos

To create a logical argument, establish a premise or base (perhaps a key definition) and then systematically build on it. Explain how each part follows from the previous part and how your claim is a logical end result. You can borrow other people's logos, such as when you cite experts. You can use statistics and other facts or cite a similar event in the past (or elsewhere) and suggest that your conditions will produce similar results.

Using logos to make a claim:

The result of new financial aid rules would be to ration education to the more successful and traditional students, at the same time excluding non-traditional and chronically struggling students.

If you are successful, your logic is convincing and you persuade your reader. However, if you fail to connect all the dots convincingly, if you draw a comparison that seems far-fetched or unrelated, or if your "experts" seem unqualified or your statistics disconnected, your argument will remain unconvincing.

Ethos

You establish your credibility as a writer in many ways: being accurate, using appropriate language that is not too formal or informal, and using correct spelling and grammar. First-hand knowledge and clear understanding of your subject make you appear believable, too. And if you cite experts, their ethos reflects on *you*.

Using ethos to concede a counterargument (and pathos to refute it):

On the other hand, cannabis users cite studies finding that fewer pot smokers (about 9 percent) will develop "major" dependencies compared to users of alcohol (about 15 percent). But why promote any substance that would enslave 9 percent of its users?

A writer with strong ethos represents opposing views fairly and accurately; he doesn't misrepresent them just to make them easier to refute. Ethos is fair: it does not exaggerate, overstate a point, or demonize the opponent.

Extreme or absolute language

Legalizing marijuana would buffer the economy during an inevitable downturn.
Americans assume Muslims are terrorists.

Ethos' moderate language

Legalizing and taxing marijuana nationally could bring in between \$2 and \$6 billion a year.
Some Americans assume most Muslims are terrorists.

If you are successful, your readers will believe that you know what you are talking about. They will believe that you respect their point of view and their intelligence, and that, even if you are wrong, you are trying to be fair. However, if you use polarizing, inflammatory, or offensive language or cite authorities that seem to have unreasonable or rigid ideologies, you may alienate your readers instead.

Pathos

Did you notice the use of the word *enslave* in the example above? That was pathos. Pathos appeals to emotions—fear, honor, love, hate, hope, guilt, desire to help. On its own, pathos is a poor tool of persuasion, but it does elicit sympathy and is useful in combination with logos and ethos. If you want to propose a solution to a problem or make a call to action, pathos, more than logos or ethos, is likely to fire up a reader.

This emotional content of writing is carried in vivid descriptions and emotionally “loaded” language: if you must choose between *slender* and *skinny*, which do you choose, and why? Figurative language and analogies also carry emotional content: is a new law a *freight train* (with connotations of fearful, unstoppable danger), or is it a *safety net* (evoking feelings of relief)?

Using pathos to make claims:

The rich should pay their fair share of taxes.

The college is trying to balance its budget on the backs of the students.

Looking for logos, ethos, and pathos in your reading

If you are asked to analyze an article or determine whether or not the author’s argument is persuasive, one approach is to look for how the author balances logos, ethos, and pathos.

To look for logos, look for words that signal a logical progression of ideas:

- Definitions (*The Democrat senator seems to define “rich” as...*)
- Statistics and facts
- Cause and effect words (*result, as a result, therefore, if, since, because, reason, so, thus*)
- Historical, national, or cultural comparisons (*The invention of the printing press caused similar social dislocations....*)
- Comparison words (*similarly, in the same way, likewise*)
- Contrast words (*however, in contrast, on the other hand, nevertheless, yet, but, although*)

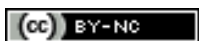
To look for ethos, look for a generally moderate tone that does not exaggerate, use extreme or absolute language, or attack people or groups in a personal way. Ethos is signaled in many ways:

- Standard, correct language use
- Moderate language
- Reasoned opposition to ideas, not people
- Honest representation of opposing views
- Citation by the author of appropriate authorities who also demonstrate ethos

When you look for pathos, ask yourself these questions:

- Does the author use words that are likely to incite strong feelings?
- Is there more neutral language that the author could have used, but did not?
- Does the author use words that carry a lot of emotional “color”?
- Can you tell just by the author’s tone how he or she feels about the topic?
- Does the author use vivid examples or descriptions likely to provoke strong feelings?
- Does the author use judgment words (*fortunately, unfortunately, worse, better, more importantly, good, bad, significantly*) that seem intended to steer you toward a particular conclusion?

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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