
Persuasive Appeals

In his guide to rhetoric, Aristotle identifies three *pisteis*, or persuasive appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos that rhetors (arguers) use to argue. Learning about these persuasive appeals will not only help you identify them in other arguments but learn how to use them to build your own arguments.

Ethos

Ethos, or the ethical appeal, is the appeal to the rhetor's own character. Aristotle writes that rhetors must demonstrate ethos by showing that they have:

- good sense—they have a good understanding of the topic they are arguing about,
- good will—they are on the audience's side,
- good character—they are a good person.

Therefore, an ethical appeal attempts to show the audience that they can trust the rhetor. Examples of ethical appeals:

As a professor of economics at Princeton, I argue that we need tax reform. (good sense)
We all want to be able to save money. My tax plan would help us do that. (good will)
I give money to charity every year. With my tax plan, I could donate even more. (good character)

Pathos

Pathos, or the pathetic appeal, is the appeal to the audience's emotions or state of mind, such as fear, anger, sadness, or excitement. While pathos appeals can be very effective, when building your argument, it is important that you not rely too heavily on pathetic appeals alone—you should supplement them with other types of persuasive appeals. An abundance of pathetic appeals may make the audience believe you have no logical basis to your argument. Examples of pathetic appeals:

Without your donation, the people will continue to go hungry. (sympathy)
We've had enough of this corrupt administration. We need change in this country! (anger)
Danger lurks behind every corner. Don't you want your child to be safe? (fear)

Logos

Logos, or the logical appeal, is the appeal to the audience's sense of sound reasoning. Logos is commonly associated with the use of statistics and facts; however, logos broadly includes any argumentation that attempts to draw a conclusion from premises.



Aristotle writes that logical appeals are built on enthymemes and examples. An **enthymeme** is an argument based on both arguable premises and factual premises. The arguable premises are usually tacit, or unspoken—the rhetor assumes that the audience already agrees with them. This is what makes the argument an *argument* rather than a simple truth. Compare enthymemes with **sylogisms**, in which all the premises are factual:

Sylogism

Premise 1: All men are mortal. (factual)
Premise 2: Socrates is a man. (factual)

Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

The conclusion is irrefutable since both premises are factual.

Enthymeme

Premise 1: All men are evil. (arguable)
Premise 2: Socrates is a man. (factual)

Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is evil.

The conclusion is refutable since one of the premises is arguable.

More examples of enthymemes:

Premise 1: This man has given to charity all his life. (factual)
Premise 2: Giving to charity precludes someone from committing theft. (arguable)

Conclusion: Therefore, this man would never commit theft.

Premise 1: The new reclining desks would help students relax during lectures. (factual)
Premise 2: Students learn better when they are relaxed. (arguable)

Conclusion: Therefore, we should implement the new reclining desks.

Premise 1: More and more teenagers are texting these days. (factual)
Premise 2: Texting results in reduced spelling skills. (arguable)

Conclusion: Therefore, teenagers are becoming worse and worse at spelling.

In addition to enthymemes, rhetors making a logical appeal should use **examples** to support their argument:

We should not let a demagogue hold office. Last year, when we elected a demagogue, he tried to declare himself dictator.

Students like class activities involving social media. In a poll last semester, 95% of students responded that they enjoyed Dr. Brown's blog assignment.



Many scholars acknowledge the income cap. For instance, economist Paul Krugman states that “the country has returned to Gilded Age levels of inequality.”