

# Research Writing and Argument

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about argument and rhetoric in the context of academic research writing. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

## 1. Argumentative vs. Non-Argumentative Writing

As consumers of written texts, we often divide writing into two categories:

- Argumentative
- Non-argumentative

In order to be argumentative, writing must:

1. Be focused on a controversial or debatable topic.
2. Defend a position in a debate between two or more opposing sides.
3. Have the goal of proving the correctness of one point of view over another.

Research writing is often incorrectly categorized as non-argumentative. This happens because generic research papers are often evaluated on the quantity and accuracy of external information they gather rather than on the persuasive impact they make and the interest they generate among readers.

Even when explicitly asked to construct a thesis statement and support it through researched evidence, beginning writers are likely to pay more attention to such mechanics of research as finding the assigned number of sources and documenting them correctly than to constructing an argument capable of making an impact on the reader.

It's important that, throughout the research and writing process, you pay equal attention to your use of sources and your argumentative thesis.

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## 2. Rhetoric and the Rhetorical Situation

The art of creating effective arguments is explained and systematized by a discipline called rhetoric.

Writing is about making choices, and knowing the principles of rhetoric allows a writer to make informed choices about various aspects of the writing process. Every act of writing takes place in a specific rhetorical

situation.

The three most basic and important components of rhetorical situations are:

- Purpose of writing
- Intended audience
- Occasion or context in which the text will be written and read

These factors help writers select their topics, arrange their material, and make other important decisions about their work.

## 2a. Purpose

Good writing always serves a purpose. Texts are created to persuade, entertain, inform, instruct, and so on. In a real writing situation, these discrete purposes are often combined.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Recall any text you wrote, in or outside of school. Think not only of school papers, but also of letters to relatives and friends, e-mails, shopping lists, online postings, and so on. Consider the following questions:

1. Was the purpose of the writing defined for you as part of an assignment, or did you have to define it yourself?
2. What did you have to do in order to understand or create your purpose?
3. Did you have trouble articulating and fulfilling your writing purpose?

## 2b. Audience

The second key element of the rhetorical approach to writing is audience awareness. Readers are an indispensable part of the rhetorical equation, and it is essential for writers to understand their audience and tailor their message to the audience's needs.

The key principles that you, as a writer, need to follow in order to reach and affect your audience are:

1. Have a clear idea about who your readers will be.
2. Understand your readers' previous experiences, knowledge, biases, and expectations, and how these factors can influence their reception of your argument.
3. Keep in mind not only those readers who are physically present or whom you know but all readers who would benefit from or be influenced by your argument.
4. Choose a style, tone, and medium of presentation appropriate for your intended audience.

## 2c. Occasion

Occasion is an important part of the rhetorical situation because writers do not work in a vacuum. Instead, the content, form, and reception of their work by readers are heavily influenced by the conditions in society as well as by the personal situations of their readers.

The conditions in which texts are created and read affect every aspect of writing and every stage of the writing process, from topic selection, to decisions about the kinds of arguments used and their arrangement, to the writing style, voice, and persona which the writer wishes to project.

All elements of the rhetorical situation work together in a dynamic relationship. Therefore, awareness of

rhetorical occasion and other elements of the context of your writing will help you refine your purpose and understand your audience better.

Similarly, having a clear purpose in mind and knowing your audience will help you understand the context in which you are writing and in which your work will be read.



#### DID YOU KNOW

To understand how writers can study and use occasion in order to make effective arguments, you can think about *kairos*, one of the most fascinating terms from Classical rhetoric. It signifies the right, or most opportune, moment for an argument to be made. Ancient rhetoricians believed that if the moment for the argument was right, for instance, if there were conditions in society that would make the audience more receptive to the argument, the rhetorician would have more success persuading the audience.

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## 3. Rhetorical Appeals

In order to persuade their readers, writers must use three types of proofs or **rhetorical appeals**:

- Logos
- Pathos
- Ethos

Understanding how logos, pathos, and ethos should work together is very important for writers who use research. The key to using the three appeals is to use them in combination with each other and in moderation.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Rhetorical Appeals

Strategies used in writing that are designed to persuade or convince.

### 3a. Logos

Appeals to **logos** are appeals to logic; these appeals use logic to persuade or convince. When you appeal to logic, you appeal to your readers' intelligence, intellect, and understanding of the world.

Logos is thus meant to support your central argument with claims that are based in fact, reason, and logic. In research papers, this typically involves the use of factual information, statistics, examples, and other similar evidence.

Even in argumentative writing, readers want to see facts presented in an unbiased and objective way, and using logical proofs will help you do that.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Logos

A rhetorical appeal that uses logic to persuade or convince.

### 3b. Pathos

Appeals to **pathos** are appeals to emotion; these appeals evoke emotion to persuade or convince. When you

appeal to pathos, you appeal to your readers' feelings.

Pathos is thus meant to cause your readers to feel the emotions you want them to feel, such as anger, sadness, or excitement in order to cause them to believe that your thesis is valid.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Pathos

A rhetorical appeal that evokes emotion to persuade or convince.

### 3c. Ethos

Appeals to **ethos** are appeals to credibility; these appeals use the author's own trustworthiness to persuade or convince. You are establishing and maintaining credibility in the eyes of your readers.

In other words, when writing, think about how you are presenting yourself to your audience. Do you give your readers enough reasons to trust you and your argument, or do you give them reasons to doubt your authority and credibility?



#### THINK ABOUT IT

Consider all the times when your decision about the merits of a given argument was affected by the person or people making the argument. For example, when watching the news on television, are you predisposed against certain cable networks and more inclined towards others because you trust them more?



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Ethos

A rhetorical appeal that uses ethical principles and credibility to persuade or convince.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the main **difference between argumentative and non-argumentative writing** is that argumentative writing takes a position on a debatable topic with the goal of convincing the reader of a certain viewpoint. Good writers pay attention to **rhetoric and the rhetorical situation**, which involves thinking about the **purpose**, **audience**, and **occasion** of the writing. You also learned that there are three **rhetorical appeals** that you can use in your writing: **logos**, or an appeal to logic, **pathos**, or an appeal to emotion, and **ethos**, or an appeal to credibility.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Research Writing and Argument" tutorial.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Ethos

A rhetorical appeal that uses ethical principles and credibility to persuade or convince.

**Logos**

A rhetorical appeal that uses logic to persuade or convince.

**Pathos**

A rhetorical appeal that evokes emotion to persuade or convince.

**Rhetorical Appeals**

Strategies used in writing that are designed to persuade or convince.