

Rhetorical Appeals

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the three main rhetorical appeals and how to deploy them effectively in argumentative essays. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Types of Rhetorical Appeals

1a. Logos

1b. Ethos

1c. Pathos

2. Using the Appeals Effectively

1. Types of Rhetorical Appeals

Recall that **rhetorical appeals** are strategies used in writing that are designed to persuade or convince. You can use these categories of convincing strategies to describe the various ways that you try to reach out to your readers and appeal to them so that they will agree with you and trust your arguments.

There are three main rhetorical appeals:

- Logos
- Ethos
- Pathos

These tools can help you as a writer strengthen your arguments and become more successful and convincing.



TERM TO KNOW

Rhetorical Appeal

A strategy used in writing that is designed to persuade or convince the reader.

1a. 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 reader's 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 CONTEXT

If you are trying to convince someone to buy your used car, you might use logos to appeal to the potential buyer by describing the miles per gallon that your car gets, how reliable it is, or what its safety crash rating is—all to show that it is a smart choice for the potential buyer.

Or imagine you're taking a writing class, and you've been assigned an argumentative paper. If you've chosen to make the argument that high school should start later in the day, you might appeal to logos by providing research that shows that the teenage brain works best later in the day, or by giving a hypothetical example of a student who gets to sleep in a little later and performs better in class because of it. In those ways, you'd be providing data and reasoning to show your reader that your position in this debate is the smartest one, the best one to believe.



TERM TO KNOW

Logos

An appeal to logic; uses logic and factual information in order to persuade or convince.

1b. Ethos

Appeals to **ethos** are appeals to ethics and credibility; these appeals use the author's own trustworthiness to persuade or convince. When you appeal in this way to ethics, you demonstrate that you—and your expert sources—are believable and trustworthy because you're credible.

In other words, you're basically making an appeal to your readers to trust in your believability. You're making the claim that you are ethical and trustworthy, and therefore, that your research and opinions ought to be believed.

Ethos is meant to support your thesis by asserting that your claim is backed up by trustworthy research, uses valid and credible expert sources, and has ethically considered all possible arguments before choosing a side.

IN CONTEXT

Imagine that you're taking an economics course, and your final assignment is to argue policy on a particular energy sector. You might use an appeal to ethos by demonstrating that your position is backed by ethical, neutral sources. For example, maybe you're going to argue against subsidies for the coal industry. In appealing to ethos, you would use nonpartisan, non-biased sources of information, not just data directly from the coal lobby or from its opponents. You would respond to

counterarguments reasonably and ethically, and you would vouch for the trustworthiness of your sources by explaining who and what they are.

Or, if you're holding a fundraiser, you might encourage people to donate by making an appeal to ethos, arguing that your charity is more deserving than others because of the way it uses its funds. You could present its internal statistics, showing the percentage of donated funds that directly support the cause. This would show your potential donors that your organization can be trusted to ethically allocate its donations.



TERM TO KNOW

Ethos

An appeal to ethics; uses ethical guidelines and credibility in order to persuade or convince.

1c. 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 reader's emotional feeling.

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.

IN CONTEXT

If you need a day off work and you're trying to get a colleague to cover your shift, you might appeal to emotion by describing why you want the day off, telling your colleague excitedly that your mom is coming to visit, and you can't wait to see her. Showing your excitement appeals to your colleague's emotions and will hopefully encourage him to switch shifts.

Or imagine you're writing a cover letter for a job. You want this job badly because it has long been your dream to work in a field where you can provide support for a community that you are passionately engaged with. You might include language like that in your letter, causing the reader to feel passionate about your candidacy as well and give you an interview.



TERM TO KNOW

Pathos

An appeal to emotion; evokes emotions in order to persuade or convince.

2. Using the Appeals Effectively

Now that you've had a taste of these three appeals, you can think about how you can use them most effectively. You want to start by thinking about the purpose of your argument.

IN CONTEXT

Politicians want citizens to vote for them, so they use these kinds of argumentative tools to encourage those votes and thereby meet their ultimate purpose of getting elected. In your own writing, you'll likely use a variety of these appeals as well, deploying different ones for different situations and audiences.

For instance, if you're writing a paper advocating for an end to the death penalty, you might use many different appeals to connect all possible readers. Some people would be more convinced by facts about the way the death penalty is imposed, and others by the credibility of your ethical argumentation. Still others will be most convinced by emotional appeals that ask them to consider how this policy makes people feel.

However, it's important to choose wisely because for every reader convinced by one appeal, another might be repelled by the same. A misused or mistimed appeal can lose you your argument, so you'll want to follow these steps to effectively deploy appeals:



STEP BY STEP

1. First, consider your audience: Appeals to logic might not go over well for an audience expecting to hear personal experiences; the lack of emotional appeal could be read as insensitive. In contrast, overly emotional writing in an academic setting might seem a little unprofessional.
2. Second, consider how often to make each appeal: Used sparingly and selectively, each of these types of appeals can have huge impacts, but too many can fatigue your readers.

In particular, appeals to emotion should be used carefully. Using too many emotional appeals can cause a host of unintended consequences:

- Readers might feel manipulated.
- Readers might become bored by hearing about emotions that they just aren't feeling and stop reading.
- Readers might begin to perceive that the writer is being self-righteous or even moralizing.

Thus, be strategic when you select your emotional appeals.



TRY IT

Read the following writing sample and see if you can recognize the rhetorical appeals in action.

All across this country, students are making the hard choice to go into debt or drop out of school. For many years, higher education was accessible to everyone who wanted it. But the rising cost of college is restricting this vital tool to only those most privileged and lucky. Shouldn't all students have the

chance to gain the skills and experience they need to fulfill their own version of the American Dream? We must all join together to create change, lowering the cost of college and giving everyone the education that is our birthright.

Which appeal is this paragraph using?

+

This first writing sample is an appeal to emotion. You know this not just because it likely makes you feel sad and angry, although your own feelings as a reader are clues. But you also know this is an appeal to pathos because you can see a lot of emotional words, and words that have strongly emotional connotations:

*All across this country, students are making **the hard choice** to go into debt or **drop out** of school. For many years, higher education was accessible to everyone who wanted it. But the rising cost of college is **restricting this vital tool** to only those **most privileged and lucky**. Shouldn't all students have the chance to gain the skills and experience they need to **fulfill their own version of the American Dream**? We must all join together to **create change**, lowering the cost of college and giving everyone the education that is our **birthright**.*

Looking for those elements of a text's tone can help you see what kind of appeal it's making. Words such as "vital," "privileged," "lucky," "birthright"—those are evocative emotional clues that this is an appeal to pathos.



TRY IT

Read the following writing sample and see if you can recognize the rhetorical appeals in action.

Student debt has reached an all-time high. Current data from the Institute for College Access and Success shows that the average college student leaves higher education with an average of \$28,950 in debt, and that, over the last 10 years, the amount of college debt held by students has risen at more than double the rate of inflation. These statistics show that student debt is growing disproportionately and is unsustainable, which indicates that something must be done to reduce the cost of higher education.

Which appeal is this paragraph using?

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This writing sample has a pretty different tone from the first, even though it's covering the same topic. Look at all that data and the even, unemotional tone of the language:

*Student debt has reached an all-time high. **Current data from the Institute for College Access and Success shows that the average college student leaves higher education with an average of \$28,950 in debt, and that, over the last 10 years, the amount of college debt held by students has risen at more than double the rate of inflation.** These statistics show that student debt is growing disproportionately and is unsustainable, which indicates that something must be done to reduce the cost of higher education.*

Those factors tell you that this is using logos to make an appeal to your logic.



TRY IT

Read the following writing sample and see if you can recognize the rhetorical appeals in action.

Currently, many students can only earn an education by taking on what the Pew Charitable Trust, a nonpartisan think tank, calls "unsustainable debt." Thus, it would be wise for the United States to lower the cost of college. Some worry about the effect such policies could have on the nation's debt. This is a fair concern, as the national debt is a burden we all share. Yet what that argument misses is that a more educated populace will be more prosperous, so spending money on education is an investment in the future. With more education, our citizens will be better able to solve problems, be more self-sustaining, and contribute more taxes toward paying down debt.

Which appeal is this paragraph using?

+

This last writing sample again takes a different tone; it's full of ethos. See how the author presents the claim using trustworthy sources, responds considerately to the opposing side, and concludes with a logical and credible argument about how his proposal will play out in the future?

*Currently, many students can only earn an education by taking on **what the Pew Charitable Trust, a nonpartisan think tank, calls "unsustainable debt."** Thus, it would be wise for the United States to lower the cost of college. Some worry about the effect such policies could have on the nation's debt. **This is a fair concern, as the national debt is a burden we all share.** Yet what that argument misses is that a more educated populace will be more prosperous, **so spending money on education is an investment in the future. With more education, our citizens will be better able to solve problems, be more self-sustaining, and contribute more taxes toward paying down debt.***

This shows that the argument itself is credible and that the author can be trusted to tell the truth and represent any data honestly.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that rhetorical appeals are strategies used in writing for the purpose of persuading or convincing the reader. There are three main **types of rhetorical appeals**: **Logos** appeals to logic, using facts to persuade or convince; **ethos** appeals to ethics, using trustworthiness to persuade or convince; **pathos** appeals to emotions, evoking certain feelings to persuade or convince.

You also learned how to **use these appeals effectively**. It's important to consider your audience, as what's appropriate in one context may not be appropriate in another. You should also use appeals sparingly and selectively; an overuse of appeals (particularly emotional ones) can actually make your writing less believable.

Best of luck in your learning!

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