

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. You will further strengthen your communication skill by practicing these rhetorical appeals. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

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. These appeals strengthen your **communication skill** by teaching you how to intelligently and persuasively convey a concept.

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 a realtor is trying to sell a home, they may use logos to point out the energy-saving appliances, the competitive pricing of this home compared to the neighborhood, or the new roof, all to show that it

is a smart choice for the potential buyer.

A company that sells cleaning products may use logos to market its product by stating the high percentage of germs and viruses it kills, or by illustrating how well it works in a demonstration. These facts can persuade the audience to purchase the product.

Logos is a very effective rhetorical appeal to persuade someone in a speech, conversation, or business transaction.



Communication: Skill in Action

When advocating for women's suffrage, Susan B. Anthony frequently used logos. In one of her speeches, she said "Webster, Worcester, and Bouvier all define a citizen to be a person in the United States, entitled to vote and hold office. Being persons, then, women are citizens." Logos enabled Anthony to communicate the logic that supports women's right to vote.



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, 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

A toothpaste commercial cites research from the American Dental Association (ADA) that supports the effectiveness of its product. It also has quotes from dentists endorsing the product. This is a great way to market any type of dental care because the ADA is a respected authority on the subject.

A common use of ethos comes during election season. You may see a candidate appear in a television commercial citing their lifelong residency in a community, showing that they are invested in the concerns of the community. For example, a candidate running in a rural area may run a campaign ad set on a farm, where they mention their grandfather was a farmer, and how much they admired him. They may go on to say that they will fight for the rights of farmers just like their grandfather if elected. The idea here is that such a candidate is more trustworthy than an outsider.



During World War II, UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill relied on ethos in his speeches to lift the spirits of British citizens. Churchill served as Secretary of State for War and Air, as well as First Lord of the Admiralty during World War I. This gave him the credibility to earn the trust of his audience, making them more open to trusting the message he was communicating.



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 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.

IN CONTEXT

Many companies use pathos to market a product. Think of many of the car commercials you may see with happy smiling families riding in the family vehicle. There is a voiceover including the safety ratings of this particular model. The company is appealing to our love of our family and our desire to keep them safe, to buy this car.

A charity that is fundraising may appeal to donors using pathos. For example, if an organization is raising funds to help children, there will certainly be pictures of the children who would benefit from these funds. We may see pictures of the deserving children, or hear anecdotes about how the charity has helped them. These are all strategies to pull on the audience's heartstrings and encourage them to donate.



In Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, he effectively uses pathos to communicate the importance of social justice. He states, "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial justice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children." This passage evokes strong emotion in his audience, empowering them to take action.

**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 persuasive 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. We saw in some of our examples how different appeals can work together: the facts about the safety ratings of a car, paired with the emotional appeal of a happy family is just one example. You can do the same in your writing.

For instance, if you're writing a paper advocating for an end to animal testing, you may use different appeals to support your point. You could certainly use an emotional appeal to discuss the pain and suffering animals may face in being tested. This will most likely be very effective with any readers who are animal lovers. You may also use a logical appeal by including research that proves or suggests that animal testing isn't very reliable in predicting the effects on humans. That may persuade other readers.

The strongest arguments use a combined approach. As you write your own persuasive arguments, consider different approaches you can use to make your persuasive argument.

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. **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. **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.



See if you can recognize the rhetorical appeals in action in the following writing sample.

Writing Sample 1:

Many people have had a pet or several pets growing up that have meant a lot to them. Childhoods are filled with riding with the family dog or curling up with a purring housecat. Animals benefit our lives in many ways. Unfortunately, people are not always beneficial to animals, and one of the ways this happens is with animal testing. Instead of growing up with loving families, some dogs spend their lives in cramped cages, only leaving to be pricked with sharp needles or accosted with caustic substances. Consumers need to boycott any company that participates in animal testing in order to finally put an end to this practice and save man's best friend.

Which appeal is this writing sample using?



This first 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:

Writing Sample 1:

*Many people have had a pet or several pets growing up that have meant a lot to them. **Childhood memories** are filled with riding with the **family dog**, or curling up with a **purring housecat**. Animals benefit our lives in many ways. Unfortunately, people are not always beneficial to animals, and one of the ways this happens in with animal testing. Instead of growing up with loving families, some dogs spend their lives in **cramped cages**, only leaving to be pricked with **sharp needles** or accosted with caustic substances. Consumers need to boycott any company that participates in animal testing in order to finally put an end to this practice and save **man's best friend**.*

Looking for those elements of a text's tone can help you see what kind of appeal it's making. Words such as "childhood memories," "family dog," "purring housecat," and "man's best friend"—those are evocative emotional clues that this is an appeal to pathos.



See if you can recognize the rhetorical appeals in action in the following writing sample.

Writing Sample 2:

We use many products in our daily lives without thinking about the process required to bring that

product to ourselves. Often, that process includes testing on animals, sometimes in very large numbers. According to the Humane Society, one pesticide may require testing on over ten thousand animals (Moxley 2015). In addition, sometimes tests are done on only slightly different products: products that have already been through testing, or that need an updated patent. This testing requires the use of many animals for very little discernible increase in human safety.

Which appeal is this writing sample using?

+

This second 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:

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



TRY IT

See if you can recognize the rhetorical appeals in action in the following writing sample.

Writing Sample 3:

When people get sick, they need medicine and treatment. Doctors, researchers, and pharmacists must research and test to create and discover this medicine. Sometimes, this testing may require testing on animals. In such a case, one may say that the ends justifies the means. However, are we really getting much benefit from animal testing? According to the Humane Society International (2012), "Some 300 million people currently suffer from asthma, yet only two types of treatment have become available in the last 50 years. More than a thousand potential drugs for stroke have been tested in animals, but only one of these has proved effective in patients. And it's the same story with many other major human illnesses." However, despite the evidence that animal testing is not helping us to better human health, we continue to test on animals in large numbers. The USDA releases an annual report on the number of animals used for testing, but does not include mice and birds. Even disregarding those animals, over 750,000 animals were used in testing in 2018 (Annual Report Summary 2020). Researchers need to consider ceasing animal testing and causing harm to animals when it is so ineffective.

Which appeal is this writing sample using?

+

This last 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.

Writing Sample 3:

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

3. Other Rhetorical Devices

We have talked about the three rhetorical appeals: logos, pathos, and ethos. There are many more rhetorical devices, and in order to analyze a piece of writing, it may be helpful to know more devices.

Here are the most common:

| Rhetorical Devices | Description |
|---------------------|--|
| Rhetorical Question | You have probably heard someone mention a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question is one that is not meant to be answered. Imagine completing a speech about recycling. You end the speech with the following question: <i>If we don't save the planet by recycling, who will?</i> Most likely, you would not intend for the audience members to raise their hands and volunteer. Instead, you hope to make the point that someone has to do something to make a change. You may remember Sojourner Truth's famous speech with the repeated line: "and ain't I a woman?" Of course, she is a woman, but her point is that she is strong and has worked very hard. |
| Parallel | Another common rhetorical device is parallel structure. Parallel structure involves using similar sentence structure elements in adjacent phrases and clauses. This strategy creates emphasis for the listener or reader. Consider some of the following examples from famous speeches. Would they have the same impact without parallel structure? |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Structure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Give me liberty or give me death." (Patrick Henry) • "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." (Neil Armstrong) • "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." (John F Kennedy) |
| Euphemism | <p>Euphemism is a rhetorical device that uses a pleasant phrase or saying to convey a more familiar or less pleasant one. This could be important in a speech where you want to paint something in a more favorable light. For example, if a teenager has had a party at their parent's house and everyone trashed the place, they may say that they had a "little get-together" and they "made a bit of a mess."</p> <p>Have you noticed that they now refer to "pre-owned" cars instead of <i>used</i>? This is another example of euphemisms at work! Euphemisms may be a writer's way to persuade the audience that a negative situation isn't a deal-breaker.</p> |
| Hypophora | <p>This is a fancy word for something we all do every day in conversation. It involves asking a question, and then immediately answering oneself: "Oh goodness, they forgot to take out the trash again. Why do I put up with them? Because I love them."</p> <p>What is the difference between this term and a rhetorical question? A rhetorical question is not answered, but the speaker will give an answer when using hypophora. In fact, this paragraph begins with an example. The question was asked and then answered it. You can use this strategy to change the topic. You could also ask a question, pause, and then answer it as a way to engage the interest of your audience.</p> |
| Simile | <p>These devices work by invoking a sense of comparison between two seemingly unlike subjects, using like or as: their smile was like a warm summer sun. Similes can be used in many ways in composition. This simile is meant to portray to the audience that the person has a bright smile.</p> |
| Metaphor | <p>A metaphor works much the same way. It is a comparison between two seemingly similar subjects that does not use "like" or "as". Metaphors can also be used to make many points. For example, <i>Their departure from the office was the last tether to hope and soon the company failed</i>. This illustrates their importance to the company and the immediate downfall afterward.</p> |

Authors and speakers use all of these, and many more, to create an effective argument. Rhetorical devices help to illustrate and prove a point or make a connection with a reader. We can evaluate an argument by carefully reading a composition, identifying the rhetorical appeals and devices, and then analyzing how they are used. This can help us determine any bias and the author's purpose. Both of these are important when we are evaluating a source to use in our own work.



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.

Finally, you examined examples of how different rhetorical appeals can be used to communicate and persuade others, and you learned about **other rhetorical devices** like rhetorical questions, euphemisms, similes, and metaphors. You now have a base to begin effectively communicating your ideas to others—whether it's in the workplace, at home, or in everyday life.

Best of luck in your learning!

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TERMS TO KNOW

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

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