

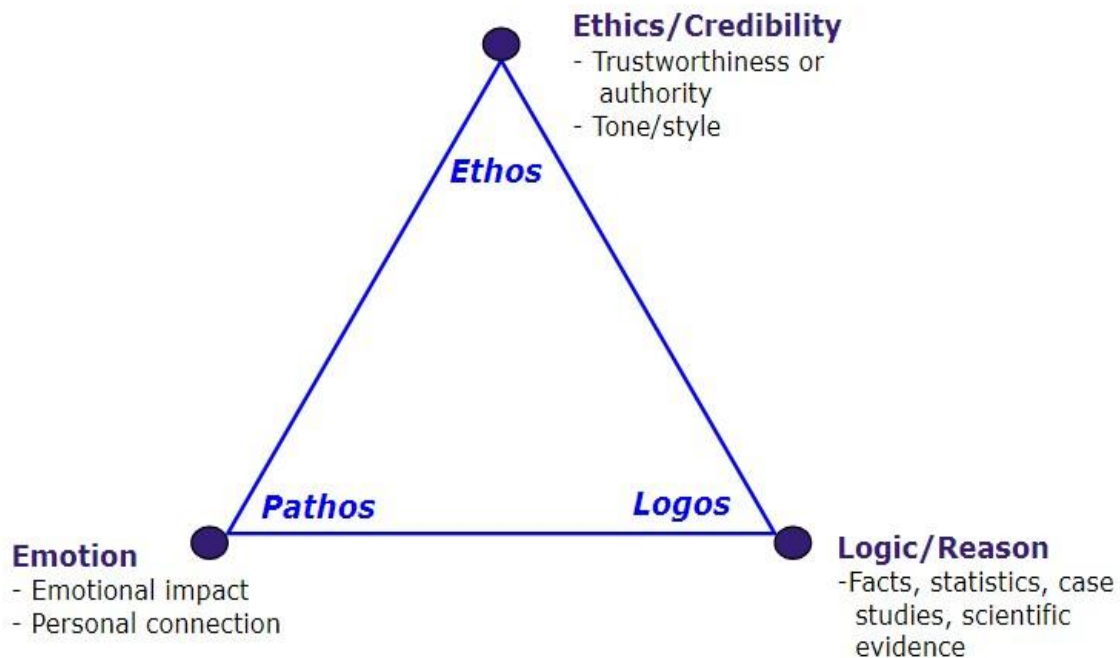
Constructing a Strong Argument

In order to convince someone, a writer must understand the priorities of that audience and convey his position in a way that appeals to those priorities. This week's readings focus on learning how to actively engage the audience in order to convince someone effectively. You will read how to use the rhetorical triangle to convince a community audience and motivate them to implement your recommendation for change.

Part 1: Appealing to Your Audience

Appealing to Your Audience

Once you know who your intended audience is and what your purpose is for writing, you can make specific decisions about how to shape your message. No matter what, you want your audience to stick around long enough to read your whole piece. How do you manage this magic trick? Easy. You appeal to them. You get to know what sparks their interest, what makes them curious, and what makes them feel understood. The one and only Aristotle provided us with three ways to appeal to an audience, and they're called *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. You'll learn more about each appeal in the discussion below, but the relationship between these three appeals is also often called *the rhetorical triangle*, and in diagram form, it looks like this:



Pathos

Pathos is the fastest way to get your audience's attention. The goal of pathos is to get the audience to respond and take action by appealing to their emotions, values, and priorities. Be careful though. Too much *pathos* can make your audience feel emotionally manipulated because they're also looking for the facts to support whatever emotional claims you might be making so they know they can trust you.

Though pathos is known as the appeal to emotions, it is also much more than that. Pathos is the appeal to the values, priorities, and ethics of the audience. When we use pathos in a personal, professional, academic, or community-based argument, we need to pay close attention to the values of our stakeholders. When we actively seek understanding of their priorities, their concerns, the limitations they must work within, and their situated knowledge about an issue, we can develop an argument that addresses those issues effectively and motivates them to agree with us and take action. In a community argument, we can seek the story-behind-the-story to get a better sense of the underlying beliefs and assumptions that we need to consider as we figure out a solution. Using pathos, a speaker can test the validity of an argument and revise it to make sure it is feasible given who he or she needs to convince.

Logos

Logos is where those facts come in. Your audience will question the validity of your claims; the opinions you share in your writing need to be supported using science, statistics, expert perspective, and other types of logic from credible sources. The research you do in Units 5 and 6 will help to ensure you have credible scholarly evidence for your argument. However, if you only rely on *logos*, your writing might become dry and boring, so even this should be balanced with other appeals.

Logos can be cultivated through examples, sound reasoning and by avoiding logical fallacies. It can also be cultivated by using evidence like statistics, research studies, expert testimony, eye-witness accounts, legal rulings, company policies, family rules, case studies, literature, poetry, non-fiction books, etc. The evidence is used to lend authority and credibility to an author's claims. To cultivate logos effectively, the communicator needs to perform research suited to the expectations of their audience. In scholarly writing, research should come from rigorous, carefully vetted sources. These include subject-matter experts, peer-reviewed journals, academic websites, government websites that contain official government regulations, policies, and positions, and non-profit websites. A well-constructed thesis can guide a writer about what information to look for. Keywords can be taken directly from the thesis statement and used to gather background information on the issue.

Ethos

Latin for ethics, *ethos* is what you do to prove to your audience that you can be trusted, that you are a credible source of information. (See *logos*.) It's also what you do to assure them that they are good people who want to do the right thing. This is especially important when writing an argument to an audience who disagrees with you. It's much easier to encourage a disagreeable audience to listen to your point of view if you have convinced them that you respect their opinion and that you have established credibility through the use of *logos* and *pathos*, which show that you know the topic on an intellectual and personal level.

In the context of making a community argument, we must demonstrate that our voice is worth listening to and that we have rigorously analyzed our ideas before presenting them. When we show careful consideration of an issue, use reliable and accurate sources, engage with dissent respectfully, and demonstrate that we have explored possible negative outcomes associated with our argument, we earn credibility with our audience.

When you are in the role of author, it can help to gather as much information you can about the community you are reaching out to. Think about what recent events have influenced their thinking. What experiences may they have that cause them to agree or disagree with your position, and how can you take those experiences into consideration as you think about the solution?

Imagining Your Audience's Needs Yourself

One purpose for writing is to figure out what you think and believe before you share your ideas with other people. What do you want to say? What do you want to find out? What do you want to decide? Sometimes you will keep this type of writing private, but sometimes you may revise for another audience.

Your instructor

Let's take a moment to consider what expectations your instructor may have. Your instructor may expect that

- You have read any assigned material before writing. What do you need to write to show your instructor you have read this material?
- You have understood the assignment given. To show this, pay particular attention to the verbs in the assignment. Are you doing the actions required? If the assignment says "analyze X," have you done so? Do you understand what it means to analyze?
- If assigned, you have done research for your topic. To show your research, you will want to use summaries, paraphrasing, and quotations from your sources, using appropriate citation.
- You will use the assigned academic format, such as APA. You will follow the instructions. Re-read the assignment to make sure you are following each step
- You will work hard on your assignment and spend time making it as good as possible, including spending considerable time proofreading and editing. Taking these steps shows that you are serious about your work, and it is important enough for others to read.

Notice that fulfilling these expectations will also help you reach any other possible readers of your work.

Fellow students

In writing classes, students often read each other's work and give feedback. To meet the needs of this audience, consider what they know and don't know about your topic. When you are writing outside of a classroom situation, you might consider an audience of fellow writers or others who are involved in your project, if any.

The “general” reader

When instructors use the term “general reader,” what do they mean? If you are given an assignment that says your audience is “the general reader,” that usually means that you are expected to write to an audience with at least some college education who is aware of your topic but not an expert on your topic.

Newspapers, for example, write for a general reader, meaning that they expect a variety of people, from various backgrounds, to read the articles. That means you must consider viewpoints and experiences that do not mirror your own. When instructors talk about an academic audience, they usually mean that you must use evidence that is acceptable to a variety of educated people, use academic sources rather than popular sources like *USA Today* and *People*, and avoid stating opinions without providing proof to support your view. Here are some questions to help you think about your topic:

- What would a general reader know about your topic? What wouldn't he know? What kinds of evidence and reasons are acceptable to an audience that does not share the same background and beliefs as you?
- What kinds of evidence and reason are acceptable in an academic community? Have you used academic sources? Are your sources credible?

A target audience

Sometimes you will have the opportunity to write for a specific group of people. For example, if you are writing about a problem in your community, such as the proposed location of a new composting facility, your audience would probably be the people in your community or perhaps local officials who have the power to make the decision about the location. If you are writing an email to your supervisor requesting a change in your work responsibilities, your audience is your supervisor—a specific person. When you know the audience, you can anticipate the kinds of reasoning and evidence that the audience will expect, and you will know what tone and level of formality is appropriate. If you don't know your audience well, you may need to do some research or at the very least imagine what they are like based on educated guesses.

Opposing viewpoints

When you write an argument, other potential audiences are the people who disagree with your opinion. To argue effectively, you will need to understand their point of view and their objections to yours. Consider writing out what the opposing viewpoints are and what kinds of information would someone with the opposing view need from you in order to change his or her mind.

(This text has been adapted from the original text by Babin, M., Burnell, C., Pesznecker, S., Rosevear, N., & Wood, J. (2017) *The word on college reading and writing*. <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/>)