

## The Art of Persuasion – A Basic Introduction to Rhetoric

### **Rhetoric**

- Along with Grammar and Logic, rhetoric is one of the three ancient arts of *discourse*, or verbal (meaning with words) communication.
- **Rhetoric** is the art of speaking or writing effectively – to serve your desired purpose.
- Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E) defined *rhetoric* as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.”

### **‘Everything’s an Argument’**

- Some theorists claim that language is inherently persuasive.
- When you say “hi, how’s it going?” for instance, in one sense you’re arguing that your hello deserves a response.
- Visual and verbal messages contain arguments.
- They express a point of view.
- Readers/listeners/viewers are intended to react.
- At its best, rhetoric is a thoughtful, reflective activity leading to effective communication, *including* rational exchange of opposing viewpoints.
- In Aristotle’s time and in ours, those who understand and can use the available means to appeal to a audience of one or many find themselves in a position of strength.
- They have the tools to resolve conflicts without confrontation, to persuade readers/listeners to support their position, or to move people to take action.

### **The Rhetorical Triangle**

- Aristotle described the interaction among subject, speaker, and audience (or subject, writer, and reader) in what has come to be known as the Rhetorical Triangle.
- The interaction of text, writer (speaker), and reader (audience) determines the structure and language of an argument.
- To be effective, one considers
- **Subject** – The general topic, content, and ideas contained in the text.
- **Occasion** – The time and place of the piece; the context that encouraged the writing to happen.
- **Audience** – The group of readers (listeners) to whom this piece is directed.
- **Purpose** – The goal the speaker/writer wants to achieve.
- **Speaker** – The voice that tells the story – Aristotle called it the *persona*. The author and the speaker are not always the same person.
- These combine to provide the **rhetorical situation**.

### **The Rhetorical Situation**

- The **subject, occasion, audience, purpose, and speaker** will work together to determine your **rhetorical situation** — the situation which generates your need for writing.
- Consider the speech Al Gore would give about global warming to an audience of true believers versus an audience of skeptics versus an audience of climate scientists versus an audience of elementary schoolchildren – each would present a different *rhetorical situation*.

## **Ethos, Pathos, Logos**

- Aristotle taught that a speaker's ability to persuade is based on how well the speaker appeals to his or her audience in three different areas: *ethos* (ethical appeals), *pathos* (emotional appeals), and *logos* (logical appeals).
- Ethos, pathos, and logos conform to the Rhetorical Triangle.
- **Ethos** relates to the writer/speaker and says, "Trust me."
- **Logos** relates to the text and says, "Here are my facts."
- **Pathos** relates to the reader/audience and says, "Experience some emotions through what I am saying."

## **Ethos**

- Greek for "character"
- We believe those whom we respect
- Focuses on the *speaker* or *writer*
- Refers to how well the writer presents herself: character, credibility, reliability
- Does she seem knowledgeable and reasonable?
- Does she seem trustworthy?
- Does she treat her opponents fairly and respectfully?
- Does she try to establish common ground with the reader?
- Every time President Obama says "Let me be clear..." he is establishing ethos: *Trust me. This is my word. I promise.*
- The impact of ethos is often called the argument's "ethical appeal."

## **Ethos Examples**

- *Look at the accomplished alumni of our college!*
- *We've been in business since 1935!*
- "I disagree with my *honorable opponent*, the senator from the great state of Missouri."
- *Four out of five dentists say Crest works best!*
- We've got that lady from *Grey's Anatomy* in our car ads and you trust her, right, cuz she's Addison Montgomery, a doctor on TV!
- OnStar commercials with actual emergency responses. *We're good – we respond!*

## **Establishing Ethos**

- You dress nicely for your college interview, court case, etc.
- You use proper grammar/punctuation in your speaking/writing, lest someone think you're stoo-pid.
- You appear restrained, sincere, fair-minded, reasoned. You establish ethos through your reasonable **tone**.

- *When analyzing text, note how the author establishes **ethos**.*

## **Ethos – When misapplied...**

- Can become unfair or dishonest.
- Can distort or misrepresent information (biased).
- When overused, can suggest elitism.

- Can be insulting or dismissive of other viewpoints.
- “I’m so smart, blah, blah, blah, I’m an expert!”

### Logos

- Greek for “word”
- Focus on the *argument*, not the person making it
- How is the intellect being appealed to?
- What is being argued? What is the thesis?
- How is it being supported?
- Are the arguments being presented logically and based upon facts? Are counterarguments included/refuted?
- The impact of logos is often called the argument’s “logical appeal” or “rational appeal.”

### Logos

- Rational appeals (logic) make use of two types of reasoning: **inductive** and **deductive**.
- Inductive reasoning generalizes a conclusion from facts, based on *probabilities*. Inductive reasoning is based upon arguments that do not contain categorical support for a conclusion. Rather, they confer only probability on the conclusion by drawing from examples, which means that it is possible for premises to be true and the conclusion false.
- Example: *Most people like ice cream. Suzy is a person. Suzy likes ice cream.* Logically correct, but perhaps not true.
- Example: *Every dog I’ve seen has four legs. All dogs have four legs.* Logically correct, and true.
- The rhetorical equivalent of inductive reasoning is the *example*. Facts are derived by repeated observations.

●Deductive reasoning uses generally accepted propositions to derive specific conclusions. Unlike induction, deductive arguments provide absolute support for a conclusion. Deductive reasoning makes the strong assertion that the conclusion *must* follow the premises, because they are generally accepted. Denying the conclusion means that at least one of the premises is flawed.

●Example: *If all human beings are mortal, and I am a human being, I must be mortal.* Notice that the critical difference between this example and the inductive examples is the use of “all” rather than “most” or “some.”

●The rhetorical equivalent of inductive reasoning is the *syllogism*. Facts are derived by combining existing “truths.”

●**Syllogism** – a simple form of deductive reasoning, yet one of the most powerful types of logical arguments.

●Always includes a *major premise* (typically relating to a group); a *minor premise* (relating to a singular); and a *conclusion* implied by the previous two premises.

●*All dogs can bark.*

●*Spot is a dog.*

●*Spot can bark.*

●Recall that words like “some,” “many,” “most” are signs that the logic of an argument may be flawed.

- *Oak trees are fast-growing plants.*
- *Some fast-growing plants don't need much water.*
- *Oak trees don't need much water.*
- This is false.

### **Logical Fallacies**

- There are several *fallacies* in inductive and deductive reasoning that, if understood, can be identified and disposed of properly. They signal poor rhetorical skills and a lack of intellectual rigor.
- We will get to these in detail later, but here's an example: Calling people with whom you disagree names is a logical fallacy called the *Ad Hominem* (personal) attack.
- Example: *No one is interested in Mayor Smith's tax plan because he is an idiot and he doesn't care about people.*

### **Logos Examples**

- A study of over 1,000 users showed this is the best skin cream.
- A Gallup poll says 60% of Americans want higher fuel-mileage cars.
- NASA scientists believe there was once water on Mars after studying hundreds of images of the planet.
- *Examples* are used to back up claims:
  - Facts
  - Studies
  - Statistics
  - Charts
  - Experiments

### **Logos – When misapplied...**

- Can lead to over-generalized claims
- Logical fallacies (If 'A' is true in this case, it's true in all cases, etc.)
- Evidence misused or ignored
- No recognition of opposing views
- Can be overly dry with the wrong audience

### **Pathos**

- Greek for "suffering" or "experience"
- Appeals to the *emotions* and *values* of the audience
- How does the writer tap into the emotions of the reader?
- How does the writer make the argument "matter" to the reader?
- Often conveyed through a narrative or an anecdote (think kids, kitties, old people – things that make you go "awwwwww").
- Appeals to sadness, pride, fear, anger, love, justice, patriotism, identity, self-interest, etc. – the "emotional appeal"
- Many rhetoricians view pathos as the strongest of the appeals, but also lament the power of emotion to sway the mind.

### **Pathos Examples**

- Sarah McLachlan with all those sad puppies and kitties while her song “Angel” plays in the background.
- The Save the Children campaign with photos of suffering, malnourished children: “For the price of a cup of coffee, you can...”
- Candidates for political office who use photographs of themselves with their cute children and families, or with soldiers, babies, handicapped people, etc.

### **Pathos – When misapplied...**

- Becomes a substitute for logic and reason
- Can offer simple, emotional reactions to complex problems
- Takes advantage of emotions to manipulate rather than convince credibly
- Examples?
- Uses stereotypes to pit one group of people against another
- Examples?
- Can provoke “lower emotions”: lust, greed, envy, revenge
- Examples?

### **Pathos**

- Arguments that appeal only to the emotions are by definition weak intellectual arguments
- They are generally **propagandistic** in purpose – designed to sway opinion rather than present information
- They are generally more **polemical** than persuasive – one-sided and usually *against* an idea, opinion or doctrine rather than *for* one.

### **Rhetoric**

- The way a writer uses **ethos**, **logos**, and **pathos** will determine his or her rhetorical success.
- Most effective arguments will use all three appeals, though one or another may be emphasized depending on the purpose and audience.

### **Patterns of Development**

- Classical rhetoricians outlined a five-part structure for an oratory, or speech, that writers still use today: the *Classical Model*
- 1) The **introduction** – introduces readers to the subject, piques their interest, gets their attention, often establishes ethos.
- 2) The **narration** – provides factual information and background material on the subject or establishes why it is a problem that needs to be addressed. Can appeal to logos *and* pathos (why should the reader care?)
- 3) The **confirmation** – usually the major part of the text, includes the proof needed to make the writer’s case. Contains the most concrete and specific detail in the text. Makes the strongest appeal to *logos*.
- 4) The **refutation** – addresses the counterargument, often as a bridge between the writer’s proof and conclusion. Classical rhetoricians put these near the end, but where the counterarguments are well known or valued by the audience, they can come before the writer presents his/her argument. Appeals to logos.

●5) The **conclusion** – whether it is one paragraph or several, brings the essay to a satisfying close. Here the writer usually appeals to *pathos*, and reminds readers of the *ethos* established earlier. Answers the question “so what?”

●Rhetoricians remind us that the last words and ideas of a text are those the audience is most likely to remember.

### **Patterns of Development**

●The *purpose* of one’s writing will usually dictate a pattern of arrangement – or a **mode of writing**. These modes include a range of logical ways to organizing an entire text or, more likely, individual paragraphs or sections.

●**Narration** – telling a story or recounting a series of events, usually governed by chronology.

●Writers often use narration by way of anecdote to enter into their topics.

●**Description** – similar to narration, but emphasizes the senses by painting a picture of how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels.

●Writers often use description to establish mood. Few essays will be all description, but it allows readers to see what you see, feel what you feel, and empathize with your argument.

●**Process analysis** – explains how something works, how to do something, or how something was done.

●Self-help books are essentially process analysis, though this mode can also be used, for example, to explain how to improve a difficult situation, such as a war, a campaign, etc.

●It is essential to explain your subject logically, clearly, and to use transitions to mark the sequence of major steps, stages, or phases of the process.

●**Exemplification** – providing a series of examples, or one extended example, to illustrate a point.

●Recall what was said about *inductive reasoning*.

●**Comparison and contrast** – A common pattern of development, juxtaposing two things to highlight their similarities and differences.

●Can be organized two ways:

·subject-by-subject, which first looks at all elements of subject A and then subject B;

·point-by-point, which analyzes specific elements for each subject, bouncing back and forth between them.

●**Classification and division** – sorts materials or ideas into major categories.

●Some topics sort themselves – *movies, books, film, and TV are all “forms of entertainment”* — while at other times writers must develop their own categories in order to break down large ideas and concepts into parts their readers can manage.

●**Definition** – to ensure that writers and readers are speaking the same language, definition may help establish common ground or identify areas of conflict.

●Are you writing about “patriotic behavior”? How do you define that?

- **Cause and effect** – analyzing the causes that lead to an effect or the effects that result from a cause is a powerful tool for argument.
- Requires clear logic and the avoidance of flawed conclusions.
- Cause and effect is often signaled by a *why* in the title or opening paragraph: *Why Johnny Can't Read: Boys and Literature*

### **Visual Rhetoric**

- Images, like words, can be used to create meaning or construct an argument. We will explore this more later.