RHETORICAL APPEALS: LOGOS, PATHOS, AND ETHOS DEFINED

by Melanie Gagich and Emilie Zickel

Rhetoric is the way that authors use and manipulate language in order to persuade an audience. Once we understand the rhetorical situation out of which a text is created (why it was written, for whom it was written, by whom it was written, how the medium in which it was written creates certain constraints or perhaps freedoms of expression), we can look at how all of those contextual elements shape the author's creation of the text.

We can look first at the classical rhetorical appeals, which are the three ways to classify authors' intellectual, moral, and emotional approaches to getting the audience to have the reaction that the author hopes for.

Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetorical appeals refer to ethos, pathos, and logos. These are classical Greek terms, dating back to Aristotle, who is traditionally seen as the father of rhetoric. To be rhetorically effective (and thus persuasive), an author must engage the audience in a variety of compelling ways, which involves carefully choosing how to craft their argument so that the outcome, audience agreement with the argument or point, is achieved. Aristotle defined these modes of engagement and gave them the terms that we still use today: logos, pathos, and ethos.

Logos: Appeal to Logic

Logic. Reason. Rationality. Logos is brainy and intellectual, cool, calm, collected, objective.

When an author relies on logos, it means that they are using logic, careful structure, and objective evidence to appeal to the audience. An author can appeal to an audience's intellect by using information that can be fact checked (using multiple sources) and thorough explanations to support key points. Additionally, providing a solid and non-biased explanation of one's argument is a great way for an author to invoke logos.

For example, if I were trying to convince my students to complete their homework, I might explain that I understand everyone is busy and they have other classes (non-biased), but the homework will help them get a better grade on their test (explanation). I could add to this explanation by providing statistics showing the number of students who failed and didn't complete their homework versus the number of students who passed and did complete their homework (factual evidence).

Logical appeals rest on rational modes of thinking, such as

- **Comparison –** including a comparison between one thing (with regard to your topic) and another similar thing to help support your claim. It is important that the comparison is fair and valid–the things being compared must share significant traits of similarity.

- **Cause/effect thinking –** arguing that X has caused Y, or that X is likely to cause Y to help support your claim. Be careful with the latter–it can be difficult to predict that something will happen in the future.

- **Deductive reasoning –** starting with a broad, general claim/example and using it to support a more specific point or claim

- **Inductive reasoning –** using several specific examples or cases to make a broad generalization

- **Exemplification –** using many examples or a variety of evidence to support a single point

- **Elaboration** – moving beyond just including a fact but explaining the significance or relevance of that fact

- **Coherent thought** – maintaining a well-organized line of reasoning; not repeating ideas or jumping around

Pathos: Appeal to Emotions

When an author relies on pathos, it means that they are trying to tap into the audience's emotions to get them to agree with the author's claim. An author using pathetic appeals wants the audience to feel something: anger, pride, joy, rage, or happiness. For example, many of us have seen the ASPCA commercials that use photographs of injured puppies or sad-looking kittens and slow, depressing music to emotionally persuade their audience to donate money.

Pathos-based rhetorical strategies are any strategies that get the audience to "open up" to the topic, the argument, or the author. Emotions can make us vulnerable, and an author can use this vulnerability to get the audience to believe that their argument is a compelling one.

Pathetic appeals might include

- **Expressive descriptions** of people, places, or events that help the reader to feel or experience those events

- **Vivid imagery** of people, places, or events that help the reader to feel like they are seeing those events

- **Personal stories** that make the reader feel a connection to, or empathy for, the person being

described

- **Emotion-laden vocabulary** as a way to put the reader into that specific emotional mindset (What is the author trying to make the audience feel? And how are they doing that?)

- Information that will **evoke an emotional response from the audience**. This could involve making the audience feel empathy or disgust for the person/group/event being discussed or perhaps connection to or rejection of the person/group/event being discussed.

When reading a text, try to locate when the author is trying to convince the reader using emotions because, if used to excess, pathetic appeals can indicate a lack of substance or emotional manipulation of the audience. See the links below about fallacious pathos for more information.

Ethos: Appeal to Values/Trust

Ethical appeals have two facets: audience values and authorial credibility/character.

On the one hand, when an author makes an ethical appeal, they are attempting to **tap into the values or ideologies that the audience holds**, for example, patriotism, tradition, justice, equality, dignity for all humankind, self-preservation, or other specific social, religious or philosophical values (Christian values, socialism, capitalism, feminism, etc.). These values can sometimes feel very close to emotions, but they are felt on a social level rather than only on a personal level. When an author evokes the values that the audience cares about to justify or support their argument, we classify that as ethos. The audience will feel that the author is making an argument that is "right" (in the sense of moral "right"-ness, i.e., "My argument rests upon the values that matter to you. Therefore, you should accept my argument"). This first part of the definition of ethos, then, is focused on the audience's values.

On the other hand, this sense of referencing what is "right" in an ethical appeal connects to the other sense of ethos: the author. Ethos that is centered on the author revolves around two concepts: the credibility of the author and their character.

- **Credibility** of the speaker/author is determined by their knowledge and expertise in the subject at hand. For example, if you are learning about Einstein's Theory of Relativity, would you rather learn from a professor of physics or a cousin who took two science classes in high school 30 years ago? It is fair to say that, in general, the professor of physics would have more credibility to discuss the topic of physics. To establish their credibility, an author may draw attention to who they are or what kinds of experience they have with the topic being discussed as an ethical appeal (i.e., "Because I have experience with this topic–and I know my stuff– you should trust what I am saying about this topic"). Some authors do not have to establish their credibility because the audience already knows who they are and that they are credible.

- **Character** is another aspect of ethos. Character is different from credibility because it involves personal history and even personality traits. A person can be credible but lack character or vice versa. For example, in politics, sometimes the most experienced candidates–those who might be the most credible candidates–fail to win elections because

voters do not accept their character. Politicians take pains to shape their character as leaders who have the interests of the voters at heart. The candidate who successfully proves to the voters (the audience) that they have the type of character that the audience can trust is more likely to win.

Thus, ethos comes down to trust. How can the author gain the audience's trust so that the audience will accept their argument? How can the author make him or herself appear as a credible speaker who embodies the character traits that the audience values? In building ethical appeals, we see authors referring either directly or indirectly to the values that matter to the intended audience (so that the audience will trust the speaker). Authors use language, phrasing, imagery, or other writing styles common to people who hold those values, thereby "talking the talk" of people with those values (again, so that the audience is inclined to trust the speaker). Authors refer to their experience and/or authority with the topic as well (and therefore demonstrate their credibility).

When reading, you should think about the author's credibility regarding the subject as well as their character. Here is an example of a rhetorical move that connects with ethos: when reading an article about abortion, the author mentions that she has had an abortion. That is an example of an ethical move because the author is creating credibility via anecdotal evidence and first-person narrative. In a rhetorical analysis project, it would be up to you, the analyzer, to point out this move and associate it with a rhetorical strategy.

Rhetorical Appeals Misuse

When writers misuse logos, pathos, or ethos, arguments can be weakened. Above, we defined and described what logos, pathos, and ethos are and why authors may use those strategies. Sometimes, using a combination of logical, pathetic, and ethical appeals leads to a sound, balanced, and persuasive argument. It is important to understand, though, that using rhetorical appeals does not always lead to a sound, balanced argument. In fact, any of the appeals could be misused or overused. And when that happens, arguments can be weakened.

To see what a misuse of logical appeals might consist of, see Logical Fallacies.

To see how authors can overuse emotional appeals and turn-off their target audience, visit the following link from *WritingCommons.org*: Fallacious Pathos.

To see how ethos can be misused or used in a manner that may be misleading, visit the following link to *WritingCommons.org*: Fallacious Ethos

Attributions

CLASSICAL RHETORIC

by Rebecca Jones

Introduction

In James Murphy's translation of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, he explains that "Education for Quintilian begins in the cradle, and ends only when life itself ends" (xxi). The result of a life of learning, for Quintilian, is a perfect speech where "the student is given a statement of a problem and asked to prepare an appropriate speech giving his solution" (Murphy xxiii). In this version of the world, a good citizen is always a PUBLIC participant. This forces the good citizen to know the rigors of public argumentation: "Rhetoric, or the theory of effective communication, is for Quintilian merely the tool of the broadly educated citizen who is capable of analysis, reflection, and powerful action in public affairs" (Murphy xxvii). For Quintilian, learning to argue in public is a lifelong affair. He believed that the "perfect orator . . . cannot exist unless he is above all a good man" (6). Whether we agree with this or not, the hope for ethical behavior has been a part of public argumentation from the beginning.

The ancient model of rhetoric (or public argumentation) is complex. As a matter of fact, there is no single model of ancient argumentation. Plato claimed that the Sophists, such as Gorgias, were spin doctors weaving opinion and untruth for the delight of an audience and to the detriment of their moral fiber. For Plato, at least in the Phaedrus, public conversation was only useful if one applied it to the search for truth. In the last decade, the work of the Sophists has been redeemed. Rather than spin doctors, Sophists like Isocrates and even Gorgias, to some degree, are viewed as arbiters of democracy because they believed that many people—not just male, property holding, Athenian citizens—could learn to use rhetoric effectively in public.

Aristotle gives us a slightly more systematic approach. He is very concerned with logic. For this reason, much of what is discussed below comes from his work. Aristotle explains that most men participate in public argument in some fashion. It is important to note that by "men," Aristotle means citizens of Athens: adult males with the right to vote, not including women, foreigners, or slaves. Essentially this is a homogenous group by race, gender, and religious affiliation. We have to keep this in mind when adapting these strategies to our current heterogeneous culture. Aristotle explains,

. . . for to a certain extent all men attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Ordinary people do this either at random or through practice and from acquired habit. Both ways being possible, the subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers succeed through practice and others spontaneously; and every one will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art. (Honeycutt, "Aristotle's *Rhetoric*" 1354a I i)

For Aristotle, inquiry into this field was artistic in nature. It required both skill and practice (some needed more of one than the other). Important here is the notion that public argument can be systematically learned.

Aristotle did not dwell on the ethics of an argument in rhetoric (he leaves this to other texts). He argued that "things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites" and finally that " . . . things that are true and things that are better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in" (Honeycutt, "Aristotle's Rhetoric" 1355a I i). As a culture, we are skeptical of this kind of position, though I think that we do often believe it on a personal level. Aristotle admits in the next line that there are people who will use their skills at rhetoric for harm. As his job in this section is to defend the use of rhetoric itself, he claims that everything good can be used for harm, so rhetoric is no different from other fields. If this is true, there is even more need to educate the citizenry so that they will not be fooled by unethical and untruthful arguments.

For many, logic simply means reasoning. To understand a person's logic, we try to find the structure of their reasoning. Logic is not synonymous with fact or truth, though facts are part of evidence in logical argumentation. You can be logical without being truthful. This is why more logic is not the only answer to better public argument.

Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

Our human brains are compelled to categorize the world as a survival mechanism. This survival mechanism allows for quicker thought. Two of the most basic logical strategies include inductive and deductive reasoning.

Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning (see Figure 7.1) starts from a premise that is a generalization about a large class of ideas, people, etc. and moves to a specific conclusion about a smaller category of ideas or things (All cats hate water; therefore, my neighbor's cat will not jump in our pool). While the first premise is the most general, the second premise is a more particular observation. So the argument is created through common beliefs/observations that are compared to create an
argument. For example:

People who burn flags are unpatriotic. **Major Premise**
Sara burned a flag. **Minor Premise**
Sara is unpatriotic. **Conclusion**
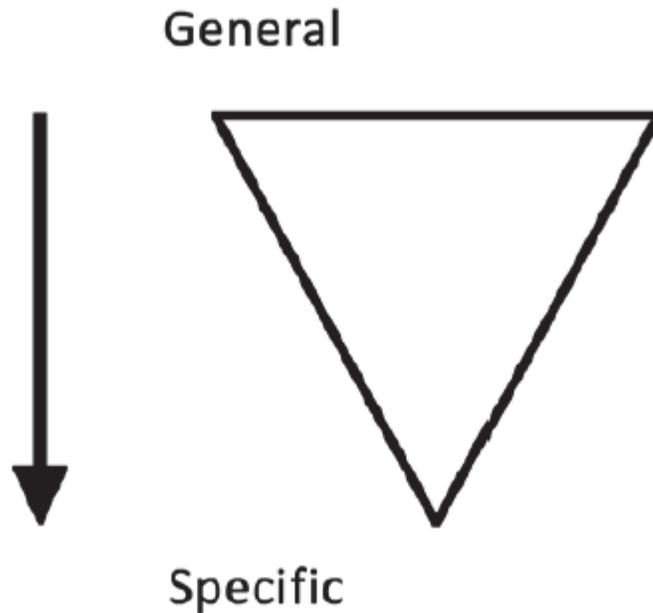
General

Specific

Figure 7.1: Deductive Reasoning

The above example is called a syllogism. As we can see in the example, the major premise offers a general belief held by some groups and the minor premise is a particular observation. The conclusion is drawn by comparing the premises and developing a conclusion. If you work hard enough, you can often take a complex argument and boil it down to a syllogism. This can reveal a great deal about the argument that is not apparent in the longer more complex version.

Stanley Fish, professor and *New York Times* columnist, offers the following syllogism in his July 22, 2007, blog entry titled "Democracy and Education":

> "The syllogism underlying these comments is (1) America is a democracy (2) Schools and universities are situated within that democracy (3) Therefore schools and universities should be ordered and administrated according to democratic principles."

Fish offered the syllogism as a way to summarize the responses to his argument that students do not, in fact, have the right to free speech in a university classroom. The responses to Fish's standpoint were vehemently opposed to his understanding of free speech rights and democracy. The responses are varied and complex. However, boiling them down to a single syllogism helps to summarize the primary rebuttal so that Fish could then offer his extended version of his standpoint (see link to argument in Question #1 at the end of the text).

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning moves in a different direction than deductive reasoning (see Figure 7.2). Inductive reasoning starts with a particular or local statement and moves to a more general conclusion. I think of inductive reasoning as a stacking of evidence. The more particular examples you give, the more it seems that your conclusion is correct.

Inductive reasoning is a common method for arguing, especially when the conclusion is an obvious probability. Inductive reasoning is the most common way that we move around in the world. If we experience something habitually, we reason that it will happen again. For example, if we walk down a city street and every person smiles, we might reason that this is a "nice town." This seems logical. We have taken many similar, particular experiences (smiles) and used them to make a general conclusion (the people in the town are nice). Most of the time, this reasoning works. However, we know that it can also lead us in the wrong direction. Perhaps the people were smiling because we were wearing inappropriate clothing (country togs in a metropolitan city), or perhaps only the people living on that particular street are "nice" and the rest of the town is unfriendly. Research papers sometimes rely too heavily on this logical method. Writers assume that finding ten versions of the same argument somehow prove that the point is true.
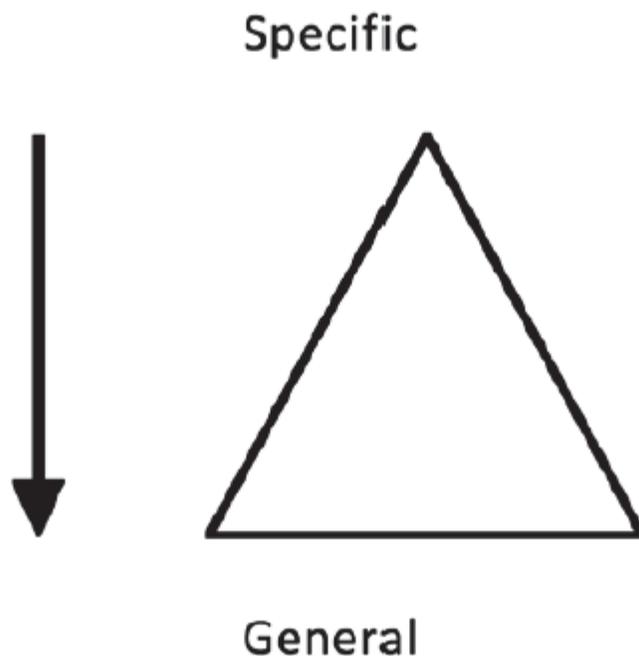

Figure 7.2: Inductive Reasoning

Here is another example. In Ann Coulter's most recent book, *Guilty: Liberal "Victims" and Their Assault on America*, she makes her (in)famous argument that single motherhood is the cause of many of America's ills. She creates this argument through a piling of evidence. She lists statistics by sociologists, she lists all the single moms who killed their children, she lists stories of single mothers who say outrageous things about their life, children, or marriage in general, and she ends with a list of celebrity single moms that most would agree are not good examples of motherhood. Through this list, she concludes, "Look at almost any societal problem and you will find it is really a problem of single mothers" (36). While she could argue, from this evidence, that being a single mother is difficult, the generalization that single motherhood is the root of social ills in America takes the inductive reasoning too far. Despite this example, we need inductive reasoning because it is the key to analytical thought (see Activity: Applying Deductive and Inductive Reasoning below). To write an "analysis paper" is to use inductive reasoning.

Activity: Applying Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

For each standpoint below, create a deductive argument AND an inductive argument. When you are finished, share with your group members and decide which logical strategy offers a more successful, believable, and/or ethical argument for the particular standpoint. Feel free to modify the standpoint to find many possible arguments.

- Affirmative Action should continue to be legal in the United States.

- Affirmative Action is no longer useful in the United States.

- The arts should remain an essential part of public education.

- Choose a very specific argument on your campus (parking, tuition, curriculum), and create deductive and inductive arguments to support the standpoint.

Most academic arguments in the humanities are inductive to some degree. When you study humanity, nothing is certain. When observing or making inductive arguments, it is important to get your evidence from many different areas, to judge it carefully, and to acknowledge the flaws. Inductive arguments must be judged by the quality of the evidence since the conclusions are drawn directly from a body of compiled work.

Attributions

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