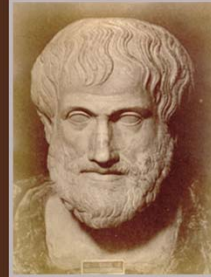
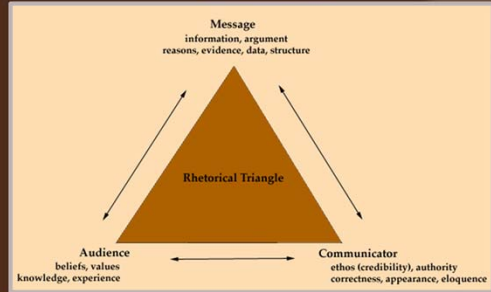


**Ethos ~ Pathos ~ Logos**  
Rhetorical Appeals



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Just as we have Aristotle to thank for describing syllogisms, we, meaning Western thinkers, use Aristotle's ideas about rhetoric as a basis for our arguments. Aristotle asserted "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Rhetorica, ch. 2). What that means is discovering what it is about a topic that will persuade... the proofs that can be marshaled to make a strong case. In his treatise on rhetoric, Aristotle further pointed out, "There are, then, these three means (logos, ethos, and pathos) of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions-that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited" (Rhetorica, ch. 2). What this boils down to is ethos, pathos, and logos are categories of evidence. Each type is an **appeal** intended to reach a different part of an audience's mind.



Ethos is an appeal to character. Each time you see a famous person hawking a product, you're watching an appeal to ethos. Someone is trying to convince you that because X believes this, it must be true. Obviously some appeals to character or credibility are much stronger than others.

It is the credibility of the **speaker** that's at stake, and that's why students are encouraged to use the ideas and words of experts in their academic essays. It is assumed that students are not experts in a subject, so they must borrow credibility from those who are. By quoting an expert, the student is using the expert's credibility to strengthen the case being made.

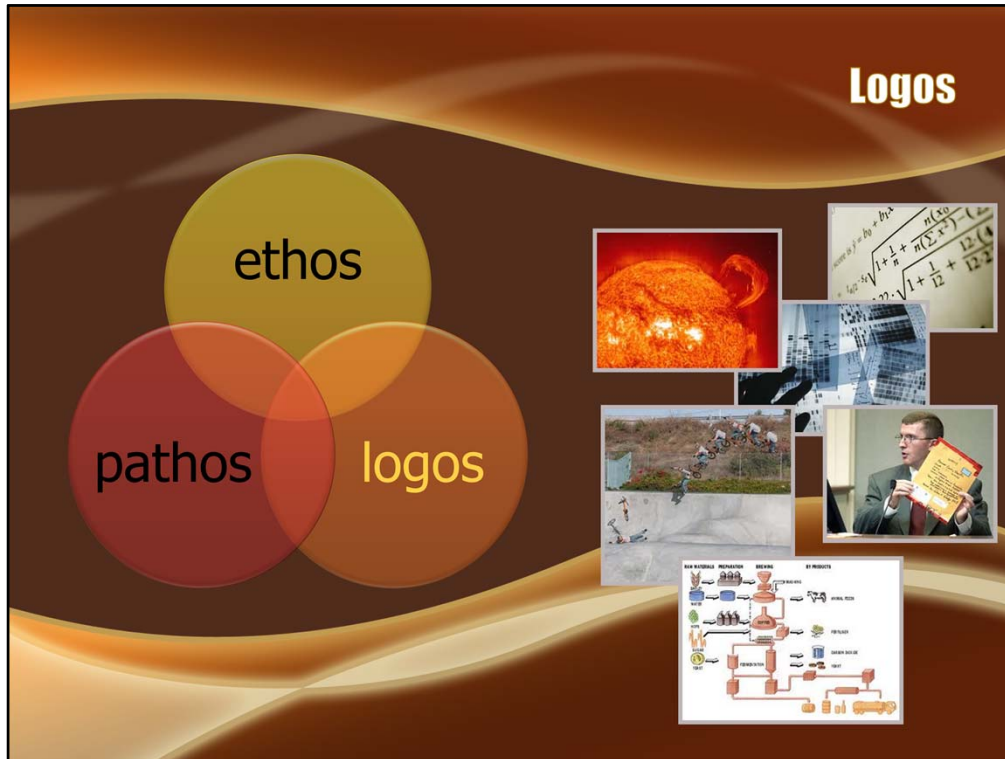
It's important to choose carefully because trying to use someone who is an expert in astronomy when the debate is about comic books may backfire. Expertise must be in the subject being discussed. This doesn't mean the expert must have a degree in a subject. A long-time interest that has resulted in careful study, years of working in a field, and going to school are all ways one might become an expert.



Surprisingly, pathos, or the appeal to emotion, is often the most powerfully persuasive evidence. If charity is needed, show a starving child or a sad puppy. Want to convince someone to do something dangerous? Imply the product will make one sexy or handsome. Fear is an excellent motivator, and it's used far too often.

Appeals to emotion can be legitimate. It's important to provide that human face when talking a lot of statistics. One can talk about how draconian the marijuana laws might be, but telling one family's story and showing the devastating impact of those laws reveals the hypocrisy and duplicity.

Appeals to emotion can be fallacious. If someone uses a worst-case scenario just to incite fear, that's not giving people a chance to make a rational decision. In the 1950s appeals to fear brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. In the 1980s and 1990s appeals to fear swelled our nation's prisons by millions. In the 2000s appeals to fear led to sanctioned torture of prisoners.



Logos is the most rational of rhetorical appeals. It is the use of facts, statistics, and careful reasoning to demonstrate the validity of a position. A photograph could be evidence. So could a DNA sequence, a process diagram, or witness testimony. Evidence could even be describing the sequence of events or actions leading to the conclusion.

The strongest arguments are prepared and explained by those with appropriate credibility, built on sound evidence, and make legitimate emotional connections between the evidence and the conclusion. Ethos, logos, pathos: The rhetorical triangle.

## Resources

- Ethos, Logos, Pathos Explanation and Examples
- <http://pathosethoslogos.com/>
- A General Summary of Aristotle's Appeals
- <http://courses.durhamtech.edu/perkins/aris.html>
- Rhetorica
- <http://rhetorica.net/argument.htm>
- Using Rhetorical Strategies for Persuasion
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/04/>

