

## Three Elements of an Argument

The three elements of an argument are

1. Logos: The logic of the argument.
  - a. Structure
  - b. Claim
  - c. Evidence
2. Ethos: Your credentials; your experience, your credibility, your past performance, awards, if any, for your work.
3. Pathos: Passion. Think of the color red; your desire to get something done; the motivating force, and I mean force, behind your idea.

What does an argument look like that has Logos or logic, but no Ethos or Pathos?

What does an argument look like that has Logos and Ethos, but not Pathos?

What does an argument look like that has all three: Logos (the logic), Ethos (the credentials), and Pathos (the Passion)

### **Logos:**

Let's start with the logical structure. This is where most classes start and stop; the logical side of the equation. In fact, here in the West, we value logic above all else. This is an exaggeration; however, we value education and are willing to pay lots of money to get it (that's why you and I are here). We also value science and understanding our world through facts and figures. Think about sports, where statistics are king. How many arguments about how much we should pay baseball players are based on statistics?

Don't we usually think someone brilliant who can rattle off answers to Jeopardy questions?

We put a high price on logic and understanding our world through our 5 senses (we'll get to the sixth sense, stay with me).

So what does this mean for writing? What must our arguments have?

- I. A Message
  - a. It should be clear and easy to understand. No garbled messages.
  - b. You should be able to say it in one sentence.
  - c. Ask yourself what you want your readers to know or to understand as a result of reading your work or listening to you speak.
  - d. It may take a while to figure out what one message you want to deliver, but it is inside you. It has always been there and it is waiting for you to let it out.
    - i. Example messages: MIT's decision to hold Monday classes on Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> is unreasonable.
    - ii. DUSP should hire a transportation professor regardless of budget cuts.
    - iii. DUSP student e-mail lists should not be made available to outside users.
- II. Reasons/Claims
  - a. Reasons or claims are how you assert your message. You have a message that you need to deliver and you need to figure out how to convince your reader/listener that it is true. What does this mean? How will you do this? How do you normally do this? The best way to do this is to outline a series of reasons that support your main message. You should ask yourself why your message is important and why someone should want to listen to you.
    - i. For example, if your message is "MIT's decision to hold Monday classes on Tuesday is unreasonable," what reasons might you give to support your argument?
      1. Too confusing
      2. MIT schedules are not students' only priority.
        - a. Harvard class schedules
        - b. Day care schedules

### c. Work schedules

Now you have a message, and you have some reasons. What else do you need to make your argument?

#### III. Evidence

- a. Evidence helps ground your argument.
- b. What statistics (remember this is logical) do you need to gather to help convince your reader? When you do this research, you may actually come up with additional reasons that you hadn't considered. Maybe you find that this switch actually costs people a pile of money for the day (parking fees, bus and train fees, (transportation costs), day care costs, loss of income from a job situation, etc.)
- c. Evidence and research may even help you reshape your main message – e.g., MIT's policy to shift Monday classes to Tuesday once each year is not only confusing, but also costly to students.

#### IV. Examples

- a. Often it is also helpful to throw in a few examples to help illustrate the points that you are making. Examples come in a few varieties: Hypothetical and Real Life Examples, and each has its place.
  - i. Hypothetical arguments should be used sparingly. You don't want to overdose on Hypothetical examples. Really hypothetical examples should be used to illustrate a point that you are trying to make in a way that your reader can understand
    1. For example, you might say to your readers "Grad student A has a job, a family and her graduate studies to attend to and carefully balances her schedule each semester to accommodate all three. When Tuesday switches to Monday, Student A has to juggle. Instead of working at the Library from 9 to 2:00 (\$60) and then picking up her kids. Student A must forgo her wages (\$60) and then hire someone to pick up her kids from school and take care of them from 2:30 to 5:30 (\$30) when she can pick them up. The total cost to this student is \$90 for the day.

- ii. Real life examples are even more powerful than Hypothetical examples because someone can always make up a hypothetical example to counter your example. Someone can always find Student B who gains (\$90) as a result of the day change. But, what if there really is a student who finds the day change a hardship? What if you could point to this student's experience as evidence to support your claim? When you can put a human body behind the examples, when you can put a face to the problem, well then, you have a story, and people love stories.

Okay, enough about logoi. Now let's look at an example of a purely logical argument. The purely logical argument tends to be what many refer to as the classic 5-paragraph essay.

Introduction w/idea

Claim 1

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Claim 2

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Claim 3

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Conclusion

Here we have the 5 paragraph essay structure. Now, let's read one....

Exercise 1: Read the following example. Can you find the main idea? Can you find the supporting assertions? Can you find any evidence? Ask yourself, "Am I persuaded by this argument?" Why? Why not? Write down your answers. Let's discuss.

**Ethos:**

Okay, we have talked about what Ethos is (your credentials), but what do your credentials have to do with writing? The word credentials; what is the root of that word? Cred? Belief, Believability, Credible, Credence, etc.

Why is it important to be believable? Why is it important to be credible?

Trust: Your audience is looking to be able to trust you. How can you gain trust? How can you lose trust? How do you begin to know how you can best convince your audience to trust you?

First of all, who is your audience? If your audience is an American Business audience, you can bet that education is going to be at the top of the list. How educated are you? Where did you go to school? (The MIT Brass Rat is known all over the world as a symbol of intelligence and education).

Second, or maybe first, depending on the situation, how much experience do you have on the topic you are presenting? Experience counts for a lot. People want to know that you have worked with these ideas before, that you maybe have failed before. They want to know that they are in good hands.

How can you demonstrate credentials?

1. You introduce yourself and include your alphabet soup initials at the end of your name. You include your title (vice president, executive director, etc, citizen, activist, etc) depending on the audience
2. You wear your Brass Rat.
3. You tell a story about your background so that people know that you went to MIT (if you are speaking). This has to be done subtly.
4. The way you speak and the way you write will also convey credibility. If your writing is full of fragments, spelling errors and incomplete thoughts, your audience will lose confidence in you.
5. How does your credibility shape your prose? Shape your speech? The words you choose will make you sound accessible, inaccessible. The technical terms and the way they are defined or undefined for the audience will send a message.
6. How does your ability to project a credible source of information affect the examples or evidence that you present?

So, first you have this logical (Logos) style for your argument, now you want to be sure that you are taken seriously. What evidence do you use to illustrate your points? What hypothetical examples do you choose and why? These decisions will make your work more or less credible, depending on audience expectations. If you choose an infantile analogy to make your point, you may be ignored.

For example, if you state that MIT should not change the Monday schedule to Tuesday because this is dumb, you will likely be dismissed by some audiences, especially those who disagree with you.

Similarly, if you state that MIT should not change the Monday schedule to Tuesday because this change is unconstitutional, you may get a number of confused looks and probably a few rolled eyes.

Your reasoning says much about who you are and what you believe in.

Be careful with your credibility, your reputation, as you write and present your thoughts. Act and be the way that you want others to think of you because that is the way that you are perceived. Treat others with respect, even those who disagree with you, even those who are not as well educated, well respected or well liked and you will find yourself a credible speaker/writer.

Okay, enough about reputation. I better stop here or I am going to be thought of by all of you as long winded, sappy and strange....

Let's look at a piece of writing that has both logos and ethos. In other words, here is a piece of writing that is logically presented by a credible, we think, someone. This person has a Ph.D. The writing is well structured, there is a message and there are logical and probably sound reasons why we should accept this argument.

What do you think about this piece of writing? Is it logical? Does the person seem credible? Why? Would you believe this person? Would you dismiss this person? Why? Why not?

What is working well in this piece of writing?

Do you see anything that needs improvement?

**Pathos:**

To experience, to suffer; an element in experience or in artistic representation evoking pity or compassion. Passion, Passionate.

Passion is what can make your message come alive; seem as if it is breathing, knowing, being....

When you breathe life into your writing, you can strike a chord with another's heart, another's life and you can make a strong argument.

This is my favorite part of creating arguments. This is the piece that is often missing until you truly care about something – a cause, a child abused, electing a president, etc.

**Exercise:**

Close your eyes.... Picture a time when you were passionate about an idea or a cause. Bring that image to your mind and let it rest there. What image do you choose? What feelings come to mind? Anger? Outrage? Pity? Sympathy? Love?

Now can you capture that feeling? Can you describe what you see in words and offer it to the reader? Can you help your reader see and understand what is most important to you?

Sometimes passionate arguments ask us to look within, to use that 6<sup>th</sup> sense – intuition – in order to decide what needs to be written on the page.

When you can infuse passion into arguments that are already logical and credible, you can really persuade an audience. But, be careful. Know that adding a bit of passion to an argument can force you to break the rules. By rules, I mean the structure of the argument may change course. You are not going to get a five paragraph essay. You are going to get an essay that passion has run over, so to speak. You are going to get an essay or a paper that may have a mind of its own. That's okay. Just go with it. You can always edit later.

Parts of your writing to focus on to infuse passion:

Verbs: Select verbs that are active. Find verbs that help tell what the actors are doing. Verbs can be better at telling what happened

because they spark the imagination. When the mind grasps an action the idea or story comes to life

Voice: Think about the way the text sounds to the reader. After all, you are putting a voice inside someone's head. What does it sound like? Whom does it sound like? Do you want the reader to feel judged, to feel lectured (passive voice)? Do you want the reader to feel as if she is talking to her friend (active voice)? As the author, you need to think about how your prose sounds when spoken in someone's head. When you can bring awareness to the voice you are creating, you can choose how you want to sound and this can help you infuse passion into your writing.

To sum up, remember there are three major parts to an argumentative piece: logos, ethos and pathos. Check your writing for each of these elements. Ask yourself and ask your friends to check the pieces of writing that mean the most to you. When you can bring awareness of these three elements into your writing, you will find that your own voice emerges. Your writing becomes distinct; the structure helps the piece flow smoothly, you give your reader a reason to trust you, and your words have color and life.