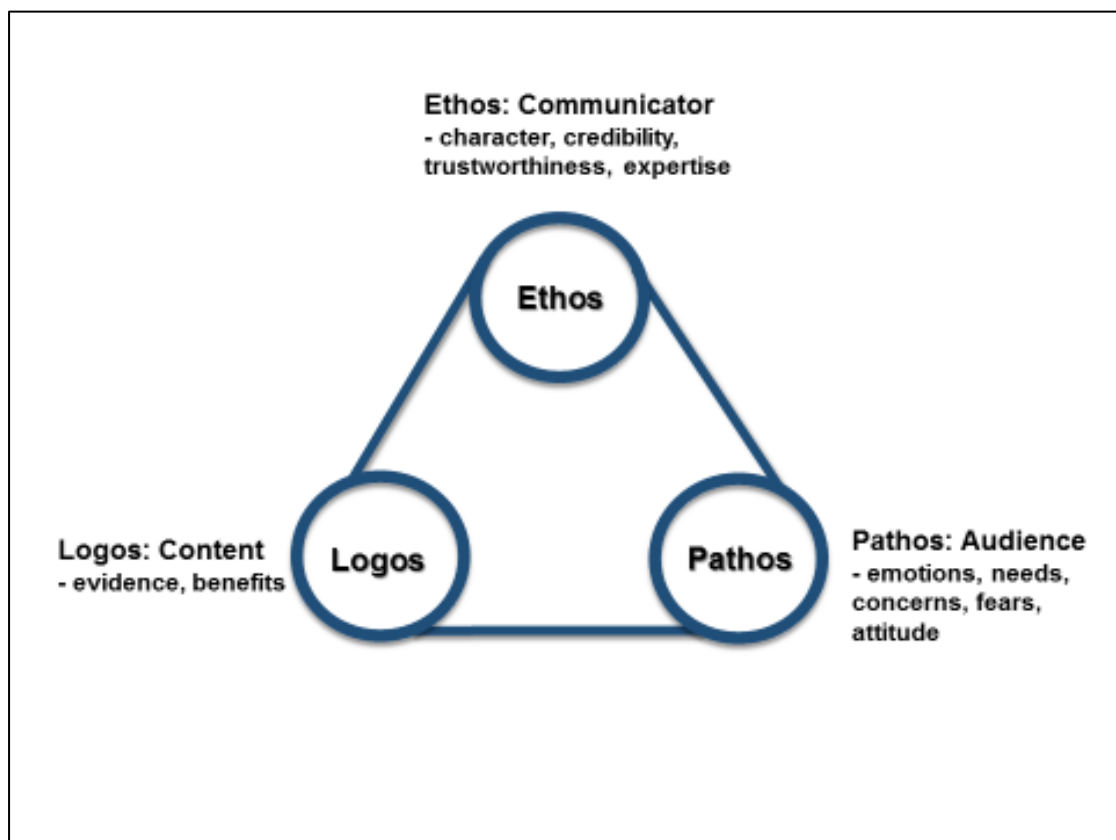


## Persuasive techniques

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At work and in your personal lives you have to persuade others on a daily basis. Persuasion means getting your audience to move to a position they do not currently hold. You want them to reconsider or change their position on an issue: to accept your ideas, proposals, or recommendations.

In order to persuade your audience to accept your ideas you need to consider three key message elements, as defined by Aristotle: **ethos**, your character, credibility and trustworthiness as a communicator; **logos**, the logic and reasoning in your message; and **pathos**, the emotional dimension.



The extent to which you draw on each of these appeals will of course always depend upon the situation. You need to get the right mix. Consider the following two examples:

**Example 1: focus on logos**

A process description in a technical manual, a highly informational message, will focus on logos – the message needs to be clear, logical, precise and unambiguous. This kind of message needs little, or no, pathos or ethos.

**Example 2: combination of ethos, logos and pathos**

A project proposal presentation to top management meant to persuade and gain funding requires a combination of ethos, logos and pathos as follows:

- The presenter needs to be seen as someone who is trustworthy and respected, a recognised expert who has a proven track record in the field. (ethos)
- The proposal itself needs to be clear and logical. It needs to provide a sound argument supported by compelling evidence. (logos)
- The presenter needs to show they are someone who understands the audience's needs, concerns and emotional state and is able to demonstrate that in the message. (pathos)

These three message elements are discussed in more detail in this input. At the end of the input, we will also look at how you can use message structure to persuade the audience.

# 1 Ethos: Persuading through communicator credibility

How the audience perceives you as a communicator will have a great impact on how enthusiastically they will receive your message. If the audience is not convinced by you as a person, they are unlikely to be swayed by your arguments.

Before presenting your ideas, you need to ask such questions as:

- How will the audience perceive my knowledge of this strategy, service, process or product?
- Do I have a proven track record in this particular area that others know about and respect?
- Am I regarded as trustworthy, helpful, and supportive?
- How can I attempt to enhance my credibility?

You can establish credibility for yourself as a communicator, independent of the message, as well as through the quality of the message itself.

## 1.1 Establishing credibility for yourself as a communicator

In the Communicating Strategically input, we already discussed the five sources of credibility (rank, goodwill, expertise, image, and common ground) that you can draw on to enhance your reputation as a communicator. By demonstrating these through e.g. knowing the subject, being well prepared, dressing appropriately, building rapport with the audience, and acknowledging their concerns, you will make your 'own character look right' (Aristotle).

## 1.2 Establishing credibility through the quality of the message

In addition to establishing your own credibility in order to enhance the audience's perception of you, you can build credibility through the quality of the message, to make your message 'worthy of belief' (Aristotle). To help you assess the quality of your message, consider the following questions:

- Does it recognize the audience's needs, concerns and motivations?
- Does it contain all the necessary facts and figures?
- Is it clear and logical, easy-to-follow?
- Are there any careless mistakes which would undermine your credibility?
- Are you using attractive and professional looking visuals, if your message is a presentation?
- Is your communication honest and ethical?

If you are ill-prepared, your audience may well think you don't really care about them and this will inevitably damage your credibility. In a presentation, for example, having a well-thought-out presentation together with a strong professional delivery can greatly boost your standing in the audience's eyes. Similarly, sending a clearly structured and reader-friendly email message will boost your standing more than a wordy, unfocused message.

## 2 Logos: Persuading through claims based on relevant evidence

In informational messages, logos basically means that you have all the necessary content that is clearly structured and coherent. Logos will be critical if you are writing documents like process descriptions, technical manuals, and user instructions, or giving a technical presentation of a new product process to a group of service engineers.

In persuasive messages, however, logos means the actual argument you are presenting.

Below, we will first look at the three main elements of a convincing argument: claim, evidence, and warrant (2.1). Then, we will look at how you can persuade the audience by highlighting audience benefits (2.2).

### 2.1 Elements of a convincing argument: claim, evidence and warrant

To convince the audience, you need to have clear claims (e.g. your opinion, viewpoint or proposal), and credible evidence that supports your claims (e.g. facts, statistics, examples, expert opinion, analogies, anecdotes, comparisons etc.). The claims and the evidence need to be clearly related to each other for the audience to accept them (the warrant). Below is an example of this, followed by a more detailed discussion of each of the three.

#### Example of claim, evidence and warrant

<b>SITUATION:</b> Human Resource Director talking to top management of a restaurant chain.	
<b>Claim</b>	<b>What do I want to prove?</b> Assertions, opinions, proposals, recommendations you want believed  <i>A 10% service charge should be included in bills instead of the present system of tipping.</i>
<b>Evidence</b>	<b>How can I support my position?</b> Supporting evidence: facts, statistics, opinions, examples, comparisons  <i>A recent national survey has shown wait staff getting a guaranteed wage are less likely to leave their present employment.</i>
<b>Warrant</b>	<b>What is the relationship between the data and the claim?</b> An explanation of the connection between data and claim  <i>High turnover of staff is costly, which reflects on our company's profit.</i>

## 2.2 Claim – what do I want to prove?

A good claim is one that:

- Captures the audience's interest: presents new ideas, teaches something new.
- Presents one central idea.
- Is specific: avoids generalizations and vague assertions.
- Is logical: emerges from a reasonable consideration of the data / evidence.

If you are structuring your message using the direct approach your claims are often likely to be the main audience benefits you wish to highlight.

## 2.3 Evidence – how can I support my claim?

Claims will always be judged on the basis of the supporting data that you provide. The evidence you give answers the questions 'Why?' and 'What is your proof?' There are basically two types of evidence: quantitative or qualitative.

### **Quantitative evidence: numerical or statistical information**

Quantitative evidence can be e.g. estimated ROI, market research, or survey results. If you use facts, they need to be accurate, verifiable, and reliable. Or, if you use statistics, they should be a representative sample, recent and reliable, and presented in terms that the audience understands.

### **Qualitative evidence: descriptive information**

The following are examples of qualitative information that you can use to support your claims:

- Expert opinion: Refer to a renowned expert who is a recognized authority.
- Examples: Make your ideas more tangible, concrete and meaningful to the audience by referring to actual events that have occurred or hypothetical events. Benchmarking is one way you can introduce compelling examples into your argument.
- Comparisons: Compare your ideas with things the audience is familiar with to make the unknown more accessible.
- Contrasts: Highlight differences and help stress the merits of your ideas compared to others' ideas. Show the benefits of your approach as opposed to that taken in similar circumstances.
- Personal testimony: If you possess high credibility, your own expert opinions may well be sufficient evidence. Note, however, that as a student or young employee, you typically lack the credibility to use your own personal opinions as evidence, unless the topic is related to, for example, student life.

## Criteria for effective evidence

Regardless of whether you use quantitative or qualitative evidence, to be compelling and for you to retain credibility, the evidence should fulfill six key criteria:

1. **Verifiable:** can you cite the source of the facts and figures you are using?
2. **Relevant:** are the facts and figures relevant in this specific context?
3. **Current:** is the information new enough to be taken seriously?
4. **Consistent:** do they support complement other available data?
5. **Representative:** are there enough facts and figures to make the argument convincing?
6. **Objective:** is the expert you are citing unbiased, do they have credibility?

## 2.4 Warrant – what is the link between the evidence and the claim?

The warrant is the link, the relationship between the claim and the evidence. It ties your evidence to the claim by answering the question: 'How does the evidence support the claim?' or 'Why does the evidence mean your claim is true?' The answer would be something like "The evidence supports the claim *because...*"

A good warrant

- will be a reasonable interpretation of the facts - it won't make illogical interpretative leaps
- will not assume more than the evidence supports
- may consider and respond to possible counter-arguments

If the warrant is not valid, the argument is weak and the argument collapses.

Note that warrants can be implicit (not stated) or explicit (stated), depending on the nature of the claim and the audience. The two examples below demonstrate this.

### Example 1: Implicit warrant

**Claim:** You should buy our teeth-whitening tooth paste.

**Data:** Studies show that teeth are 30-40% whiter after using the paste.

**Warrant:** People want to have white teeth.

Here the warrant is implicit. It doesn't need to be stated because you can safely assume that the receivers of the message already accept that having white teeth is something desirable.

In other cases, whether or not the warrant needs to be explicitly stated will depend on the audience you are addressing.

## Example 2: Implicit or explicit warrant depending on the audience

**Claim:** The Euro will strengthen against the British pound over the next five years.

**Data:** A recent IMF report forecasts strong growth in the Eurozone over the next few years, whilst the UK economy is expected to contract over the same period.

**Warrant:** Growth is essential for a currency to strengthen.

In this example, the warrant would not need to be stated for a business audience familiar with how economic growth of one country in relation to another directly affects currency exchange rates.

However, if you were presenting the same information to an audience that is unfamiliar with the factors that impact currencies then you would probably need to include an explicit warrant so the audience could fully comprehend how the data supports the claim.

## 2.5 Identifying and highlighting audience benefits

Whereas informational messages typically focus on describing features, and the inherent attributes of a product, solution, or process, persuasive messages should highlight the **benefits** of these features to the audience, the WIIFT (What's In It For Them). These benefits are often the main content in your presentation or document.

### Types of benefits

There are four types of benefits that you can focus on:

- Tangible** Emphasize the value or significance of concrete benefits such as savings, increased productivity, bonuses or greater profits.
- Task** Show the audience how you can make their job easier, more interesting more challenging, or enhance their reputation / career prospects.
- Group** Stress the benefits that the group will gain if your audience values group relationships and identity. How your proposal will make life easier for everyone, enhance team success, or sense of group worth. You can highlight group consensus and solidarity over individual gain.
- Ego** Appeal to the audience's sense of self-worth and accomplishment. Show them that their ideas and contribution are vital. You can ask for their suggestions and involve them in the decision-making process.

### Benefits should be audience-oriented

The benefits you choose to focus on will inevitably depend upon the audience. For example, when you write a job application there are probably a number of selling points related to your qualifications and experience that you could choose to sell ourselves to the prospective

employer. However, you need to consider the readership and highlight those benefits that are most relevant for the job you are applying for, and which the reader would find appealing.

### 3 Pathos: Persuading by appealing to audience emotions

When you are trying to persuade the audience, remember to think beyond just the arguments that you are making, as there is an emotional dimension in most situations. Emotions often have the power to enhance the motivation of people to respond to your arguments – and they can help you convince your audience in situations where logical arguments fail. Understanding which emotions to tap, and which to avoid, is one of the most important aspects of communication strategy.

The simplest way to determine the most effective emotional appeal is to analyze the audience's needs and concerns. What kind of appeals would help create a positive response to your message?

This does not mean you have to agree with their viewpoints or allow their feelings to serve as a basis for decision-making. What is important is to show empathy by acknowledging the audience's emotions, desires and fears.

#### **Example of pathos**

Imagine the situation where an HR Director is talking to a group of managers after a recent merger with a larger organization. The merger has caused a lot of concern amongst personnel, particularly as there have been rumours circulating of possible layoffs. In this kind of situation the HR Director would need to begin the presentation by building empathy, by recognising the audience's fears, sympathising with them and attempting to reassure them.



## 4 Persuading with message structure

Besides thinking about the three key elements of any communication (ethos, logos, and pathos), you can think of how you can structure your message to help you convince a (resistant) audience. Think about the following questions:

- Are audience members likely to support your proposals and the rationale behind them?
- Or is there likely to be a lot of resistance to what you are suggesting?
- If there is likely to be resistance, how will you overcome this?

The more strongly your audience objects, the sooner you should deal with their objections. They will not listen to your arguments until their own concerns have been acknowledged. Here are some techniques for overcoming audience objections and motivating through the choice of message structure.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1 Establish common ground before disagreeing

You can establish substantive common ground by showing that you understand the audience's concerns and by recognising how important the issue is to them. Once you have created empathy, you can go on to point out what they will gain from your proposal. Sometimes you might even start with points that you know they agree with before moving on to deal with more controversial issues.

### 4.2 Acknowledge both sides of the argument

A negatively biased audience is likely to respond more favourably to a two-sided argument, one which also acknowledges opposing views. This means recognising the reasons for the opposing attitude and then presenting arguments which tactfully refute that viewpoint. At the same time, you need to emphasise points which clearly argue in favour of your view. This will give the impression that you are being fair-minded and taking a balanced view.

### 4.3 Start with smaller requests

This 'foot-in-the-door' technique means you break down your request into smaller chunks and then try to get your audience to accept a limited request. Later on you can try to get them to accept more, and perhaps eventually, the whole request. For instance, if you are proposing a whole new system your audience is not likely to favor you could try to get them to accept a small pilot program first.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Munter and Hamilton (2014)

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#### 4.4 Point out the dangers of inaction

Point out at the beginning of the presentation the dangers of not taking a certain course of action. For instance, you could draw attention to the fact that if the organization does not do something soon, competitors will be one step ahead.

#### 4.5 Get them to agree there is a problem and then solve it

Sometimes audiences are not fully informed about what the situation is. This can mean they have a negative attitude to the ideas you want them to accept. In these situations, it might be best to begin by clarifying the situation and getting them to admit that a problem exists. Once you have gained their sympathy, and they agree that there is a need, then you can go on to satisfy that need by presenting your solution. Problem-solution formulae, such as the Four Ps (see below), are useful in these kinds of situations.

#### 4.6 Use a persuasive pattern if it suits your presentation

The 4 Ps mentioned above is an example of a persuasive presentation pattern. Besides the 4Ps, you could consider using the Motivated sequence or AIDA. Which one you choose for your presentation will depend on the presentation context. However, they all share the same idea: getting the audience to see that there is a problem and then providing a solution to it.

## Persuasive pattern 1: Four Ps

<b>Position</b>	Show the audience you know their position
<b>Problem</b>	Show the audience you understand their problem
<b>Possibilities</b>	Outline the possible options
<b>Proposal</b>	Make your suggestion

Making your case: Video Arts (Video)

### **Position**

Show the audience that you are fully aware of the present situation.

### **Problem**

Clarify the problem or concern from the audience's perspective. This is an important step. If you fail to define the need correctly then the rest of your argument will fail.

### **Possibilities**

Suggest two or three alternative solutions. Analyze each in turn, weighing up the pros and cons. This shows that you are being fair-minded and taking a balanced view. You can then eliminate what you consider to be the weaker option(s), leaving the alternative you favor. Of course, in some situations you may decide to omit the 'possibilities' step and proceed directly to the proposal. This will depend on the situation: who you are speaking to and what their expectations are.

### **Proposal**

Suggest which option(s) you would recommend pointing out again the inherent benefits of choosing this particular alternative. In some situations, you might omit this step because you want the audience to make the final decision based on the alternatives you have provided. In fact, in some parts of the world it would be inappropriate and cause loss of face to firmly state the proposal to a group of superiors. So, the presenter would simply provide a few sound options and leave it up to the audience to make the final decision.

## Persuasive pattern 2: Motivated sequence

<b>Step 1</b>	Get attention – arouse interest, focus on message
<b>Step 2</b>	Show the need – identify the problem
<b>Step 3</b>	Satisfy the need – present a solution
<b>Step 4</b>	Vizualize the results – point out the benefits
<b>Step 5</b>	Request action – obtain commitment

German, Gronbeck, Ehninger & Monroe (2010)

### **Step 1: Get attention**

Begin by arousing the audience's interest in the topic and focusing their attention on the main message. You could use such attention grabbing devices such as a shocking example, dramatic statistic, or powerful quotation.

### **Step 2: Show the need, identify the problem**

Explain the current situation and clarify the problem. You should attempt to show the extent and seriousness of the need and relate it to our audience as much as possible. You could use facts, figures, statistics, examples, etc. to convince your audience that there is a need for action to be taken.

### **Step 3: Satisfy the need, present a solution**

Outline the changes you are suggesting and give details of your solution. Attempt to address any likely objections the audience might have to your proposal.

### **Step 4: Visualize the results, point out benefits**

Describe the benefits that the audience will receive if the request or proposal is adopted and/or point out the consequences of failing to act upon your proposal.

### **Step 5: Request action, gain commitment**

Tell the audience what they should do and attempt to gain their commitment by, for example, restating the advantages of what you are proposing.

## Persuasive pattern 3: A I D A

<b>Attention</b>	Convince them of the importance of the message
<b>Interest</b>	Explain how it relates to them, give details
<b>Desire</b>	Support your claims, provide evidence
<b>Proposal</b>	Suggest the action you want them to take

### Attention

In the attention phase you have to convince the audience that you have something useful to say. Make it clear to them what they will gain from your message.

1. Show that you understand their concerns.
2. Point out the main benefit(s).
3. Try to get the audience on your side: say you need their help, describe the problem that you hope to solve, or you would like their help with.

### Interest and Desire

In the interest step you make it clear how the message relates to them: what benefits will they gain? The desire phase provides evidence to support the claims made in the second phase and prepares the audience for your request for action in the final phase.

1. State clearly why you are addressing them.
2. Mention the main benefit they will get.
3. Clearly outline what you are requesting or proposing: give all necessary details.
4. Present all the necessary evidence to support your case.
5. Anticipate and present counter-arguments to possible objections.

### Action

The action phase points out what you would like them to do: what action do you want them to take?

1. Request action.
2. Make it clear and easy to implement.
3. Emphasize the positive outcome of such action.

In conclusion, the persuasive techniques discussed in this input help you to argue your case and create convincing audience-focused messages.

## 5 References

German, K. M., Gronbeck, B. E., Ehninger, D., & Monroe, A. H. (2016). *Principles of public speaking*. Routledge.

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