

## Aristotle's three modes of persuasion

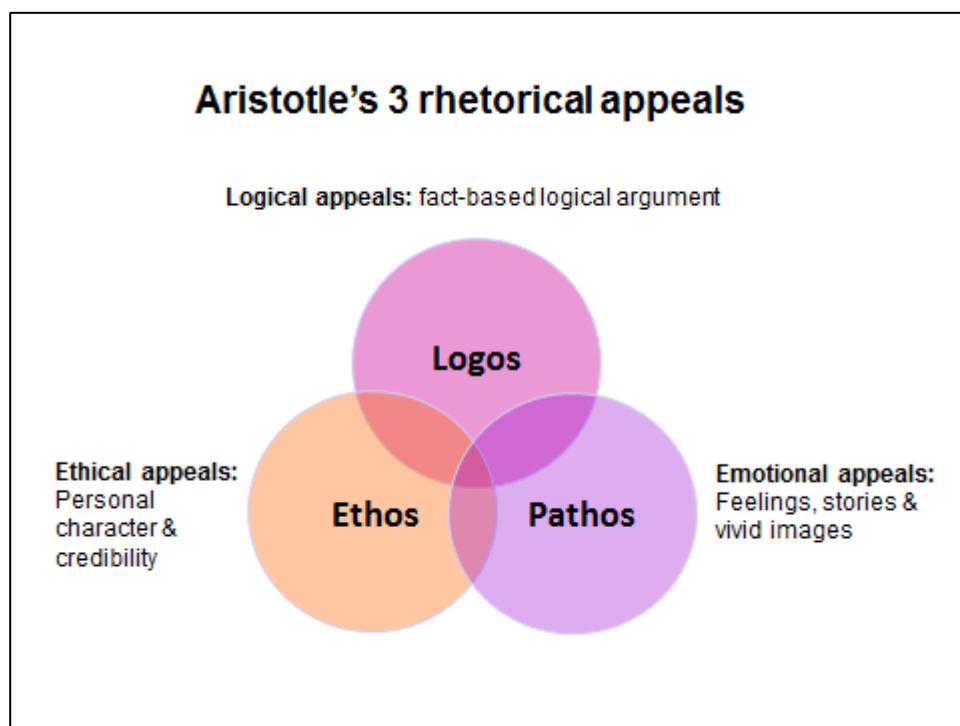
Mike Baker, Aalto University School of Business

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, suggested that any spoken or written communication intended to persuade contains three key rhetorical elements: **logos**, the logic and reasoning in the message; **ethos**, the character, credibility and trustworthiness of the communicator; and **pathos**, the emotional dimension.

The extent to which we draw on each appeal will depend upon the situation. 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.

On the other hand, a project proposal presentation to top management meant to persuade may well require a combination of logos, ethos and pathos.

To achieve our desired communication outcome we need to get the right mix of ethos, logos and pathos.



**LOGOS (logical appeal): Persuading through reasoning based on evidence**

Most communications require that we are logical and ‘rational’. Logos refers to the overall logic and coherence of the message. Appeals to logos are necessary where facts or processes are of utmost importance. Process descriptions, technical manuals, and business reports in general are heavy on logos.

Messages intended to persuade will require clear claims substantiated by compelling evidence: facts, statistics, examples, expert opinion, analogies, anecdotes etc.

**ETHOS (ethical appeal): Persuading through communicator credibility**

How we are viewed has a very powerful influence on whether or not we successfully persuade the receiver of the message. If the audience is not convinced by us a person, they are unlikely to be swayed by our arguments. Ethos is the credibility or trustworthiness that we establish in our communication. It is the degree to which we are perceived to be ethical, believable, trustworthy, competent, responsible, and sincere. And while the communicator’s ethos is important for most communications, it is especially significant for relational messages designed to establish goodwill and build relationships.

Our credibility is evident in three main ways:

1. **The quality of the message.** We need to ensure that our message is ‘worthy of belief’ (Aristotle): recognizes the audience’s needs and motivations; contains all the necessary facts; is meaningful, clear, logical; avoids careless mistakes; is honest and ethical.
2. **The audience’s perception of us as a communicator.** We need to make our ‘own character look right’ (Aristotle): project confidence; dress appropriately; know the subject; be well prepared; build rapport with the audience.
3. **Our reputation as a communicator independent from the message.** This can be shown by referring to appropriate sources of credibility such as rank, goodwill, expertise, image, or common ground (see page 3).

**Pathos (emotional appeal): persuading by appealing to audience emotions**

Pathos is an appeal to an audience's beliefs, feelings and emotions. An appeal to pathos causes an audience not just to respond emotionally, but to identify with the communicator's point of view.

There is an emotional dimension in most situations: some communications may be highly charged, some more neutral. Where logical arguments fail, emotions often have the power to motivate people to respond. 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 analyse the audience’s needs and concerns. What kind of appeals would help create a positive response to our message?

## Credibility enhancing techniques

Factor	Based on	Technique
<b>Rank</b>	Hierarchy	Emphasise your title, rank, position or associate yourself with someone who the audience respects or admires.
<b>Goodwill</b>	Personal relationship and trustworthiness	Refer to your established relationship with the audience or your personal record of providing benefits to the group.
<b>Expertise</b>	Knowledge, competence	Refer to your knowledge, competence, qualifications, track record or the acknowledged reputation of your organisation. Associate yourself with authoritative sources.
<b>Image</b>	Attractiveness, audience's desire to be like you	Build your image by stressing attributes the audience find attractive and by identifying yourself with audience benefits.
<b>Common ground</b>	Shared ideas, problems or needs.	Acknowledge and highlight values and beliefs which you share with the group. Focus on what you have in common.

Based on Kotter (1985) *Power and Influence* and Munter (2012) *Guide to Managerial Communication*