

RHETORICAL ARGUMENTS SURVIVE THE TEST OF TIME

The Declaration of Independence is not only an historical document; its assertions serve as a benchmark for the status of freedom in the United States and in countries around the world. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stood in front of a crowd of thousands at the Lincoln memorial in 1963 to present his “I Have a Dream” speech, reprinted in Chapter 4, which refers specifically to the Declaration of Independence. He said,

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.”

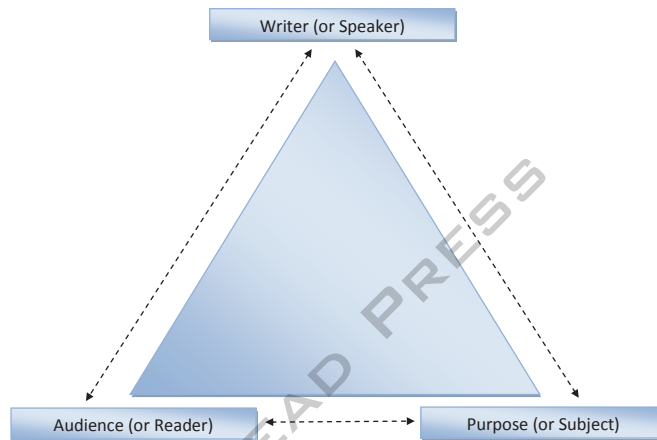
According to Dr. King, America had not lived up to the promise made in the Declaration of Independence that all men were created equal and entitled to the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” But King was not content with blame and accusations; he had a dream that America would some day make good on that “bad check” and that Negro people would be equal to whites.

Then, in November 2008, President-Elect Barack Obama stood in front of another crowd of thousands as he gave the “Victory Speech,” which you have just read in Chapter 2, and reminded America that the “preacher from Atlanta” [King] had said, “We will overcome [prejudice].” Just by his physical presence as an African-American president-elect, Obama evoked the heritage both of King’s speech and of the Declaration of Independence. Obama said, “If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.”

The Declaration of Independence, as author Stephen E. Lucas shows in the following document, brilliantly served its purpose of declaring the independence of the 13 American colonies. Moreover, as the examples from

the speeches by President-Elect Obama and Dr. King attest, the Declaration has stood the test of time and is still relevant in asserting the occasion and the necessity for the nation's freedom and equality.

THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE



The act of speaking or writing encompasses three elements: the writer (or **speaker**), the purpose (or **subject**), and the **audience**. In the case of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote the basic draft, though the document was signed by all the members of the Continental Congress. The purpose of the document was to declare independence and, as Stephen E. Lucas points out, to show such a declaration was “necessary” or inevitable, given the offenses of the British government. Otherwise, the Americans were merely rebels in a civil war. The document had several immediate audiences—the colonists themselves who may or may not have supported such a declaration, the British government, and foreign powers such as France whom the Continental Congress hoped to entice into entering the war. Without foreign support, the war was likely to fail. Over time, however, the Declaration has acquired other audiences, such as generations of Americans and people around the world who hold the United States accountable for the promises it made when it declared that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Like the occasion for the writing of the Declaration of Independence, every speaking or writing situation has the same three elements, though

some situations may be more urgent or persuasive than others. A good way to visualize the three interacting rhetorical elements is as a triangle.

The *writer's* or *speaker's* charge is to project an ethos or image of credibility and reliability that is persuasive to the audience. An effective writer is always aware of the *audience's* characteristics, including demographics, level of knowledge about the subject, prejudices, values, and emotions. The writer may inform the reader of information or express thoughts about a topic, but all rhetorical purposes are, in some way, persuasive. For example, Stephen E. Lucas points out that the introduction of the Declaration of Independence identifies the purpose of the Declaration as simply to “declare”—to announce publicly in explicit terms—the “causes” impelling America to leave the British empire. This gives the Declaration, at the outset, an aura of philosophical (in the eighteenth-century sense of the term) objectivity that it will seek to maintain throughout. Rather than presenting one side in a public controversy on which good and decent people could differ, the Declaration purports to do no more than a natural philosopher would do in reporting the causes of any physical event. The issue, it implies, is not one of interpretation but of observation.

So, the Continental Congress may not have voiced their intent to argue independence but to declare it, so that they would not be inviting argument in return. There, indeed, may have been no need to persuade the British of their intent, as fighting had already begun; but no matter what they stated, the signers of the Declaration desperately needed to persuade both American colonists and the French (potential allies) of the seriousness and validity of American independence. By signing their names to the document, members of the Continental Congress thus declared themselves traitors to the British. There was no turning back, for them, or for anyone who supported the cause of American independence.

ARISTOTLE'S PERSUASIVE APPEALS

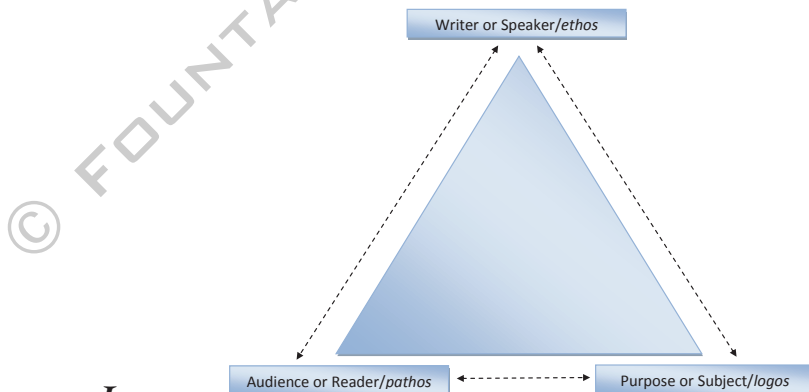
Some theorists associate the rhetorical triangle directly with Aristotle's **appeals** (or proofs): *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* refers to the writer's (or speaker's) credibility, *pathos* to emotion used to sway the audience; and,

finally, purpose (or subject) to *logos*, for an effective argument will include evidence and other supporting details to back up the author’s claims.

Aristotle wrote:

Of those proofs that are furnished through the speech there are three kinds. Some reside in the character [*ethos*] of the speaker, some in a certain disposition [*pathos*] of the audience and some in the speech itself, through its demonstrating or seeming to demonstrate [*logos*].

Contemporary theorist Wayne C. Booth said something similar: The common ingredient that I find in all writing that I admire—excluding for now novels, plays, and poems—is something that I shall reluctantly call the rhetorical stance, a stance which depends upon discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort; the available arguments about the subject itself [*logos*], the interests and peculiarities of the audience [*pathos*], and the voice, the implied character of the speaker [*ethos*].



ARGUMENTS FROM *LOGOS*

Logos or reason was Aristotle’s favorite of the three persuasive appeals, and he bemoaned the fact that humans could not be persuaded through reason alone, indeed that they sometimes chose emotion over reason. Aristotle also used the term *logos* to mean rational discourse. To appeal to *logos* means to organize an argument with a clear claim or thesis, supported by logical

reasons that are presented in a well-organized manner that is internally consistent. It can also mean the use of facts and statistics as evidence. However, logos without elements of pathos and ethos can be dry, hard to understand, and boring.

DEDUCTIVE REASONING

Aristotle was the first person in Western culture to write systematically about logic, and he is credited with developing and promoting syllogistic or **deductive reasoning** in which statements are combined to draw a **conclusion**. He wrote that “a statement is persuasive and credible either because it is directly self-evident or because it appears to be proved from other statements that are so.” This logical structure is called a **syllogism**, in which premises lead to a conclusion. The following is perhaps the most famous syllogism:

Major premise:	All humans are mortal.
Minor premise:	Socrates is human.
Conclusion:	Socrates is mortal.

The **major premise** is a general statement accepted by everyone which makes an observation about all people. The second statement of the syllogism is the **minor premise** which makes a statement about a particular case within the class of all people. Comparison of the two premises, the general class of “all humans” and the particular case of “Socrates” within the class of “all humans” leads to the conclusion that Socrates also fits in the class “mortal,” and thus his death is unavoidable. Thus, the logic moves from the general to the particular.

Similarly, if you try the pumpkin bread at one Starbucks and like it, you infer that you will like the pumpkin bread at another Starbucks. The argument would look like this:

Major premise:	Food products at Starbucks are standardized from one Starbucks to another.
Minor premise:	You like the pumpkin bread at one Starbucks.
Conclusion:	You will like the pumpkin bread at another Starbucks.

However, if your major premise is wrong, and the owner of one Starbucks substitutes an inferior stock of pumpkin bread, then your conclusion is wrong. Deductive reasoning is dependent upon the validity of each premise; otherwise the syllogism does not hold true. If the major premise that food products are standardized at all Starbucks' franchises does not hold true, then the argument is not valid. A good deductive argument is known as a valid argument and is such that if all its premises are true, then its conclusion must be true. Indeed, for a deductive argument to be valid, it must be absolutely impossible for both its premises to be true and its conclusion to be false.

INDUCTIVE REASONING

Aristotle identified another way to move logically between premises, which he called "the progress from particulars to universals." Later logicians labeled this type of logic as **inductive reasoning**. Inductive arguments are based on probability. Even if an inductive argument's premises are true, that doesn't establish with 100% certainty that their conclusions are true. Even the best inductive argument falls short of deductive validity.

These are examples of inductive reasoning:

Particular statement: Milk does not spoil as quickly if kept cold.

General statement: All perishable foods do not spoil as quickly if kept cold.

Particular statement: Microwaves cook popcorn more quickly than does conventional heat.

General statement: All foods cook more quickly in a microwave.

For the first example, inductive reasoning works well because cold tends to prolong the useable life of most perishable foods. The second example is more problematic. While it is true that popcorn cooks more quickly in a microwave oven, the peculiarities of microwave interaction with food molecules does not produce a uniform effect on all food stuffs. Rice, for example, does not cook much, if any, faster, than cooking on a stovetop. Also, whole eggs may explode if cooked in their shells.

A good inductive argument is known as a strong (or “cogent”) inductive argument. It is such that if the premises are true, the conclusion is likely to be true.

LOGICAL FALLACIES

Generally speaking, **logical fallacy** is an error in reasoning, as opposed to a factual error, which is simply being wrong about the facts. A deductive fallacy (sometimes called a formal fallacy) is a deductive argument that has premises that are all true, but they lead to a false conclusion, making it an invalid argument. An inductive fallacy (sometimes called an informal fallacy) appears to be an inductive argument, but the premises do not provide enough support for the conclusion to be probable. Some logical fallacies are more common than others, and, thus, have been labeled and defined. Following are a few of the most well known types:

Ad hominem (to the man) are arguments that attempt to discredit a point of view through personal attacks upon the person who has that point of view. These arguments are not relevant to the actual issue because the character of the person that holds a view says nothing about the truth of that viewpoint.

Example: Noam Chomsky is a liberal activist who opposes American intervention in other countries. Noam Chomsky’s theory of transformational grammar, which suggests that humans have an innate ability to learn language, is ridiculous.

Begging the Question arguments simply assume that a point of view is true because the truth of the premise is assumed. Simply assuming a premise is true does not amount to evidence that it is true.

Example: A woman’s place is in the home; therefore, women should not work.

Confusing Cause and Effect is a common problem with scientific studies in which the fact that two events are correlated implies that one causes the other.

Example: Obese people drink a lot of diet soda; therefore, diet soda causes obesity.

Post Hoc (from the Latin phrase “Post hoc, ergo propter hoc,” or after this, therefore because of this) is a fallacy that concludes that one event caused another just because one occurred before the other.

Example: The Great Depression caused World War II.

Straw Man is a fallacy in which a position of an opponent is exaggerated or weakened, so that it is easier for the opponent to argue against it.

Example: Pro-choice advocates believe in murdering unborn children.

A **Slippery Slope** argument asserts that one event will inevitably lead to another event.

ARGUMENTS FROM *PATHOS*

Pathos makes use of emotion to persuade an audience. Aristotle wrote: “Proofs from the disposition of the audience are produced whenever they are induced by the speech into an emotional state. We do not give judgment in the same way when aggrieved and when pleased, in sympathy and in revulsion.”

Effective rhetors know their audiences, particularly what emotions they hold that are relevant to the issue under consideration. What motivates them? What are their fears, their hopes, their desires, and their doubts? If the audience has the same emotions as you do, fine. However, if they do not already hold those emotions, you need, through the stories you tell, the statistics you cite, and the reasoning you offer, to bring them to share the hurt, the anger, or the joy that will persuade them to share your viewpoint.

For example, when Martin Luther King, Jr., in his “I Have a Dream” speech (reprinted in Chapter 4) referred to the “hallowed spot” of the Lincoln Memorial, he was appealing to his audience’s feelings of patriotism and reverence for the accomplishments of President Lincoln. Subtly, he was also garnering this emotion toward Lincoln in contemporary support of civil rights. Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation that declared all slaves to be free, yet, according to King, America had not lived up to Lincoln’s promise.

ARGUMENTS FROM *ETHOS*

No exact translation exists in English for the word *ethos*, but it can be loosely translated as the credibility of the speaker. This credibility generates good will which colors all the arguments, examples, and quotes the rhetor utilizes in his text. Rhetors can enhance their credibility by evidence of intelligence, virtue, and goodwill and diminish it by seeming petty, dishonest, and mean spirited. In addition, a speaker or writer can enhance his or her own credibility by references to quotes or the actions of authorities or leaders.

Aristotle wrote: Proofs from character [*ethos*] are produced, whenever the speech is given in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence – we more readily and sooner believe reasonable men on all matters in general and absolutely on questions where precision is impossible and two views can be maintained.

For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., pointed out in his “I Have a Dream” speech, that, according to the framers of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” apply equally to black men and white men. He was, in effect, borrowing the *ethos* of Thomas Jefferson and the framers of the Constitution in support of the unalienable rights of blacks.

COMBINING *ETHOS*, *PATHOS*, AND *LOGOS*

Did you notice that the triangle earlier in this chapter representing Aristotle’s three appeals is equilateral, meaning that all sides are equal in length. This is to illustrate that the *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* elements are equally important and merit equal attention in the writing process. No text is purely based on one of the three appeals, though more of the argument in a particular text may be based on one appeal rather than another. In each writing situation, however, an effective rhetor will think about how each plays into the structure of the argument.

In today’s world, for example, a public speaker’s effectiveness is affected by the ability to use a teleprompter, or, if one is not available, to memorize a speech well enough so he or she has to refer to notes infrequently. If a

speaker's eyes flit from left to right across the text of a teleprompter, it shows on television, and reduces the credibility, or ethos of the speaker, no matter how well the other appeals are executed in the speech. The equivalent of presentation for a written text would be to produce a document that is essentially free from surface grammatical errors, is spell-checked, and is printed on good paper stock with the correct margins and type size. If the document does not look professional, it will lose credibility or ethos no matter what it says.

To give another example, E. Benjamin Skinner's essay "People for Sale" relies on the highly emotional image of a child being sold into slavery for its major appeal. However, if you read back through the essay, you will see that it has a clear thesis, which could be stated as the following: slavery exists in the present time, even in the United States, and it is not even that difficult to buy a slave. The essay is well organized and offers a variety of evidence, including statistics and first-person observation. Logos may not stand out as the primary appeal in Skinner's essay, but it is nevertheless strong in its appeal to *logos*.

If you want to develop your writing skills, it is essential that you pay attention to each of Aristotle's appeals—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.



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