

# Persuasive power - ethos, pathos and logos

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2300 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote down the secret to being a persuasive speaker. This secret forms the basis of nearly every public speaking book written since...

In fact, many teachers of communication, speech and rhetoric consider Aristotle's writing; "The most important single work on persuasion ever written."

The theory is that a speaker's ability to persuade depends on how well they appeal to their audience on three different fronts - ethos, pathos and logos.

Together, they are the three persuasive appeals. In other words, the three essential qualities your speech or presentation must have before your audience will accept your message.

Many people have heard of these rhetorical concepts, even if they don't know what they mean.

## Ethos - the credibility or character of the speaker

We tend to believe people who we respect.

Before you can convince an audience to accept anything you say, they have to accept you as credible. If your audience doesn't trust you, it doesn't matter how emotionally moving your argument is, or how clear and brilliant your logic.

Ethos is often the first thing we notice. Even before a speaker takes to the stage to speak, the audience has already begun to decide if they are going to listen.

Ethos has two parts:

*Extrinsic ethos - the authority, education and experience of the speaker or author.*

*Intrinsic ethos - the way the speaker goes about the act of persuading.*

Trustworthiness is established through your audience's perceptions. Which means it's in the mind of the receiver, not the speaker - the audience determines if you are credible.

### Establishing credibility:

- Respect
- Authority
- Trustworthiness
- Expertise
- Physical and emotional presentation
- History

## Pathos - emotional connection with the audience

Establishing an emotional connection with your audience is a way of getting them involved in your presentation, and involvement can create more opportunities for persuasion and action.



We tend to believe people who we respect. If we do not respect them, we are probably less likely to believe them. And that applies whoever you are - even Michelle Obama. (Image: Public domain)

Pathos ensures people are involved in your talk, it appeals to the human love of storytelling. We're all emotional beings - speakers, writers and particularly advertisers know this well. They use language, examples, diction and images to create an emotional reaction in the audience. By introducing pathos they evoke pity, sympathy, sorrow, joy, love, desire, anger and laughter.

But it's not enough to have your audience emotionally respond to your message, they need to identify with it as well. That's when persuasion starts taking place.

The secret is not to tell the reader what to feel, but to arrange it in such a way as to conjure emotion.

## **Emotional connection:**

- Vivid storytelling
- Descriptive use of language
- Engaging delivery of information
- Emotional emphasis in themes and words
- Humour

## **Logos - logical argument**

Logos is appeal based on logic or reason. Clear, concise and logical argument and rational explanation, give substance to the speaker's message.

Persuasion, to a large extent, involves convincing people to accept our assumptions as probably true and to take appropriate action. If you argue without evidence, people will quite rightly start to question you.

Evidence can include statistics, pictures and recounted experiences (especially first hand).

Pathos can be used when giving evidence, as you can give it emotional spin. Ethos is also important to establish credibility.

When there are no facts available, then logic can be supported with other types of compelling reasons.

## **Logical argument:**

- Facts
- Statistics
- Studies
- Examples
- History
- Evidence

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