Logos, Ethos, Pathos, Kairos

What are logos, ethos, pathos, and kairos?

Often, instructors give assignments asking students to analyze the "argument" that a text makes, or to take a side on a "hot topic" issue. Most often, he or she wants you to think about the "rhetorical strategies" that the author of the text uses to address his or her audience and to think about the "rhetorical situation" that involves the writer, the audience, and the text. Instructors may ask you to consider the concepts of "logos," "ethos," "pathos," and "kairos" (all Ancient Greek rhetoric terms) to breakdown the rhetorical situation. This handout offers you a definition and explanation of each concept and concludes by giving you a few suggestions as to how you may conduct your analysis using these terms.

Logos (Greek for "word")

- Focuses attention on the *message*.
- Often called a "logical appeal," or an "appeal to reason."
- Points out internal consistency and clarity within its argument.
- Frequently uses data to support its claim.

Ethos (Greek for "character")

- Focuses attention on the writer's or speaker's trustworthiness.
- Takes one of two forms: "appeal to character" or "appeal to credibility."
- A writer may show "ethos" through her tone, such as taking care to show more than one side of an issue before arguing for her side. When you use a counterargument to show an opposing side to an issue before explaining why your thesis is still correct, you use *ethos*.
- Other times, the author may rely on his reputation for honesty or his experience in a particular field. Advertising that relies on doctors' statements or political records often use an appeal to *ethos*.

Logos, Ethos, Pathos, Kairos

Pathos (Greek for "suffering" or "experience")

- Focuses attention on the values and beliefs of the intended audience.
- Appeals to the audience's capacity for empathy, often by using an imaginable story to exemplify logical appeals.
- Whereas logos and ethos appeal to our mental capacities for logic, pathos appeals to our imaginations and feelings, helping the audience grasp an argument's significance in terms of how it would help or harm the tangible world around them.

Kairos (Greek for "right time," "season" or "opportunity")

- Refers to the "timeliness" of an argument.
- Often, for an ad or an argument to be successful, it needs appropriate tone and structure and come at the right time. For example, an ad featuring Avril Lavigne would be more effective for a teen magazine in 2002 than in 2012. A Sears ad featuring Kim Kardashian would be more appropriate in TeenVogue than it would be in AARP magazine.
- *Kairos* is also the reason you might send a different kind of complaint email to your boss than you would to your mom or to a close friend. You may want similar results from all three of these recipients, but depending on who will read it, you may adjust the timing, tone and level of formality within the email itself.

How can you use these four concepts in your writing?

Remember that effective arguments use each of these rhetorical strategies to some extent. Some news articles may focus on connecting with a reader's empathy rather than presenting a lot of statistics, but *logos* is still likely to be involved to some degree. Some ads may really focus on "What's Hot Now," which seems like a direct appeal to *kairos*, but also involves *ethos* by using a popular celebrity who serves as a "credible source" on new trends. Feel like you're ready to analyze? How about write an argumentative essay of your own? Check out our "thesis statements" worksheet for tips on creating a strong central argument!

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