

# RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

The **rhetorical triangle** is a strategy that employs **logos**, **pathos**, and **ethos** to create solid arguments and persuade readers.

NOTE: For more help with persuasive writing, consult Academic Coaching's resources on [knowing your audience](#), [scholarly tone](#), and [writing persuasively](#).

Referring to the rhetorical triangle can help you **evaluate sources** (books, journal articles, etc.) and **create strong arguments** in your own writing.

## THREE POINTS OF THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

1. **Logos (logical appeal)** – Authors employ logical connections between ideas and use facts and statistics to appeal to readers' sense of reason or logic (Writing Center, n.d.-a).
  - a. Identify: "How did the author use logic to develop his argument?"
  - b. Authors may use historical and literal analogies to make logical arguments.
  - c. To effectively incorporate logos, a writer must avoid logical fallacies.
    - i. Logical fallacies – holes in an argument; unclear or wrong assumptions or connections between ideas
      1. E.g., hasty generalizations, slippery slope arguments, and circular arguments/reasoning
2. **Pathos (emotional appeal)** – Authors incorporate meaningful language and intentional word choice to appeal to readers' emotions (Writing Center, n.d.-a).
  - a. Identify: "How did the author tap into your emotions?"
  - b. Authors may include stories and examples to elicit emotional responses.
  - c. In academic writing, use emotional appeal carefully and sparingly (Bullock & Weinberg, 2022).
    - i. While it is important in persuasive writing to appeal to readers' emotions, be sure to highlight logical reasons and evidence (logos) as these provide the foundation for academic writing.
3. **Ethos (writer's credibility and authority)** – Writers convey authority when they refer to credible sources, use appropriate language, and demonstrate an objective examination of the topic or issue (Writing Center, n.d.-a).
  - a. Identify: "How do you know you can trust this author?"
  - b. Writers often introduce their credentials and personal experiences with the issue.
  - c. Pay close attention to grammar, syntax, spelling, etc., because it exemplifies credibility.

## EXAMPLE OF THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE IN WRITING

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People not only have a sociological need to act morally but also a psychological basis. Most people are concerned to some extent about their reputation. According to PsyPost, “A lot of economic models of human behavior assume that people are only rational when they narrowly pursue their own self-interest, but history shows us that people are also tremendously concerned with being and appearing moral” (Dolan, Eric W). So, the fear of one’s reputation being tarnished is often a strong motivator to be moral. If someone has been immoral, most people go out of their way to make sure no one finds out or to correct the behavior in order to not be caught. This goes in line with conscience as well. People generally feel in a better psychological state if they feel that their conscience is clean. A dirty conscience can result in a lack of sleep, anxiety, internal stress, and even illness (Academic Help, 2019, para. 3).

### **Paragraph Breakdown:**

#### Logos

- First, the author appeals to the reader’s sense of logic in a transitional statement: morality is not only a sociological need—it is also based in human psychology.
- After presenting pathos and logos, the author analyzes the psychological motivators of morality. The author draws connections between morality, behavior, reputation, and conscience.

#### Pathos

- In this sentence, the author speaks to readers’ emotions by providing an example to which most people can relate: concern for personal reputation.

#### Ethos

- In this sentence, the author establishes authority by referring to a credible source and using it to defend the claim.

#### References

Academic Help. (2019, March 20). *Why it is better to be moral than immoral*.

<https://academichelp.net/samples/academics/essays/persuasive/better-moral-immoral.html>

Bullock, R., & Weinberg, F. (2016). *The Norton field guide to writing with handbook* (4th ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Writing Center. (n.d.-a). *Pathos, logos, and ethos*. St. Louis Community College.

<https://stlcc.edu/student-support/academic-success-and-tutoring/writing-center/writing-resources/pathos-logos-and-ethos.aspx>

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