

Ethos: The Ethical Appeal (Character)

Logos, ethos, and pathos are the three components of classical argument. While logos refers to appeals to argument (or techniques to invent such appeals), ethos refers to the appeals to the character of the person using those arguments (or techniques to invent such appeals) and pathos to appeals to the emotions of the audience (or techniques to invent such appeals). For the ancients, the keyword about character was virtue, though today we more often use personality, or even just character.

Aristotle believed ethos to be the most important of the three components. Ethos is more than just character, as it is also what we today call persona; hence, it is not merely a person's personality but also the projection of that personality into various rhetorical situations. In short, ethos is how we appear to ourselves and to others. Cultivating ethos, however, is difficult and time-consuming to cultivate. For the most part, one cultivates ethos through habit and instruction.

Invented ethos

However, even though ethos takes time to cultivate, ethos can be invented, as the word *persona* implies; in fact, in many situations, especially in writing, it can only be invented. Unlike situated ethos, in which the author and audience have some personal knowledge of one another, invented ethos is used whenever the author and audience have only limited personal knowledge of one another.

Perhaps the most important aspect of inventing ethos is understanding the rhetorical situation: what arguments are available, which of these arguments appeal to the audience, and how one's personal history (his or her character, expertise, reputation, credibility, experience, etc.) relate to the audience and these arguments. For example, if one is speaking on parental responsibility and has never been a parent, one must use entirely different arguments and situate them differently than if one has been a parent.

Another way to invent ethos is to establish one's good character by casting oneself in a good light, maximizing one's positives and minimizing one's negatives. (One might also minimize one's opponent's negatives and maximize one's opponent's positives.) Yet another way is to achieve good will by appealing to common ground with the audience, or more simply to their kindness or even their interests.

It goes without saying that being knowledgeable and well-informed on the issue is another important way to invent ethos. Finally, one's use of language is a way to invent ethos. Even though rhetoric is the art of the commonplace, some situations call for more specialized language; also one must understand when and how to use different types of style (in particular first-, second-, or third-person; word choice; and ornamentation)

Situated ethos

In any rhetorical situation, one must be aware of the social relations between oneself and the audience, including but certainly not limited to the personal relationships between the members of the audience (what is often called liking), their relative amount of power, and one's ability to negotiate these relationships with whatever power one has.