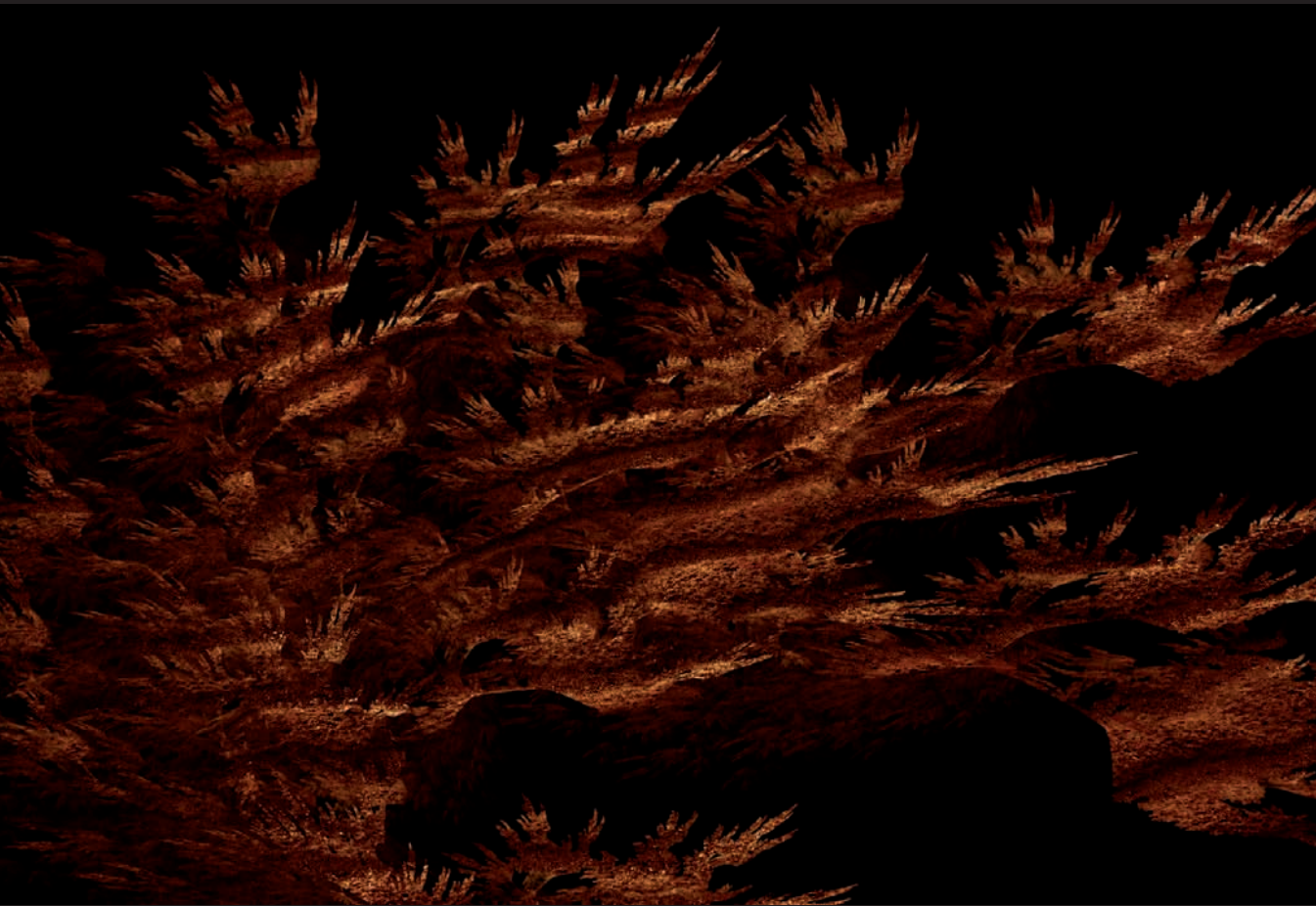


# REASON TO WRITE



GINA L. VALLIS

It includes an essay that tries to persuade a reader that a given question has a given answer, but it also includes a police officer waving a driver around an accident in order to dissuade the driver from blocking traffic.

It includes a political speech designed to persuade people to vote for a certain candidate, but it also includes an advertisement in a popular magazine that is designed to persuade people to buy a certain product.

It includes a scientific treatise published in a scientific journal that proposes experimentation in stem cell research, and it also includes a conversation at a dinner table between two friends about whether or not stem cell research is ethically sound.

Strange as it may seem, you don't need language to have rhetoric. It is not that every act of communication is persuasive, but rather that persuasive acts of communication can occur in a lot of different ways. One of the first steps to understanding rhetoric is being able to identify which messages are designed to persuade, and which serve another purpose. Let's take some examples:

#### Images

- An image of a child on a fundraising pamphlet can be designed to persuade people to donate money.
- A painting of a landscape may not be designed to persuade, but merely to give pleasure.

#### Gestures

- A gesture that involves someone pointing to a door may be designed to persuade a person to get out of the room.
- A rude gesture on the freeway, to another driver, may not be designed to persuade anyone, but merely to comment.

#### Road signs

- A road sign can be designed to persuade drivers to obey a traffic law, such as stopping at a stop sign.
- A sign on the road giving directions to a party may not be designed to persuade, but merely to give information.

## Clothing

- A man dressing in a suit to meet his future in-laws for the first time may be trying to persuade them that he will be a suitable spouse.
- A person dresses in jeans to do housework may merely be practical.

## 2 APPEALS

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We rarely persuade someone just by telling them to do something. We have to appeal to that person in some way. To take just a few examples, we may appeal to a person's sense of loyalty, or we may threaten that person, or we may show the rightness of our message to a person through sound reasoning. Some are fair, and some are not.

There is nothing inherently wrong with appeals in and of themselves. There is nothing wrong with attempting to persuade someone to act or believe a certain way. We do it all the time. We reason with our parents or friends, present our political views to our peers, dress to impress a potential love interest, talk about our professional experience at job interviews, etc.

Nevertheless, the discipline of rhetoric is very clear about the difference between an ethical and sound use of persuasive appeal, even if it is particularly skillful, and an unethical appeal that is designed to deceive another, or to hide our true intentions. In other words, rhetoric studies strategies of persuasive trickery in order to recognize when they are being used. In rhetoric, these are called *fallacies*: unethical ways of getting your way. Examples of fallacies would be to lie, to distract an audience from the real issue, or simply to use outright force to compel action or belief.

Rhetoric breaks down the ways we can persuade into three basic kinds of appeals: an appeal to logic (*logos*), an appeal to emotion (*pathos*), or an appeal that attempts to persuade an audience through the use of the speaker's personal credibility or authority (*ethos*). In most cases, all three appeals will be combined to create

persuasion; it is rare to see only one kind of appeal used in a single persuasive message.

While logic may seem like it would be the strongest of the appeals, it is more effective in certain contexts than in others. In advertising, for example, *logos* can be very dull. Imagine an advertisement for a cell phone that simply listed, in a series of lines, the uses for the device. In fact, advertising is best served by an *ethos* appeal, such as a testimonial endorsement of the product by a famous figure. Secondary in efficacy in advertising is a *pathos* appeal, which arouses desire for a product by evoking, or even simply staging, a pleasurable or fearful emotional situation.

In academic writing, in contrast, the most effective appeal is *logos*, because the rhetorical situation involves an audience that tends to expect reasoning to be the primary way in which persuasion will occur. However, *ethos* also comes into play, because one must sound reasonable and because certain speakers will already have credibility within their field, in the form of previous publication, and their writing will tend to be given more credence in the general readership on the basis of that authority. While *pathos* is not absent within academic writing, any overt usage will tend to diminish the *ethos* of the writer as an authority who can be trusted to be scrupulously objective.

Any appeal can be used in a way that is ethical, and any appeal can be used dishonestly, too. It depends on whether the intention is an honest effort to communicate, or if the intention is to deceive or make one's point through unfair means.

One can twist logic to suit one's own ends, or make it appear as if something is sensible, when it is not. One can divert the attention of the audience from the true issue at hand by creating an emotional response that is disconnected from the issue, or presents it in an unfair light that evokes strong emotion. One can use one's own power or authority to force another to believe or act a certain way. Whether used ethically or not, the three appeals are broken down in the following ways:

### **logos:** Appeal to Logic

*Logos* produces suasion by appealing to the reasoning of a given message. This is where logic comes into play when persuading another: If one can show that one's reasoning is sound, others may agree with what one has to say.

For example, if a political candidate was delivering a speech while running for public office, he or she might offer a message that demonstrates how, if he or she wins the election, he or she plans to reduce the budget deficit. He or she may persuade someone to vote for him or her, based upon the soundness of his or her plan.

**pathos:** Appeal to Emotion

*Pathos* produces suasion by appealing to the audience's emotions.

For example, if a candidate was delivering a speech while running for public office, he or she might:

- Speak passionately about the importance of civic duty.
- Talk about overcoming personal adversity.
- Bring a spouse/children onto the stage.

This appeal does not have to be unethical; it can be an expression of profoundly honest emotional intent. When Martin Luther King Jr. opened his famous speech with “I have a dream...” he was not referring to a sleep state. He used the line—and the repetition of that line—to evoke emotion in his audience.

**ethos:** Appeal to Personal Credibility/Authority

While at first glance one might think that *ethos* refers to appealing to the audience's sense of ethics, it is not. Appealing to an audience's sense of ethics is still an appeal to *pathos*. If a speaker were to evoke patriotism in order to talk about enlistment in the armed forces, the speaker is attempting to evoke a sense of duty in the audience, which is an emotional response.

*Ethos* appeals to the audience by establishing the *credibility of the speaker*. If one can establish that one has authority to speak on a given matter, one can persuade one's audience, in part, through that authority.

For example, if a candidate was delivering a speech while running for public office, he or she might talk about experiences in the Senate, or as a policymaker, that make him or her especially qualified for public office.

Ethos—credibility and authority—can be drawn from a lot of sources:

- Police officers, judges, teachers, and priests draw their credibility from *institutional authority* that is granted to them.
- Someone who has had a particular experience may gain credibility by virtue of that experience. For example, a person who has had a broken leg may be perceived as more qualified to speak on the topic of the pain of broken bones than someone who has not.
- One may gain credibility with an audience if the audience is gradually persuaded through one's communication that one is fair and reasonable, and that one is taking all sides of an issue into account.

### 3 FALLACIES AND OTHER FALLACIES

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“The realms of advertising and of public relations, and the nowadays closely related realm of politics, are replete with instances of bullshit so unmitigated that they can serve among the most indisputable and classic paradigms of the concept. And in these realms there are exquisitely sophisticated craftsmen who—with the help of advanced and demanding techniques of market research, of public opinion polling, of psychological testing, and so forth—dedicate themselves tirelessly to getting every word and image they produce exactly right.”

—Harry G. Frankfurt

Understanding persuasion—which is the function of an appeal within a communication—does not just make people effective thinkers and writers. If people are not taught about how persuasion functions within communication, and how such persuasion can be used in ways that are both honest and dishonest, people remain vulnerable to very powerful and carefully rendered appeals that ultimately may not be in their best interest. Public education may have forgotten rhetoric, but politicians and advertising representatives know it very well.

On the following page is a short list of common fallacies that one sees in usage all of the time. Look them over; you should be able to think of a time when such a fallacy was demonstrated for you.

<u>Fallacy/Common Name</u>	<u>Explanation</u>	<u>Example</u>
<u>Reducio ad absurdum</u> (Slippery Slope)	If "A" happens, a series of other things will happen, into the absurd	Gun control legislation will lead to the erosion of civil liberties and the creation of a police state.
<u>Dicto Simpliciter</u>	Conclusion based on Insufficient evidence	All men love baseball. My brother does
<u>Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc</u> (False Cause)	Asserts cause/effect where none exists	The sun rises as the rooster crows; therefore, the rooster causes the sun to rise
<u>False Dichotomy</u>	Presenting two options as if they were the only options	You're either on the plate or you're on the menu
<u>Argumentum ad Misericordiam</u> (Appeal to Pity)	Appeal to emotion instead of dealing with the issue at hand	If you fire me for drinking, my wife will leave me
<u>Fallacy of Presupposition</u> (Rigged Question)	Possible responses constrained by terms of question	Have you stopped beating your wife?
<u>Straw Man Argument</u>	Present weakest argument as if the strongest	Scientists say we are related to monkeys
<u>Argumentum ad Hominem</u>	Ignores issue and attacks person instead	You may be right, but look at your clothes
<u>Argumentum ad baculum</u> (Appeal to force)	Uses power to sidestep issue	I pay your rent, Mister
<u>Argumentum ad Ignorantiam</u> (Argument from ignorance)	Something is true if it has not been proved false	Can you prove global warming? Then it doesn't exist
<u>Tautology, Circular Reasoning</u> Begging the Question	Restating proposition as if it was a conclusion	Everyone should be free, because freedom is for everyone
<u>Non-Sequitur</u> (Does not follow)	Conclusion that does not follow from premises	If we can put a man on the moon, we should be able to cure the common cold
<u>Argumentum ad Antiquitatem</u>	Because something has been so, it is valid or true	Marriage is between a man and a woman
<u>False Analogy</u>	Comparison that makes it appear that things are alike when they are not	Why should factory workers complain about long hours? I pull overtime at the office
<u>Transfer Fallacy</u>	Using biased language Instead of dealing with issue	The death penalty is barbarism

## 4 GETTING OUR DARNED ICE CREAM CONE

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“What if there were no hypothetical questions?”

—Anon

To quickly learn about rhetorical appeals, let’s take a very simple example: a child wants a parent to buy an ice cream cone. The *speaker* (a child) may produce a rather simple *message* (“buy me ice cream”) through a *vehicle* (verbalization) with the *intention* (to persuade) of getting the *audience* (a parent) to buy the ice cream. However, the *appeals* that the child uses may vary in complexity and strategy.

- The child may appeal through logic (*logos*)
- The child may appeal through emotion (*pathos*)
- The child may appeal by invoking his or her authority (*ethos*).

The child may, in making his or her appeal, also employ an unfair persuasive tactic, or *fallacy*. There are fallacies in each kind of appeal. For example, a fallacy that is used while appealing through logos is called a *logical fallacy*.

Here are some examples of different appeals that the child might attempt. Each example will demonstrate the child using a certain appeal. That appeal may be fair and valid, or it may be unfair or invalid (a fallacy).

Before reading the answer, see if you can identify what appeal is being used, and whether or not the appeal is a fallacy, drawing from the list on the previous page. If you believe that the appeal is a fallacy (or *fallacious*), state which fallacy you believe is being used.

**“Give me ice cream because I ate a healthy lunch”**

Appeal being used:    Logos \_\_\_\_\_ Pathos \_\_\_\_\_ Ethos \_\_\_\_\_

Is this a fallacy?    No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Fallacy \_\_\_\_\_

ANSWER

In this case, the child is using an appeal to logic, or *logos*. There is no fallacy involved.



In a nutshell, the child is saying: “I know that your reason for denying me the ice cream is probably not based on the fact that you do not have the money, or that you hate that particular ice cream vendor. Rather, I have inferred, from past experience, that you might deny it to me because ice cream is not nutritious, and you are concerned about my health. Yet, because I already consumed a nutritious lunch, this dramatically weakens your reason for denying me the ice cream cone, and strengthens my logic for receiving it.” Not bad for a kid, huh?

**“Give me ice cream, or I’ll whine”**

Appeal being used:    Logos    \_\_\_\_\_    Pathos    \_\_\_\_\_    Ethos    \_\_\_\_\_

Is this a fallacy?        No        \_\_\_\_\_    Yes        \_\_\_\_\_

Fallacy \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWER**

Sometimes a message is not outright stated. It is *implied*. If the question at hand is the purchase of a motorcycle, and occurs between a parent and a child of age to drive, and the parent says: “I still pay your rent, Mister,” the threat is implied (“If you buy a motorcycle, I will no longer support you”), but still has an effect.

Thus, in this example, the child may not directly *say* he or she is going to whine until he or she gets the ice cream cone, but the parent “gets it” that this is the situation at hand, and the child “gets it” that this is the appeal he or she is offering.

In this case, the child is using *pathos*, and also employing what is called a *pathetic fallacy*: an appeal that uses unfair means, through an appeal to emotion, in order to compel action or belief.

In this case, the fallacy is called *argumentum ad baculum*. It translates, literally, into “argument with a club.” Its common name is: “Appeal to Force.”

While *argumentum ad baculum* is an appeal that can be used in different ways by different people (“Do you like your job?”/“Give me your wallet, or I’ll shoot you”), its function is to compel a person to action or belief through direct threat (to withdraw livelihood, to harm the body, or, in the case of the ice cream, a threat to parental sanity) instead of dealing with the issue on its own merits.

**“Give me ice cream because it will make my time with you special”**

Appeal being used: Logos \_\_\_\_\_ Pathos \_\_\_\_\_ Ethos \_\_\_\_\_

Is this a fallacy? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Fallacy \_\_\_\_\_

ANSWER

In this case, the child is again using *pathos*: appeal to emotion. The child is basically saying: “I know that you value my feelings toward you, and I am offering a way for you to ensure that I will view you in a favorable light. I’ll get the ice cream, you’ll get to know that I like you for it, and that will make both of us feel good.”

It’s tempting to think of this one as a fallacy, because the child is being so outright manipulative in making his or her affection dependent upon receiving ice cream. However, this does not make this argument a fallacy. Poor persuasion is not the same as deceptive persuasion. In addition, most of us expect children to employ such obvious tactics, considering:

- How little power a child has within this particular relationship
- That the child is relatively new to the game of persuasion, and may not yet recognize the transparency of the appeal to its audience.

In other words, if you think about it, such an appeal would be less likely to work between adults.

**“Give me ice cream, because I always get ice cream when we come here.”**

Appeal being used: Logos \_\_\_\_\_ Pathos \_\_\_\_\_ Ethos \_\_\_\_\_

Is this a fallacy? No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Fallacy \_\_\_\_\_

ANSWER:

In this case, the child is employing a *logos* argument, and using it in a way that is also a fallacy.

This is a logical fallacy called *Argumentum ad Antiquatem*. Its common name is “Appeal to Tradition.” Basically, this fallacy argues that because something

has been so, in the past, it is true and valid, now. The child is saying: “Whenever we pass this ice cream stand, I should receive an ice cream cone, because this has been the case, in the past.”

Another example of the fallacy “appeal to tradition” would be one routinely used in public discourse to argue against gay marriage. The statement that “Marriage is between a man and a woman” says nothing except that “this has been so.”

If we were to go back to a time when women couldn’t vote in the United States, it would be similar to a person justifying refusal to allow women to vote based on the statement: “Voters are men.” These are *fallacies* regardless of the topic that is under debate: one is arguing that “the way it has been” is fair and true for its own sake.

**“Give me ice cream because I want it.”**

Appeal being used:    Logos    \_\_\_\_\_    Pathos    \_\_\_\_\_    Ethos    \_\_\_\_\_

Is this a fallacy?        No        \_\_\_\_\_    Yes        \_\_\_\_\_

Fallacy \_\_\_\_\_

ANSWER:

This is an appeal to personal credibility, or *ethos*. It is not a fallacy. It is an attempt to draw upon the personal authority of the speaker. Basically, the child is saying: “The fact that I want something, coupled with the fact that I perceive myself to be basically the center of the known universe, should be reason enough for you to give me ice cream.”

In most cases, children quickly learn to avoid this particular appeal, because it usually doesn’t work very well. Children don’t have much personal authority, because children don’t usually have that much power in the parent/child relationship. It’s a lot different if a police officer orders someone to “step back”—now that’s an *ethos* appeal.

A typical conversation between a parent and a child, in the example used, might involve an exchange based solely upon *ethos*, with no *logos* or *pathos* being used on either side. Because *ethos* has to do with power, the conclusion is rather predictable:

Child:    “Give me an ice cream.”

Parent:    “No.”

Child: “I want it.”

(Appeal to *ethos*: child’s personal authority)

Parent: “No.”

Child: “Why?”

Parent: “Because I said so.”

(Appeal to *ethos*: parent’s personal authority).

In this conversation, the child attempts suasion by appealing to his or her personal authority, and the parent counters with superior authority. In other words, the parent quite simply pulls rank—no other explanation required.

Depending on the parent, any of the appeals that a child may attempt may have varying degrees of success in persuading the parent to act (to buy the ice cream cone for the child). In any case, it does demonstrate that humans start rhetoric early.

## 5 REVIEW

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### CHAPTER REVIEW

The information to take from this chapter is that the history and the meaning of the term *rhetoric* are often misunderstood. Rhetoric is foundational to the development of logic in Western discourse, in all areas of knowledge.

Rhetoric particularly concerns itself with *communication*, in whatever form that communication is offered. It defines communication by a series of five elements that must be present in order for communication to occur: *speaker*, *audience*, *vehicle*, *message*, and *intention*.

In its study of *argumentation*, rhetoric elucidates specific issues regarding the use of communication and *suasion*, whether persuasion or dissuasion, partly through an analysis of *appeals*. Appeals are broken down into three areas: an appeal to logic (*logos*), an appeal to emotion (*pathos*), and an appeal to the authority or credibility of the speaker (*ethos*). Rhetoric also identifies areas of the misuse of any of these appeals, either through error or deliberate deception on the part of the speaker. The misuse of an appeal is called a *fallacy*.