The Three Appeals of Argument

Aristotle postulated three argumentative appeals: logical, ethical, and emotional. Strong arguments have a balance of all of three, though logical (logos) is essential for a strong, valid argument. Appeals, however, can also be misused, creating arguments that are not credible.

Logical Appeal (logos)

Logical appeal is the strategic use of logic, claims, and evidence to convince an audience of a certain point.

When used correctly, logical appeal contains the following elements...

- Strong, clear claims
- Reasonable qualifiers for claims
- Warrants that are valid
- Clear reasons for claims
- Strong evidence (facts, statistics, personal experience, expert authority, interviews, observations, anecdotes)
- Acknowledgement of the opposition

When used poorly, logical appeals may include...

- Over-generalized claims
- Reasons that are not fully explained or supported
- Logical fallacies
- Evidence misused or ignored
- No recognition of opposing views

Ethical Appeal (ethos)

Ethical appeal is used to establish the writer as fair, open-minded, honest, and knowledgeable about the subject matter. The writer creates a sense of him or herself as trustworthy and credible.

When used correctly, the writer is seen as...

- Well-informed about the topic
- Confident in his or her position
- Sincere and honest
- Understanding of the reader's concerns and possible objections
- Humane and considerate

When used incorrectly, the writer can be viewed as...

- Unfair or dishonest
- Distorting or misrepresenting information (biased)
- Insulting or dismissive of other viewpoints
- Advocating intolerant ideas

Emotional Appeal (pathos)

Not surprisingly, emotional appeals target the emotions of the reader to create some kind of connection with the writer. Since humans are in many ways emotional creatures, pathos can be a very powerful strategy in argument. For this same reason, however, emotional appeal is often misused...sometimes to intentionally mislead readers or to hide an argument that is weak in logical appeal. A lot of visual appeal is emotional in nature (think of advertisements, with their powerful imagery, colors, fonts, and symbols).

When done well, emotional appeals...

- Reinforce logical arguments
- Use diction and imagery to create a bond with the reader in a human way
- Appeal to idealism, beauty, humor, nostalgia, or pity (or other emotions) in a balanced way
- Are presented in a fair manner

When used improperly, emotional appeals...

- Become a substitute for logic and reason (TV and magazine advertising often relies heavily on emotional rather than logical appeal)
- Uses stereotypes to pit one group of people against another (propaganda and some political advertising does this)
- Offers a simple, unthinking reaction to a complex problem
- Takes advantage of emotions to manipulate (through fear, hate, pity, prejudice, embarrassment, lust, or other feelings) rather than convince credibly

Effectiveness vs. Credibility

Credible (credibility) means an argument is logically sound and well-supported with strong evidence and reasoning.
Effective (effectiveness) means an argument works in convincing or persuading its audience. Many arguments that are effective are also credible...but there are also many that aren't.