

The Three Basic Techniques of Persuasion

To have an influence on policy, you need to be able to persuade people. A first step is to convince others that the problem you have chosen is important. Then you will need to persuade people to support what you are doing. The goal is to persuade others to act on your policy issue.

How can you persuade people to side with you? The Greek philosopher Aristotle laid down the basics of persuasion more than 2,000 years ago. In his work *Rhetoric* (the art of using language to persuade), Aristotle cited three methods. You can persuade people through:

1. Reasoning (what Aristotle called *logos*).
2. Emotions (*pathos*).
3. Trustworthiness (*ethos*).

The best arguments create a balance among reasoning, appealing to emotion, and building trust.

Reasoning (*Logos*)

Reasoning is fundamental. All your persuasive efforts rest on it. You must be able to state your position and support it with reasons and evidence.

In policy, as in most areas where you need to persuade someone, there are opposing sides. You must anticipate what the other side will say and respond with counterarguments.

To construct your reasoned argument, you will have to research and think about the issue. You can research by talking to people, going to the library, and searching the Internet.

Once you have the information, state your position in a single sentence. Then state the reasons that support your position. Make your argument clear and simple. Be prepared to respond to arguments from the other side with clear arguments. "I disagree with that position for these reasons." And state the reasons.

Emotions (*Pathos*)

An argument that relies on reason alone may fall flat. People may agree with your reasoning but not feel stirred to act. Persuasion is a call to action. An emotional appeal can rouse people to act.

One of the best ways to make an emotional appeal is by telling a story. Your reasoned argument will tell the facts. An emotional appeal can personalize your argument by telling about a person affected by the problem or issue. A story can bring dry facts to life, making others feel as you do.

Trustworthiness (*Ethos*)

If people don't trust you, it doesn't matter how well-argued or emotion-rousing your message is. They just won't buy it. If you're going to persuade people, you have to make sure they have confidence in you: You must gain their trust.

You can do many things to gain trust. One is to appear responsible. Show up on time. Dress appropriately. Your first impression will be of a responsible person.

How you talk about an issue can make people trust you. If you present the other side's arguments fairly, people will consider you to be a fair person. If you know a lot about the issue, people will respect your learning. Don't pretend to know things that you don't. If you are found out, you will have lost the other person's confidence in you. Once lost, trust can be difficult to regain.

PERSUASION

REASONING (*logos*)

- Present evidence: facts, statistics, expert opinions, survey results.
- Cite the source of your information.
- Make your facts understandable.
- Tailor your arguments for your audience.
- State your conclusion in one simple sentence.
- Make sure all your reasons support your conclusion. You should be able to say, "I want you to do X for the following reasons: A, B, C."

GAINING PEOPLE'S TRUST (*ethos*)

- Listen to what people have to say.
- Be fair. Tell the truth without exaggerating. If you have opposition, be able to state your opponent's positions fairly.
- Know what you're talking about. Study up as best you can. If you don't know something, don't try to fake it.
- Show that you believe in what you're doing. Show your interest and enthusiasm.
- Stay calm. People tend not to trust someone who flies off the handle.
- Be friendly. You are not going to persuade anyone who dislikes you.

EMOTIONAL APPEALS (*pathos*)

- Link your proposal to basic human needs (food, shelter, security, belonging, esteem, power, shared beliefs, self-fulfillment, etc.).
- Personalize the issue. Tell a story about how it affected a person's life.
- Tie your proposal to self-interest. Show people how it benefits both them *and* the community.
- Entice them: Be complimentary. Find something you like or that is impressive.

For Discussion

1. What are *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*? Which, if any, of the three do you think is most important in making a persuasive appeal? Why?
2. Look at the examples below. Which type of persuasion is each an example of?
 - a. I have lived in this community my entire life and served on the school board for the last four years. I can assure you that the dropout problem deeply affects our community.
 - b. More than 50 percent of all high school freshman in our community do not graduate. Dropouts earn much less than high school graduates and are more likely to require government services. If we want to improve our community's future, we should do something about the dropout problem.
 - c. Let me tell you about John Smith. When he was in high school, he was having trouble keeping up. No special help was available for him. He thought school wasn't for him, and he dropped out. Today, John is without a job and has little hope of getting one.