

The Basics of Persuasion

For your project, there are many things you might want people to do. How can you persuade people to do them? The Greek philosopher Aristotle laid down the three basic methods of persuasion more than 2,000 years ago: reasoning (what Aristotle called *logos*), emotional appeals (*pathos*), and gaining people's trust (*ethos*).



Reasoning (Logos)

All your persuasive efforts rest on it. You have good reasons for what you're doing. By sharing these reasons, you may persuade others to support you.

- 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 your reasons support your conclusion.
- You should be able to say, "I want you to do X for the following reasons: A, B, and C."

Emotions (Pathos)

People make important decisions—whom to marry, where to live, and what kind of car to buy—based on emotions or feelings. You probably have strong feelings about your project. If you share them in the right way, you may persuade others.

- Link your proposal to basic human needs (food, shelter, security, belonging, esteem, power, shared beliefs, self-fulfillment, etc.).
- Tie your proposal to self-interest. Show people how it benefits both them and the community.
- Entice them: Show how interesting it is.
- Be complimentary. Find something you like or that impresses you and comment on it.

Trust (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 gain their trust.

- Listen to what people have to say.
- Be fair. Tell the truth without exaggerating. 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.
- Be friendly. You are not going to persuade anyone who dislikes you.

CAP Lesson 9: Persuading elaborates on logos, pathos, and ethos.

What convinces is conviction. Believe in the argument you're advancing. If you don't, you're as good as dead. The other person will sense that something isn't there, and no chain of reasoning, no matter how logical or elegant or brilliant, will win your case for you.

—Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973), 36th U.S. President