Chapter 3: Effective Argument

# Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

In order to persuade a particular audience of a particular point, a writer makes decisions about how best to convince the reader. Aristotle recognized three basic appeals that a writer (or orator) should consider when presenting an argument: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

## 3.1.1 Logos

Consider this hypothetical plea from Zach to his father: “Dad, could you loan me money for gas until I get my paycheck at the end of the week? If you do, I’ll be able to haul your junk pile to the dump as well as drive myself back and forth to work. I’ll pay you back as soon as I get my check!” **Logos**, a Latin term referring to logic, appeals to the reader’s intellect.

As readers, we test arguments for their soundness. Does the writer make false assumptions? Are there gaps in the argument? Does the writer leap to conclusions without sufficient evidence to back up his claims? As writers, it is our job to build a solid, well-explained, sufficiently supported argument. In academic texts, logos is usually considered the most important appeal since scholarly research is supposed to be objective and thus more dependent on logic than on emotion (pathos) or on the reputation of the scholar (ethos). What about Zach’s argument above? Essentially, he asserts that a loan from his father would benefit both Zach and his dad. Does the argument seem sound? We do not know why Zach is short on cash this week—his father may be aware that Zach spent most of last week’s check on the newest iPhone, so he does not have enough to cover his gas this week. Thus, there may be factors that undermine Zach’s implication that his request is motivated by responsibility. However, he does offer evidence that the loan will allow him to fulfill his obligations.

Logic is based on either *inductive* or *deductive reasoning*. Understanding these types of logic can help us test the soundness of arguments, both our own and those of others.

### Inductive Reasoning

You likely use inductive reasoning every day. By this kind of logic, we form conclusions based on samples. Lab experiments, for example, must be repeatable in order for scientists to gather a convincing amount of data to prove a hypothesis. If a scientist hypothesizes that addiction to a particular drug causes a certain, predictable behavior, the experiment must be carefully controlled, and must be repeated hundreds of times in order to prove that the behavior is consistently associated with the addiction and that other possible causes of that behavior have been ruled out. If we observe enough examples of an event occurring under similar circumstances, we can employ inductive reasoning to draw a conclusion about the pattern. For example, if we pay less each time we buy apples at Supermart than when we purchase apples at Pete’s Grocery, we will likely conclude, inductively, that apples are less expensive at Supermart.

Literary argument is often based on inductive reasoning. Here are two illustrations of such reasoning:

1. In Robert Frost’s sonnet “Design,” the color white is used ironically to suggest that only a devious designer would clothe the universe’s evil in so much beauty. The “dimpled spider, fat and white”; the “white heal-all” flower that “hold[s] up” the moth for the spider’s feast; and the rhyming of “blight” with “white” and “right” work together to generate the poem’s disturbing sense that the innocence implied in the whiteness of the natural scene is deceptive.
2. As powerful evidence of the irreversible destruction of war, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* presents Jake Barnes’s struggles to overcome the damage incurred during his service as a soldier in World War I. Jake’s difficulty coping with his injury, his tendency to self-medicate with alcohol, his inability to pray, and his
3. failure to sustain an intimate relationship with another person all exemplify the terrible destruction inflicted on him by the war.

When writing a literary analysis essay, such as the paper that might develop from the second argument above, you will need to provide enough examples to support your assertion that the pattern you observed in the text does, indeed, exist.

### Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning, on the other hand, is drawing a conclusion based on a *logical equation*. It can be argued that we see deduction in its purest form in the context of scientific or mathematical reasoning. A logical equation of this sort is based on a *proven* assumption and/or clearly and inflexibly-defined terms. Commonly manifesting these conditions, computer programs accomplish tasks through deductive logic. For example, *Mary, an art major who has completed 24 credit hours, cannot register for English 4500*. This statement is true because the university course enrollment system is governed by the following logic: Only English majors with 30 or more credit hours may register for English 4500. Students who have not officially declared as English majors and/or whose records do not exhibit completion of credit hours equal to or greater than 30 will be automatically prevented from registering for English 4500. Similarly, the following statement is based on deductive logic: *Glyptol paint cannot be cleaned up with water only*. This conclusion is based on the fact that Glyptol contains alkyds, which are not water soluble. Therefore, clean-up of any paint containing alkyds will require turpentine or another petroleum-based solvent.

Having examined deductive reasoning in its pure form, however, we can see that argument will rarely be required in such a context. Investigation may be required in order to determine the characteristic and/ or definition of a material, but once the facts are ascertained, scientists will not need to debate whether or not alkyds are water-soluble. *Persuasion* becomes relevant when the issue moves beyond proven facts. As we explore issues of ethics and values, logical reasoning can seem a bit mushy, yet rather than throw up their hands in abandonment of deductive reasoning, humanities scholars generally work hard to establish valid assumptions, or generally agreed-upon notions, that can be used to help humans move closer to reasonable, or logical, social and political beliefs and behaviors.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes is famous for employing deductive reasoning to solve mysteries. In “Five Orange Pips,” Holmes uses deductive reasoning to work as far as possible toward solving John Openshaw’s case, based on the facts Holmes and Watson have been given:

Now let us consider the situation and see what may be deduced from it. In the first place, we may start with a strong presumption that Colonel Openshaw had some very strong reason for leaving America. Men at his time of life do not change all their habits and exchange willingly the charming climate of Florida for the lonely life of an English provincial town. His extreme love of solitude in England suggests the idea that he was in fear of someone or something, so we may assume as a working hypothesis that it was fear of someone or something which drove him from America. As to what it was he feared, we can only deduce that by considering the formidable letters which were received by himself and his successors. Did you remark the postmarks of those letters?

Equations such as the ones being forwarded by Holmes, when seen in their complete form, comprise a three part logical statement called a **syllogism**.

The statement includes

1. A **general statement**, or **major premise**: Middle-aged men do not readily embrace change.
2. A **minor premise**: Colonel Openshaw is a middle-aged man.
3. And a **conclusion**: Colonel Openshaw would not have changed his circumstances without a strong impetus.

Although some might argue that Holmes came to the major premise through inductive reasoning (observing the behavior of many, many middle-aged men), in the above passage, he asserts the major premise as the basis for his deductive logical equation proving that Colonel Openshaw must have had a strong impetus for leaving America. If we agree with Holmes’s *premise*, we are likely to trust his *conclusion*.

Here is a more questionable logical equation, considered by the characters of Stephen Crane’s short story “The Open Boat”:

If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men’s fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble. The whole affair is absurd.... But, no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work.

The following syllogism reflects the men’s attitude:

1. Major premise: The world is just and reasonable.
2. Minor premise: All of the men in the life-boat are good men and are working hard to survive.
3. Conclusion: All of the men should survive.

You can see in the latter example that sometimes syllogisms are flawed, or illogical. Most of us doubt, at least some of the time, that the universe is indeed just and reasonable, at least by human standards. If it is not just, then the men’s conclusion that they ought to survive may be incorrect.

The occurrence of flawed logic is most problematic when we find an equation in its incomplete form: an **enthymeme**. If we consider the major premise as the *underlying assumption*, and recognize that this premise often goes *unstated*, we see that the enthymeme is a type of elliptical statement that sometimes “leaps” to its conclusion unreasonably. Consider the following examples:

### Sample 1

* Enthymeme: Sarah, don’t eat that beef; it came from Bob’s Café.
* Major premise: All food from Bob’s Café is bad.
* Minor premise: That beef came from Bob’s Café.
* Conclusion: That beef is bad.

### Sample 2

* Enthymeme: Lisa Harmon would be a good hire for our company; she has a degree from Harvard University.
* Major premise: Anyone with a degree from Harvard University would be a good employee for our company.
* Minor premise: Lisa has a degree from Harvard University.
* Conclusion: Lisa would be a good employee for our company.

### Sample 3

* Enthymeme: *Kill Bill* is a chick flick.
* Major premise: Any movie that features a female protagonist is a chick flick.
* Minor premise: *Kill Bill* features a female protagonist.
* Conclusion: *Kill Bill* is a chick flick.

As you test the major premises above, how do they fare? Are they true? If a writer asserted the above enthymemes, would you, as the reader, agree with the major premise of each? Why or why not? What is the danger of reading (or hearing) only the enthymeme and not testing the underlying (unspoken) assumption which would complete the syllogism?

### Logical Fallacies:

Whether an assertion is based on inductive or deductive reasoning, when we test a claim, it helps to know about the following logical fallacies commonly found in weak arguments:

### Bandwagon Argument:

This claim encourages us to agree with a particular opinion because “everyone else agrees with it.” *Frost’s “Design” implies an evil creator; several important critics agree that this is Frost’s message.* Does the text *itself* support this theory?

### Single Cause:

This kind of argument suggests that a problem results from one particular cause when the causes may actually be complex and multiple: *In* The Great Gatsby*, it is Gatsby’s decision to pursue a decadent woman like Daisy that leads to his downfall.* Are there any other factors that might lay the groundwork for the tragic events of the novel?

### Either/Or:

This type of statement implies that there are only two options: Roethke’s poem “My Papa’s Waltz” either points to abuse, or it emphasizes the love between father and son. Is it possible for both to be true?

### Slippery Slope:

In this kind of argument, the writer warns that one step in the “wrong” direction will result in complete destruction: If the instructor curves the grade for this assignment, students will expect a curve on all assignments, and they will lose their motivation to work hard toward their own learning. Is the compromised course grade inevitable as the result of one curved assignment grade? A similar argument is the following: If the government gives welfare to poor citizens, those citizens will become permanently dependent on “handouts” and will lose their motivation to work for a living.

### Straw Man:

In this approach, the writer holds up an *extreme* and usually easy- to-defeat example of the opposition as the general representative of that opposition instead of considering the opposition’s most reasonable arguments. *Senator Jill Campbell was convicted of bribery, confirming that politicians can’t be trusted.* Are there *any* ethical politicians? If so, this conclusion is logically flawed.

### False Cause:

Here, the writer offers a cause that seems linked to the problem but does not actually establish the causal relationship. The university cut three class days due to snow, and now I’m failing history; therefore, the university should have added three extra days to the semester.

As you listen to and read arguments forwarded by others, test the claims carefully to ensure that you are not accepting an illogical line of thinking. Also, carefully review your own arguments to avoid forwarding faulty logic yourself!

## 3.1.2 Ethos

**Ethos**, an appeal based on the credibility of the author, can affect a reader’s willingness to trust the writer. This credibility is often generated by the author’s apparent ethics. If the reader perceives that she shares important values with the writer, the door of communication opens wider than if the writer and reader seem to lack common values. Reflecting back to Zach’s request for a loan from his father, Zach does remind his father subtly that the loan will allow him to work, both at his job and at home. This respect for work is likely a value held by Zach’s father, so it becomes important common ground for the argument.

Consider again the previously presented thesis about Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*:

As powerful evidence of the irreversible destruction of war, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* presents Jake Barnes’s struggles to overcome the damage incurred during his service as a soldier in World War I. Jake’s difficulty coping with his injury, his tendency to self-medicate with alcohol, his inability to pray, and his failure to sustain an intimate relationship with another person all exemplify the terrible destruction inflicted on him by the war.

Hopefully, the writer, let’s call him Bill, will go on to support, with evidence from the text, the claim that the portrayal of Jake’s struggles promotes anti-war sentiment. Beyond the logical soundness of the argument, however, the reader will inevitably react on a personal level to the values underlying the statement. Bill, in his decision to focus on this aspect of the text, seems to appreciate the anti-war stance he observes in the novel. If the reader is sympathetic to this position, she may be more open to Bill’s argument as a whole.

Aside from the writer’s ethics, ethos can also be generated by the author’s credibility, which is usually based on (1) the ability to forward a logical argument (hence, ethos can be affected by logos!), (2) thoroughness of significant research, and (3) credentials proving the writer’s expertise. If Bill is not an expert in the field of literary studies yet, but is a sophomore English Major, he may have no recognizable credentials to persuade the reader in his favor. But if he has been careful and thorough in his presentation of evidence (passages and examples from the text itself) and has considered (and possibly integrated) material from scholarly articles and books to help define and support his argument, his ethos is likely to be strong.

## 3.1.3 Pathos

What about **pathos**, or the appeal to the reader’s emotions? Certainly, Zach’s father will be affected by his feelings for his son Zach as he considers whether to loan Zach the money for gas, but what about in a more academic or professional context? Even though the goal of an academic writer is to approach a research topic as objectively as possible, even scholars are people, and people are emotional creatures. Bill’s awareness of this fact leads him to choose some particularly poignant passages from Hemingway’s novel to support his point:

The damage caused by Jake’s war experience is not only physical but also psychological. For example, after looking in the mirror at the scar from his wound, he lies in bed unable to sleep:

I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn’t keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it was better and I lay in bed and listened to the heavy trams go by and way down the street, and then I went to sleep. (Hemingway 31)

Although Jake makes a convincing show in public of dealing with his trauma, this passage reveals the challenge he faces in trying to cope.

Although Bill’s readers will critically consider whether this passage logically supports Bill’s claim, it is likely that they will also react emotionally to Jake’s anguish, thus reinforcing the persuasive effectiveness of Bill’s argument.

# Audience Awareness

For success in any project, a writer must be aware of and carefully consider his audience. Zach seems to know his audience pretty well—the evidence he presents that a loan would benefit both Zach and his father shows that Zach understands his father’s values, and chances are good that Zach considers his filial status as an advantage with this audience. After all, he did ask his father, rather than a stranger, for the loan.

On the other hand, an academic audience can be a tough one since scholars are trained to consider claims critically, rigorously questioning and testing their validity. Your professors are in this camp, and you and your peers are quickly joining these ranks as well. While this audience is not a highly sympathetic one, its critical rigor is not intended for intimidation but for establishing and maintaining high standards of thought and research. Academia’s purpose is to maintain and improve the quality of our world, so you are encouraged to consider this audience as a factor as you work to produce increasingly significant and well-written texts.

# Evidence

## 3.3.1 Primary Sources

**Primary Evidence** is the *thing* we study. In academic writing, this kind of evidence differs according to discipline. In biology and chemistry, primary evidence can be an experiment’s results. In the field of history, it might be a letter written by a World War I soldier, a memo issued by a U.S. president, a Civil War bullet, or cave drawings. In sociology, it can be the data gathered from participant surveys (quantitative) or information arising from a case study (qualitative).

In the field of English literature, primary evidence comes from the poem, novel, short story, play, or memoir you are studying. Bill, for example, presents direct quotes from the novel *The Sun Also Rises* supporting specific claims he forwards in his argument, as well as **summarized** and **paraphrased** passages in which he describes, in his own words, key occurrences in the novel. Below, he *summarizes* a conversation between Jake and Robert Cohn, condensing a lengthy passage of dialogue into one sentence:

In an early conversation between Jake and Robert Cohn, Jake warns his friend that Cohn desires to go to South America only because he has been reading sentimental literature.

Later, *paraphrasing* the novel’s description of Jake’s and his friends’ response to a bullfight, Bill translates Hemingway’s words into his own in about the same number of words as the original passage:

Jake observes Brett for any signs of serious disturbance as she watches the matador kill the bull, but Brett is not upset by the scene. Instead she expresses her appreciation for the matador’s extraordinary grace.

These examples from the primary text support Bill’s argument, but how does Bill decide when to quote, summarize, or paraphrase?

These decisions are important ones for effectively incorporating primary evidence into an essay. Here are a few guidelines as you consider these options in your own writing:

### Quotes:

Use the shortest quote possible to generate (a) the evidence needed and (b) the effect you seek. Be careful to *avoid* long quotes unless they serve a significant purpose in forwarding your argument. *Do* use quotes to “liven up” your argument, to bring the voice of the literary text into your academic prose.

### Summary:

Use summary to provide a broad-scoped piece of evidence (a long passage from the novel, for example) to the reader. That “Jake and Brett have multiple tension-filled encounters” (Bill’s summary) is evidence that they still care for each other even though they cannot overcome Jake’s impotence to settle into a committed relationship. There may be no need in this section of Bill’s essay to focus more closely on particular tension-filled exchanges.

### Paraphrase:

Employ paraphrase when the content of a scene or passage is pertinent but does not require the original language itself. Bill’s description of Jake’s and Brett’s behavior during the bullfight is a helpful example of effective paraphrase use.

## 3.3.2 Secondary Sources

Although the proof that Jake’s struggles reveal the destructive potential of war must come from the novel itself, the primary source, Bill can use **secondary sources** to (a) help explain his perspective on the novel, and (b) indicate how his argument fits into the ongoing scholarly dialogue about the novel. Plenty of people have contributed to the conversation on the meaning of *The Sun Also Rises*. Bill’s goal is to say something *new*, to bring the reader fresh insight about the novel, to contribute something *original* to the conversation. To clarify the significance of his argument, he can integrate material from carefully selected **scholarly articles and books**.

How does one find and use secondary sources? Chapter 8 elaborates on these processes. But to get started, we can discuss some of the basics here. First, let’s distinguish between **popular** and **scholarly**, or **peer-reviewed**, **sources**. There is a vast amount of information available on a vast number of topics, both in print and on the internet. Most digital and print publications these days are written for a popular, or mass, audience. Since the average reader is not writing a research project on the topic he is interested in, most texts are written for the non-expert. Such a reader, having just finished *The Sun Also Rises*, might seek some basic general information on Hemingway or on World War I, which could easily be found on sites such as Wikipedia or the Poetry Foundation website (poetryfoundation.org).

However, the scholar who is working on her own research project needs more in-depth analysis than is provided in these popular sources. Thus, she must gather academic or scholarly resources. These are written for an expert audience, assuming that this reader already has a more sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the subject and is researching a specific aspect of the topic rather than looking for general information. These sources are often more difficult to find and obtain. They are rarely free and must usually be accessed through a university library system.

The differences between the purposes and production processes of popular and scholarly sources result in their having distinct characteristics. Here is a chart to help you visualize the differences:

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Popular sources | Scholarly sources |
| Example | *Time Magazine*, Spark Notes, or Shmoop article | An article from *The Hemingway Review* |
| Location | Newsstand or internet (accessible through a Google search) | Subscribed to by universities and libraries. Usually accessible only to members of those institutions |
| Target reader | Non-expert, lay reader | Experts/professionals in a particular area of study |
| Appearance | Glossy visuals, eye-catching layout, strategies to attract buyers/readers | Plain text; generally not marketed at all since experts are professionally motivated to seek out this kind of resource |
| Production process | * Written not by experts in the field but by journalists and other professional writers * Fact-checked and edited by publishing and editing professionals (or sometimes not at all) * Published every month, every week, or sometimes even daily | * Written by experts in the field * Reviewed by the expert’s peers and accepted   or rejected by their recommendation   * Edited by journal or press editor * As a result of the research and peer-review process, these journals are usually published only 1-4 times annually |
| Features | Short articles, meant to be read in one sitting; no bibliography; short, clear paragraphs and sentences;  vocabulary meant for middle to high school reading level; usually published for profit | Long articles, sometimes based on a year or more of research/ analysis; include substantial bibliography of other peer-reviewed sources used in research; vocabulary often specialized, reasoning often complex, targeting readers familiar with the field;  published by academic journals or not-for-profit university presses |

# Articulating an Effective Thesis

The understanding of pathos, logos and ethos is crucial to formulating a significant and arguable thesis, which should capture the essence of *your perspective* on a text. The argument itself will require much more than a sentence or two, but the **thesis**, or the statement of the central argument, is an important tool in presenting a persuasive case. It should relay to your reader the *specific point* around which the rest of the argument revolves and *why that point is so important*.

You are encouraged to compose, early in your writing process, a **working thesis**. At this point, the thesis is not yet set in stone, but it will help guide your research and your logic as you formulate your case. Once you have analyzed the text, read the research on your topic, and determined your perspective and purpose, you will need to revise and refine your thesis to ensure that it sets up and controls your argument with real impact.