A Guide to Argument

The Three Modes of Persuasion

The modes of persuasion are rhetorical devices that classify the speaker’s appeal to the audience.

1. **Ethos** is an appeal to the authority or honesty of the speaker or a strategy in which the writer attempts to establish his or her credibility. A writer can build ethos in many ways, including the following:
   - By establishing common ground with the reader—showing the reader that they share similar opinions or concerns on an issue.
   - By addressing counterarguments to show that he or she is informed on all sides of the issue.
   - By presenting solutions to the problem.
   - By citing notable persons in the field in question, such as college professors or executives of companies whose businesses are related to the topic.

2. **Pathos** is an appeal to the audience’s emotions. Pathos can be particularly powerful if used well, but most speeches do not rely solely on pathos. A writer may build pathos using a number of strategies, including the following:
   - By using words that are have specific emotional, political, or social connotations.
   - By including images that have clear emotional impact, such as a photograph of a starving child.
   - By using shocking facts or statistics.

3. **Logos** is a logical appeal or a strategy in which the writer tries to appeal to the reader’s sense of reason. Writers can establish logos by building arguments that are logically sound and free of fallacies. There are numerous ways that writers can establish logos, including the following:
   - By using concrete examples, statistics, facts, and other research.
   - By creating a hierarchy of purpose, in which the writer organizes main points in a way that allows each point in the body of the argument to build upon or refine the previous idea.
   - By giving readers a reason to care or showing why the issue is important.

The Classical Argument

1. **Introduction**.
2. **Statement of fact**. Provide foundational material your reader will need to know to understand your arguments.
3. **Confirmation**. Present your arguments that support or prove your thesis, point by point.
4. **Refutation** or **Counterargument**. Present ideas that conflict with your thesis and then demonstrate why those ideas are wrong or unworthy of consideration.
5. **Conclusion**.

Two important points:
- One section of this model does not necessarily equal one paragraph in your essay. For example, the confirmation section will probably require several paragraphs.
- You do not have to present all your confirming arguments together and all your refutations together. A good strategy is to pair them up: present one confirming argument, present the related counterargument, and then refute the counterargument. And so on.
The Toulmin Model

1. **Introduction**, which includes your **Claim**. In the Toulmin model, *claim* equals *thesis statement*.
2. **Data**. Present facts and evidence that back up your claim.
3. **Warrant**. This is the most important part of the Toulmin argument, where you explain how the data supports the claim. That is, you tell how the two sections are connected.
4. **Backing**. Provide any other logic your reader needs to see the connection between your claim and your data.
5. **Counterargument** or **Counterclaim**. Present ideas that conflict with your claim.
6. **Rebuttal**. Explain how those counterarguments are wrong.
7. **Conclusion**.

Logical Fallacies

One of the best ways to build logos in your argument is to avoid the use of logical fallacies. The various types of logical fallacies are too numerous to list here, but some of the most common fallacies are listed below.

- **Sweeping generalization**. The writer fails to qualify the applicability of the claim and asserts that it applies to *all* instead of to *some*: *All old people are bad drivers.*
- **Overgeneralization**. The writer fails to qualify the claim and asserts that "it is certainly true" rather than "it may be true": *It is certainly true that men perform better in high stress jobs.*
- **Begging the question or Circular Reasoning**. The proof for the support itself depends on the claim: *Women do not belong in military schools because the schools were designed exclusively for men.*
- **False analogy**. Two cases are not sufficiently parallel to lead readers to accept the claim: *What the police force did to frame O.J. Simpson was exactly like what the Nazis did to the Jews during WWII.*
- **False Authority**. The writer uses information from a self-styled authority figure whose expertise lies outside of the field or topic: *Dr. James, a professor of biology at James George University, states that the Holocaust did not occur.*
- **Non sequitur**. This is when one statement is not logically connected to another: *Many people question the legitimacy of the stories in The National Enquirer, but the stories must hold some truth since my dad told me that he liked the newspaper.*
- **Red herring**. The writer raises an irrelevant issue to draw attention away from the central issue: *Marijuana smoking is not very harmful. I’d rather ride in a car driven by a pot smoker than someone under the influence of alcohol.*
- **Post hoc propter hoc** ("After this, therefore because of this"). The writer implies that because one event follows another, the first caused the second: *Before uniforms were introduced at Will Rogers Middle School, Rogers ranked 14th out of 19 district schools on a statewide algebra test, but the following year when they wore uniforms, their ranking jumped to 4th.*
- **Slippery Slope**. The writer argues that taking one step will lead inevitably to a next step, one that is undesirable: *The legalization of euthanasia will ultimately lead to our killing the homeless, the handicapped, and the elderly.*
- **Equivocation**. The writer uses two different senses of the same term in an argument: *People say that sexism and racism are forms of discrimination. But what's wrong with discrimination? We discriminate all the time in our choices of food, homes, and friends.*
- **Oversimplification**. The writer’s argument obscures or denies the complexity of the issue: *The welfare system’s problems can be solved if we enroll its recipients in job training programs.*
- **Either/or reasoning**. The writer reduces the issue to two polar opposite alternatives: *Either we choose democracy or we choose anarchy.*