

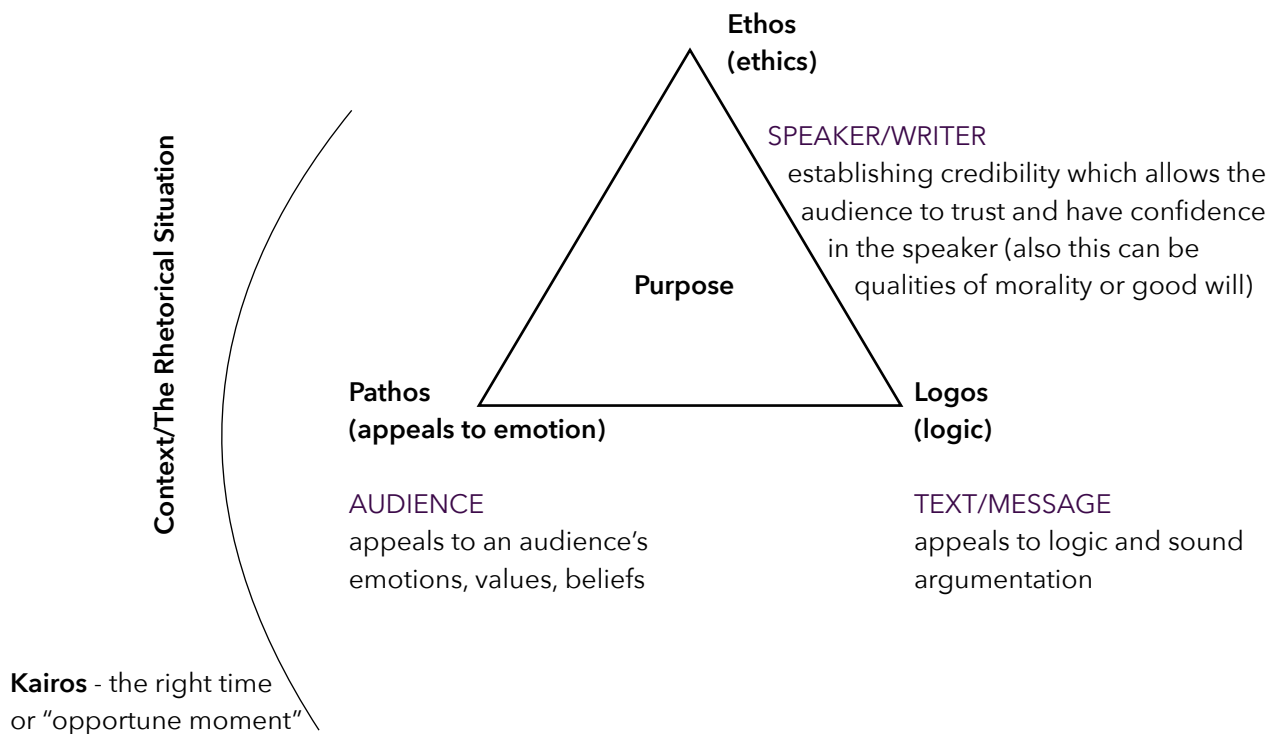
Rhetoric

Rhetoric: the art of persuasion; features that make up effective communication/persuasion

Rhetoric is known as the study, or “art,” of persuasion. It is held within a long tradition going back to classical Greece and heavily influenced by the philosophies of Aristotle (384-322 BC). Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” In Aristotle’s day, public speaking was seen as an art and a major part of civic life (particularly, education and politics). Aristotle began to theorize rhetoric, and those theories have become very influential in Western thought and communication.

By understanding rhetoric, you can understand how persuasion works, how that persuasion is connected to logic/argumentation, and soon begin to notice how rhetoric is all around us influencing nearly every facet of our daily lives (whether we realize it or not). Today, we can study and analyze rhetoric not only through public speaking and writing, but any kind of “text” that has the ability to persuade (an ad, a public space, a t-shirt, a billboard, a meme, an *Instagram* post, etc.).

Rhetorical Appeals



These features (ethos, pathos, logos) are the three key elements of any *rhetorical situation*. They are all dependent on each other, but they can be separated or emphasized specifically (sometimes for the sake of analysis or for particular affects/effects).

For instance, an ad may heavily appeal to audience's emotion (pathos) as a way to establish credibility (ethos) and an argument (logos). Why would a company like Budweiser have an ad with a puppy that barely mentions their products? Why would they run such an ad during the Super Bowl?

This type of analysis and examination of rhetoric helps decode what makes communication and persuasion effective. In the college environment (particularly writing classes), we pay close attention to the ways messages are constructed, how they persuade, what they imply, and what may be folded into the text that isn't immediately announced or intended. Such work calls for *analysis* and *critical thinking*, and it can help to develop new ways to seeing how persuasion operates, both effectively and deceptively.



But isn't rhetoric just empty, deceptive flattery?

Likely, you've heard the phrase "it's all rhetoric!" - most likely in the realm of politics. When people say that, they are saying that rhetoric is all manipulation, deception, or just empty words. This was Plato's view of rhetoric (Aristotle's teacher, 428-348 BC). Plato's view of rhetoric, while mostly negative and focused on politics, prompted Aristotle to propose that rhetoric is involved in all things and that truth/values are always ideals held in the importance of studying and theorizing rhetoric. So, where are we now? The study of rhetoric calls for a better understanding of the world, a form of civic engagement that helps us see how arguments work and how ideas are best communicated.

Rhetorical Analysis

Doing a *rhetorical analysis*, for any kind of text or medium, is all about examining the rhetorical appeals described above. We can study how such elements are involved in our own writing of an essay (citing sources, for example, is a way to establish your credibility as a scholar). In turn, we can analyze texts rhetorically to give us insights into the ways a text is constructed (intentionally or not), developing new knowledge and insights along the way. This kind of work is especially useful in the reading process and it is often applied to pop culture texts. For an example, check out this clip of a rhetorical analysis of the Budweiser Super Bowl ad: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrTzRtf61qU>

For more strategies on *reading rhetorically*, check out Mike Bunn's essay "How to Read Like a Writer" on writingspaces.org

The Five Canons: Steps in the Persuasive Process

- **Invention** (Inventio) - brainstorming, finding ideas/questions, planning
- **Arrangement** (Dispositio) - organization, sound logic, order
- **Style** (Elocutio) - voice, tone, style, language
- **Memory** (Memoria) - memorization, rehearsal (if it's a speech or performance)
- **Delivery** (Actio) - how the text/message is presented (intonation, body language, for a speech)

