

Rhetoric

The Appeals: Logos, Ethos, Pathos

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OVERVIEW

- The following is a basic introduction to one of the fundamental principles behind rhetoric. It is intended as a brief overview of this core communication tool.

REFERENCES

- Silva Rhetoricae
- <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>

Description

Rhetoric was first developed as a formal area of study and practice in the mid-300's BC by Aristotle. It is the study of effective speaking and writing, and has often been called the art of persuasion. Speaking and writing were the predominant means of communication at the time of rhetoric's development, but in recent years its principles have been applied to the persuasive value of the image, particularly in visual communication. As communication designers we should be aware of various forms and uses of rhetoric.

The Persuasive Appeals

According to Aristotle and the many authorities that would echo him, persuasion is brought about through three kinds of proof (pistis) or persuasive appeal; logos, ethos, and pathos. Although they can be analyzed separately, the persuasive power of these three appeals is typically most effective when used together.

Aristotle calls these "artistic" or "intrinsic" proofs—those that could be found by means of the art of rhetoric—in contrast to "nonartistic" or "extrinsic" proofs such as witnesses or contracts that are simply used by the speaker, not found through rhetoric.

Logos

Logos is the use of logical argument to persuade the audience. There are two types of logical argument:

- * Inductive: synthetic process used to reason from particulars to probable conclusions

This ice is cold. (All ice I have ever touched was cold.)

- * Deductive: analytical process used to move from generalizations to structurally certain conclusions. (A syllogism is deductive logic)

All humans are mortal / Socrates is human / Socrates is mortal

Ethos

Ethos deals with the credibility of the speaker. This is an important aspect of persuasion as, if the speaker isn't credible the argument won't be as convincing, regardless of its truth or logic. Aristotle talked about the following three components of the speaker's ethos:

- * Practical Wisdom: decision making, possessing knowledge about the subject
- * Virtue: compassion abilities of the speaker
- * Goodwill: is the speaker concerned about the best interests of the audience

Pathos

Pathos is a proof that appeals to the emotions of the audience members. Aristotle knew that a good speaker understood their audience and utilized the knowledge of an audience's emotions to persuade them. There are three vital questions to ask regarding emotions:

- * what is the audience's state of mind
- * toward whom are their emotions directed
- * why do audience members feel the way they do