

ETHOS

Ethos is a common rhetorical appeal or form of artificial support. This form of support is also known as *the ethical appeal* or *the appeal of ethical character*.

The principle of Ethos is simple: *Good Ethos = Good Credibility/Trustworthiness*. Moreover, the more Ethos a person has or emits, the more credible they are.

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, taught that a text must demonstrate three characteristics in order to demonstrate that a person has good Ethos (or is a good person)

In order to have a strong sense of Ethos or to emit the appeal well, the person should emit:

Good Will
Good Sense
Good Virtue

Consider this:

When you go to a job interview for the first time, what do your parents or friends normally tell you? Dress nicely. Answer the questions appropriately. And, mind your manners.

Why? To convey the right impression....

In a sense, you do these things to establish a sense of Ethos or to show ethical character.

Moving away from the professional world, here is a more personal example:

When you meet a person you like for the first time, you normally play the "twenty questions" game, asking them:

What's your name?
Where are you from?
What do you do for fun?
Do you have any brothers or sisters?
What kind of movies do you watch?
What kinds of music do you listen to?
What do like to eat?

You usually ask these questions to determine that the person you are dating is a sound, intelligent, and sane person, and you ask questions also to decide if their disposition/personality is agreeable to you.

We often ask questions to evaluate a person's Ethos or to test their ethical character....

If you ask those questions and receive a response like:

Yes, my name is Lisa.

I'm from the deepest levels of hell... I meant that I grew up in the desert.
I like to torture small animals for fun, and they taste good....
I had two brother and sisters, but they disappeared mysteriously... the bodies were never found... isn't that tragic?
I like horror movies.
Jeffrey Dahmer is my hero....

With responses like this, you might have a problem.

You have found a person who does not seem to express good will, good sense, or good virtues. However, let us say that she answers your questions in this way:

Yes, my name is Lisa.
I'm from a small town in Vermont.
I like to babysit my nephews, and I walk regularly.
I have two loving brothers and sisters, and I just love visiting them during holidays.
And, I love a good comedy.

Then, you might have found someone with Good Will, Good Sense, and Good Virtue. These traits are evident if you consider the findings.
She comes from a small town + She babysits her nephews = Indicates the possibility of good values and good intentions.
She comes from a loving family and shows love towards them = Indicates good virtue and good will.
She walks regularly = Indicates good sense (she thinks about her health).
She likes comedy = Indicates that she is fairly light-hearted about things, which suggests good will in her relations with others.

We like to think of these traits as so:

Good Will = Good Intentions towards others

Good Sense = Good intelligence and sound reasoning abilities, even sane.

Good Virtue = Good mannerisms or things done as not to openly offend others.

SITUATED ETHOS

Now, back to the effectiveness and importance of ethos....

For crimes of fraud, criminals will use ethos to take advantage of others. For example, we are all familiar with the "Wolf in sheep's clothing" example. If you have a bad person dress up well or take on the shape/actions of a good person, then they might have enough Ethos to persuade you to do something you might regret.

The idea is similar to acting: A good actor can convince the audience that they are benevolent, when in reality they may be malicious.

And, conversely, what about the “boy who cried wolf”? If a person consequently has established bad ethos with a person, then the result is not having anyone listen to what they want/need to say, even at the expense of some sort of serious loss. In one sense, they lose what we call, Situated Ethos.

Situated Ethos refers to the personal dimension which contributes to the audience listening or avoiding a rhetor based on their assessment or their familiarity with the person. In addition, a person's propensity to tell the truth is also a factor.

The more familiar an audience is with the person -> The easier the task of persuading them.

The less familiar an audience is with the person -> The more difficult the task of persuading them.

As readers and audience members, we often gather to listen to those who have established a good reputation with us. We often find these people trustworthy.

Because people can knowingly take advantage of our attention and earn our respect, we refer to this instance as artificial support.

EX:

Brady is dating Heather. Brady acts like he genuinely cares for Heather: He treats her well; he is courteous and kind to her; and, he spoils her. Brady establishes Situated Ethos with Heather. He earns her trust. He earns her love.

Now, here is the question: What's to stop Brady from "cheating" on Heather and pretend to still cares for her? Nothing....

The entire time the relationship is occurring, perhaps Brady is dating other girls on the side. Brady's use of Ethos may keep him from being caught... if he is even guilty.

EMITTING ETHOS THROUGH TEXTS

A few methods for emitting ethos through writing exist:

1. Positive autobiographical information about the author. He or she talks positively about themselves, displaying good sense, good virtue, and good will.
2. Positive biographic information about the authors of secondary sources.

EX:

Dr. Raymond Klaus, chief resident, at Cedars-Sinai medical center, states....

3. Carefully-chosen subject matter (is closely aligned with the audience's desires/needs).
4. Uses word choice deliberately and carefully.
 - +May be higher to demonstrate intellect... (e.g., when people use multi-syllabic words or technical terms to impress someone with their knowledge....)
 - +May be lower in order to connect with the audience (e.g., slang, regionalisms, etc.).

5. May use lengthy sentences (to demonstrate control of the language and/or knowledge of grammatical/syntactic ability).

6. Creates himself/herself to be the type of character that an audience will respond to by aligning himself/herself with the audience's cultural, religious/spiritual, political, moral, and ethical belief systems....

EX:

If the writer is writing to a strongly conservative, religious group, then he/she will discuss *topoi* (i.e., subject matter) closely aligned to these beliefs. In addition, there will be use of scriptures and examples which are religious in origin.

7. May use inclusive language (or an inclusive voice – e.g., use of You, Yours, Our, Ours, We, Us, etc.).

EX:

We need to pull together to take back *our* home. *Your* lives may depend on *your* ability to reclaim the earth from certain disaster. *You and I* can make a difference. Take every precaution to make sure that *you* use eco-friendly disinfectants and other solutions which do not cause harm to *our* ground water....

8. Good/Reliable/Authoritative Sources of Information

9. Good Variety of Sources of Information

10. Good Citation & Formatting Use to Represent Sources of Information

11. Displays Good Grammar and Punctuation.

12. Uses Style to convey messages with

- a. Clarity (things are well-written and easily understood),
- b. Coherence (things make sense and follow a logical progression or arrangement),
- c. Conciseness (things are brief and not said in long superfluous passages),
- d. Consistency (the formatting is consistent, citations are done correctly, etc.), and
- e. Creativity (the paper is unique and not plagiarized, representing your own voice and your own thoughts).

13. Qualification/Quantification: Make sure you do not attack a topic too strongly. Give yourself some “wobble room” with the subject matter/topic.

EX:

You couldn't say:

“All surfers are beach bums” (some surfers are doctors, lawyers, etc.).

You would be incorrect in your claim.

However, you might say: “Most surfers are beach bums” (allowing for some exclusions).

14. Approach belief systems and cultures carefully....

Consider this: If you dismiss someone's beliefs or ideals as idiocy or stupidity, then you are eliminating your opportunity to attempt to persuade them.

15. Explains terminology to the audience in a useful and easy to read way.