

4.4.5: Making an Argument

Learning Objectives

1. Label and discuss three components of an argument.
2. Identify and provide examples of emotional appeals.

According to the famous satirist Jonathan Swift, “Argument is the worst sort of conversation.” You may be inclined to agree. When people argue, they are engaged in conflict and it’s usually not pretty. It sometimes appears that way because people resort to fallacious arguments or false statements, or they simply do not treat each other with respect. They get defensive, try to prove their own points, and fail to listen to each other.

But this should not be what happens in persuasive argument. Instead, when you make an argument in a persuasive speech, you will want to present your position with logical points, supporting each point with appropriate sources. You will want to give your audience every reason to perceive you as an ethical and trustworthy speaker. Your audience will expect you to treat them with respect, and to present your argument in way that does not make them defensive. Contribute to your credibility by building sound arguments and using strategic arguments with skill and planning.

In this section, we will briefly discuss the classic form of an argument, a more modern interpretation, and finally seven basic arguments you may choose to use. Imagine that each is a tool in your toolbox, and that you want to know how to use each effectively. Know that people who try to persuade you, from telemarketers to politics, usually have these tools at hand.

Let’s start with a classical rhetorical strategy, as shown in Table 4.4.5.1. It asks the rhetorician, speaker, or author to frame arguments in six steps.

Table 4.4.5.1: Classical Rhetorical Strategy

1. Exordium	Prepares the audience to consider your argument
2. Narration	Provides the audience with the necessary background or context for your argument
3. Proposition	Introduces your claim being argued in the speech
4. Confirmation	Offers the audience evidence to support your argument
5. Refutation	Introduces to the audience and then discounts or refutes the counterarguments or objections
6. Peroration	Your conclusion of your argument

The classical rhetorical strategy is a standard pattern and you will probably see it in both speech and English courses. The pattern is useful to guide you in your preparation of your speech and can serve as a valuable checklist to ensure that you are prepared. While this formal pattern has distinct advantages, you may not see it used exactly as indicated here on a daily basis. What may be more familiar to you is Stephen Toulmin’s rhetorical strategy that focuses on three main elements, shown in Table 4.4.5.2

Table 4.4.5.2: Toulmin’s Three-Part Rhetorical Strategy

Element	Description	Example
1. Claim	Your statement of belief or truth	It is important to spay or neuter your pet.
2. Data	Your supporting reasons for the claim	Millions of unwanted pets are euthanized annually.
3. Warrant	You create the connection between the claim and the supporting reasons	Pets that are spayed or neutered do not reproduce, preventing the production of unwanted animals.

Toulmin’s rhetorical strategy is useful in that it makes the claim explicit, clearly illustrating the relationship between the claim and the data, and allows the listener to follow the speaker’s reasoning. You may have a good idea or point, but your audience will be

curious and want to know how you arrived at that claim or viewpoint. The warrant often addresses the inherent and often unspoken question, “Why is this data so important to your topic?” and helps you illustrate relationships between information for your audience. This model can help you clearly articulate it for your audience.

Argumentation Strategies: GASCAP/T

Here is useful way of organizing and remembering seven key argumentative strategies:

1. Argument by **G**eneralization
2. Argument by **A**nalogy
3. Argument by **S**ign
4. Argument by **C**onsequence
5. Argument by **A**uthority
6. Argument by **P**rinciple
7. Argument by **T**estimony

Richard Fulkerson notes that a single strategy is sufficient to make an argument some of the time, but more common is an effort to combine two or more strategies to increase your powers of persuasion. He organized the argumentative strategies in this way to compare the differences, highlight the similarities, and allow for their discussion. This model, often called by its acronym GASCAP, is a useful strategy to summarize six key arguments and is easy to remember. In Table 4.4.5.4 we have adapted it, adding one more argument that is often used in today’s speeches and presentations: the argument by testimony. This table presents each argument, provides a definition of the strategy and an example, and examines ways to evaluate each approach.

Table 4.4.5.3: GASCAP/T Strategies

Argument by		Claim	Example	Evaluation
G	Generalization	Whatever is true of a good example or sample will be true of everything like it or the population it came from.	If you can vote, drive, and die for your country, you should also be allowed to buy alcohol.	STAR System: For it to be reliable, we need a (S) sufficient number of (T) typical, (A) accurate, and (R) reliable examples.
A	Analogy	Two situations, things or ideas are alike in observable ways and will tend to be alike in many other ways	Alcohol is a drug. So is tobacco. They both alter perceptions, have an impact physiological and psychological systems, and are federally regulated substances.	Watch for adverbs that end in “ly,” as they qualify, or lessen the relationship between the examples. Words like “probably,” “maybe,” “could,” “may,” or “usually” all weaken the relationship.
S	Sign	Statistics, facts or cases indicate meaning, much like a stop sign means “stop.”	Motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol occur at significant rates among adults of all ages in the United States	Evaluate the relationship between the sign and look for correlation, where the presenter says what a facts “means.” Does the sign say that? Does is say more, or what is not said? Is it relevant?

Argument by		Claim	Example	Evaluation

Argument by		Claim	Example	Evaluation
C	Cause	If two conditions always appear together, they are causally related.	The U.S. insurance industry has been significantly involved in state and national legislation requiring proof of insurance, changes in graduated driver's licenses, and the national change in the drinking age from age 18 to age 21.	Watch out for "after the fact, therefore because of the fact" (<i>post hoc, ergo propter hoc</i>) thinking. There might not be a clear connection, and it might not be the whole picture. Mothers Against Drunk Driving might have also been involved with each example of legislation.
A	Authority	What a credible source indicates is probably true.	According to the National Transportation and Safety Board, older drivers are increasingly involved in motor vehicle accidents.	Is the source legitimate and is their information trustworthy? Institutes, boards and people often have agendas and distinct points of view.
P	Principle	An accepted or proper truth	The change in the drinking age was never put to a vote. It's not about alcohol, it's about our freedom of speech in a democratic society.	Is the principle being invoked generally accepted? Is the claim, data or warrant actually related to the principle stated? Are there common exceptions to the principle? What are the practical consequences of following the principle in this case?
T	Testimony	Personal experience	I've lost friends from age 18 to 67 to alcohol. It impacts all ages, and its effects are cumulative. Let me tell you about two friends in particular.	Is the testimony authentic? Is it relevant? Is it representative of other's experiences? Use the STAR system to help evaluate the use of testimony.

Evidence

Now that we've clearly outlined several argument strategies, how do you support your position with evidence or warrants? If your premise or the background from which you start is valid, and your claim is clear and clearly related, the audience will naturally turn their attention to "prove it." This is where the relevance of evidence becomes particularly important. Here are three guidelines to consider in order to insure your evidence passes the "so what?" test of relevance in relation to your claim. Make sure your evidence is:

1. **Supportive** Examples are clearly representative, statistics accurate testimony authoritative, and information reliable.
2. **Relevant** Examples clearly relate to the claim or topic, and you are not comparing "apples to oranges."
3. **Effective** Examples are clearly the best available to support the claim, quality is preferred to quantity, there are only a few well-chosen statistics, facts or data.

Appealing to Emotions

While we've highlighted several points to consider when selecting information to support your claim, know that Aristotle strongly preferred an argument based in logic over emotion. Can the same be said for your audience, and to what degree is emotion and your appeal to it in your audience a part of modern life?

Emotions are a psychological and physical reaction, such as fear or anger, to stimuli that we experience as a feeling. Our feelings or emotions directly impact our own point of view and readiness to communicate, but also influence how, why, and when we say things. Emotions influence not only how you say what you say, but also how you hear and what you hear. At times, emotions can be challenging to control. Emotions will move your audience, and possibly even move you, to change or act in certain ways. Marketing experts are famous for creating a need or associating an emotion with a brand or label in order to sell it. You will speak the language of your audience in your document, and may choose to appeal to emotion, but you need to consider the strategic use as a tool that has two edges.

Aristotle indicated the best, and most preferable, way to persuade an audience was through the use of logic, free of emotion. He also recognized that people are often motivated, even manipulated, by the exploitation of their emotions. In our modern context, we still engage this debate, demanding to know the facts separate from personal opinion or agenda, but see the use of emotion used to sell products. If we think of the appeal to emotion as a knife, we can see it has two edges. One edge can cut your audience, and the other can cut you. If you advance an appeal to emotion in your document on spaying and neutering pets, and discuss the millions of unwanted pets that are killed each year, you may elicit an emotional response. If you use this approach repeatedly, your audience may grow weary of it, and it will lose its effectiveness. If you change your topic to the use of animals in research, the same strategy may apply, but repeated attempts at engaging an emotional response may backfire on you, in essence "cutting" you, and produce a negative response, called emotional resistance.

Emotional resistance involves getting tired, often to the point of rejection, of hearing messages that attempt to elicit an emotional response. Emotional appeals can wear out the audience's capacity to receive the message. As Aristotle outlined, ethos (credibility), logos (logic) and pathos (passion, enthusiasm and emotional response) constitute the building blocks of any document. It's up to you to create a balanced document, where you may appeal to emotion, but choose to use it judiciously.

On a related point, the use of an emotional appeal may also impair your ability to write persuasively or effectively. If you choose to present an article to persuade on the topic of suicide, and start with a photo of your brother or sister that you lost to suicide, your emotional response may cloud your judgment and get in the way of your thinking. Never use a personal story, or even a story of someone you do not know, if the inclusion of that story causes you to lose control. While it's important to discuss relevant topics, including suicide, you need to assess your own relationship to the message. Your documents should not be an exercise in therapy and you will sacrifice ethos and credibility, even your effectiveness, if you "lose it" because you are really not ready to discuss the issue.

As we saw in our discussion of Altman and Taylor, most relationships form from superficial discussions and grow into more personal conversations. Consider these levels of self-disclosure when planning your speech to persuade in order to not violate conversational and relational norms.

Now that we've outlined emotions and their role in a speech in general and a speech to persuade specifically, it's important recognize the principles about emotions in communication that serve us well when speaking in public. DeVito offers us five key principles to acknowledge the role emotions play in communication and offer guidelines for their expression.

Emotions Are Universal

Emotions are a part of every conversation or interaction that we have. Whether or not you consciously experience them while communicating with yourself or others, they influence how you communicate. By recognizing that emotions are a component in all communication interactions, we can place emphasis on understanding both the content of the message and the emotions that influence how, why, and when the content is communicated.

The context, which includes your psychological state of mind, is one of the eight basic components of communication. Expression of emotions is important, but requires the three Ts: tact, timing, and trust. If you find you are upset and at risk of being less than diplomatic, or the timing is not right, or you are unsure about the level of trust, then consider whether you can effectively communicate your emotions. By considering these three Ts, you can help yourself express your emotions more effectively.

Emotional Feelings and Emotional Expression Are Not the Same

Experiencing feelings and actually letting someone know you are experiencing them are two different things. We experience feeling in terms of our psychological state, or state of mind, and in terms of our physiological state, or state of our body. If we experience anxiety and apprehension before a test, we may have thoughts that correspond to our nervousness. We may also have an increase in our pulse, perspiration, and respiration (breathing) rate. Our expression of feelings by our body influences our nonverbal communication, but we can complement, repeat, replace, mask, or even contradict our verbal messages. Remember that we can't tell with any degree of accuracy what other people are feeling simply through observation, and neither can they tell what we are feeling. We need to ask clarifying questions to improve understanding. With this in mind, plan for a time to provide responses and open dialogue after the conclusion of your speech.



Figure 4.4.5.1: Emotions are often communicated through nonverbal gestures and actions. Becky Wetherington – [Stress](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Emotions Are Communicated Verbally and Nonverbally

You communicate emotions not only through your choice of words but also through the manner in which you say those words. The words themselves communicate part of your message, but the nonverbal cues, including inflection, timing, space, and paralanguage can modify or contradict your spoken message. Be aware that emotions are expressed in both ways and pay attention to how verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce and complement each other.

Emotional Expression Can Be Good and Bad

Expressing emotions can be a healthy activity for a relationship and build trust. It can also break down trust if expression is not combined with judgment. We're all different, and we all experience emotions, but how we express our emotions to ourselves and others can have a significant impact on our relationships. Expressing frustrations may help the audience realize your point of view and see things as they have never seen them before. However, expressing frustrations combined with blaming can generate defensiveness and decrease effective listening. When you're expressing yourself, consider the audience's point of view, be specific about your concerns, and emphasize that your relationship with your listeners is important to you.

Emotions Are Often Contagious

Have you ever felt that being around certain people made you feel better, while hanging out with others brought you down? When we interact with each other, some of our emotions can be considered contagious. If your friends decide to celebrate, you may get

caught up in the energy of their enthusiasm. Thomas Joiner noted that when one college roommate was depressed, it took less than three weeks for the depression to spread to the other roommate (Joiner, T., 1994). It is important to recognize that we influence each other with our emotions, positively and negatively. Your emotions as the speaker can be contagious, so use your enthusiasm to raise the level of interest in your topic. Conversely, you may be subject to “catching” emotions from your audience. Your listeners may have just come from a large lunch and feel sleepy, or the speaker who gave a speech right before you may have addressed a serious issue like suicide. Considering the two-way contagious action of emotions means that you’ll need to attend to the emotions that are present as you prepare to address your audience.

Key Takeaway

Everyone experiences emotions, and as a persuasive speaker, you can choose how to express emotion and appeal to the audience’s emotions.

Exercises

1. Think of a time when you have experienced emotional resistance. Write two or three paragraphs about your experience. Share your notes with the class.
2. Which is the more powerful, appeal to reason or emotion? Discuss your response with an example.
3. Select a commercial or public service announcement that uses an emotional appeal. Using the information in this section, how would you characterize the way it persuades listeners with emotion? Is it effective in persuading you as a listener? Why or why not? Discuss your findings with your classmates.
4. Find an example of an appeal to emotion in the media. Review and describe it in two to three paragraphs and share with your classmates.

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