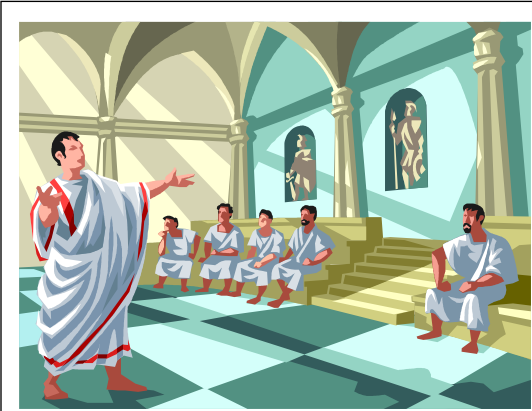


LOGIC IN ARGUMENTS

Before the widespread use of writing and books, most great thinkers and leaders advanced their ideas through spoken word or persuasive argument. Many philosophers of the ancient world believed it possible to change people's thinking and behavior through the skillful use of language. **Rhetoric** is verbal artistry, the act of using language as a means to persuade.



In ancient Greece, a rhetor was one who possessed speaking gifts superb enough to influence political assemblies.

As a student, one of the major skills you must develop is that of rhetorical analysis, for if you take a moment to reflect, most types of academic writing revolve in some way around argument. Skill in presenting a point or idea and backing it with reasons and support is essential to a successful argument. *Rhetorical analysis* is the ability to take apart (or logically weave together) ideas, and *rhetorical devices* are the tools a writer uses to build up to a main idea.

Rhetorical devices are regularly used as tools of persuasion in daily life, the media, and academics. They are frequently used in speeches and advertisements. They are also evident in much of what you read when writers assert their opinions, make judgments, clarify causes and effects, make comparisons, or share interpretations. You may also have used them in your own writing.

Rhetorical devices have many applications in academics.

Just as rhetorical devices can serve as persuasive techniques, they can also be used as diversionary tactics. When used as diversionary tactics, these rhetorical devices can create fallacies or propaganda. A **fallacy** is a statement or an argument based on a false or invalid inference; it is flawed reasoning. (*The root of fallacy is the word "false."*)

Rhetorical fallacies, also known as "fallacies of argument", are typically placed in one of three groups:

EMOTIONAL, Greek: *pathos* – manipulates the audience's *emotions*

ETHICAL, Greek: *ethos* – goes to extremes to heighten the writer's *authority or character*

LOGICAL, Greek: *logos* – is based on **incorrect** interpretation of **evidence**

Propaganda, on the other hand, has political connotations; it involves a heavy-handed attempt to guide public opinion and public action. You may recognize some of the examples below.

Personal attack: Attacking the person instead of refuting the argument. In Latin, it means literally an attack "against the man." (*Example: Why would you vote for someone who is not from our neighborhood and who has had questionable business dealings?*)

Either-or reasoning: Limiting the discussion to only two choices. (*Example: "You're either for us or against us."*)

Bandwagon: Defending an assertion based on popularity, as in "following the crowd" or "jumping on the bandwagon." (*Example: Two million users can't be wrong; call now to subscribe to the AM Coupon Network for discounts at the best establishments in town.*)

Emotional appeal: Appealing to emotions to argue an invalid conclusion. This approach is common in sales and/or political ads to

- elicit support by arousing pity (“sob story”) or by building positive connections, (*Example: “as American as apple pie.”*)
- arouse desire, (*Example: Wear XXX lip gloss for a sexier you.*)
- or trigger fear through negative or stereotypical associations. (*Example: When those people move in, property values will go down and crime will increase.*)

Circular reasoning (or begging the question): Simply repeating the argument in different words. (*Example: Parents should not spank children because good parents do not spank children.*)

False analogy: Assuming that because one thing resembles another, conclusions drawn from one also apply to the other, despite evident differences. (*Example: Parenting children is like raising puppies.*)

Hasty generalization: Offering only weak or limited evidence to support a conclusion; jumping to conclusions. (*Example: I know German Shepherds are vicious animals because one bit me when I was a child.*)

Overreliance on authority: Basing an argument solely on authority or position; basing truth on what one expert says, despite evidence to the contrary. (*Example: My father said so, and he is a doctor.*)

Over-generalize: Drawing an overly broad conclusion from very specific evidence. (*Example: I have tried a number of detergents, and liquid detergents are the best.*)

Oversimplifying: Giving easy answers to complicated questions, often by ignoring important facts. (*Example: Anyone who wants a job can find one.*)

Red herring: Making a conscious effort to draw attention away or misdirect the argument by emphasizing a relatively insignificant point. (*Example: Those who say that we ought to have educational reform forget how disruptive these changes will be to family vacations.*)

Slanting: Taking a biased or one-sided approach; presenting only the evidence that supports your claim and ignoring or playing down other evidence. (*Example: The Internet is dangerous; it is a haven for child predators, a free market for sexual deviants, and detrimental to family values.*)

Slippery slope: Pretending that one thing follows or inevitably leads to another. (*Example: If your child smokes, he will also drink and steal.*)

Rhetorical devices which appeal to emotion, logic and authority are often used in writing. They can be effective when woven into a balanced and well-thought-out presentation designed to persuade, entertain or influence. However, care must be taken not to use them as the sole support for an assertion or with the intent to convey fallacies or propaganda. As college readers and writers, it will be important for you to recognize the various rhetorical devices. You should also be conscious of how they are used in arguments. (This type of *rhetorical analysis* is crucial in critically reading and evaluating sources.) Most importantly, you should take care to use rhetorical devices effectively in your own writing.

RESOURCES CONSULTED

- *Reading for Results*, 5th Edition, L. Flemming, p.380-382
- University of Texas Online Writing Center
- Online Writing Lab at Purdue University
- The Fallacy Files (<http://www.fallacyfiles.org/index.html>)