

ESTABLISHING ETHICAL CHARACTER

A person's personality or seemingly ethical character can affect the judgment of other people by allowing them to be more accepting of the individual and their rhetoric. We refer to this character appeal or use of personality for persuasion as Ethos.

A person of good character or good ethos can inspire others and even lead others. A person of good character is attractive, authoritative, commanding, enticing, and even sexy to others. A person of good character is a good spokesperson, a good citizen, and a good example of how to live (in the minds of others). Therefore, people trust others who maintain good character and good ethos. And consequently, as a result of the ethos of others, people are led to do things or believe things that they normally would not.

Recognizing these ideals in good people, Aristotle and Quintilian claimed that people with good Ethos exhibit three things:

- 1) Good Sense (Phronesis) or Intelligence
- 2) Good Virtue (Arete) or High Moral Character
- 3) Good Will (Eunoia) or Benevolence and Respect for others

GOOD SENSE

When using ethos, you should strive to demonstrate good sense. When a person demonstrates good sense (that is, the person shows intelligence and works for the good of others with his/her ideas), then a person may exhibit good ethos.

Demonstrating knowledge and good judgment is the path to good sense, which is the path to good ethos.

A person with good sense knows both sides of everything. They show understanding of problems and solutions. Moreover, they demonstrate this knowledge openly.

EX:

If you write an argumentative paper, then you must consider the opposing viewpoints and any merit on its part. Moreover, if you write a paper about being a woman, then you better understand the difference between women and men (anatomically, socially, intellectually, and even historically).

Suggestions:

- Consider all of the information which you need to make a successful argument or referential piece.
- Consider qualification of claims or facts (e.g., use qualifiers and quantifiers).

GOOD VIRTUE

When using ethos, you should strive to demonstrate good virtue. The concept of Ethos is discussed heavily by Aristotle in his work, Nicomachean Ethics. Here, he claims that ethos is mainly concerned with virtue.

Evidence of this notion is found in leaders who are not necessarily highly intelligent, but who can command a multitude of others.

EX:

Here is a question: Have you ever known a really good person? A person whom you could trust? A person who is generally good to others? A person with which you have high regard?

Ask yourself, what about this person makes me like them? Is it the way that they dress? Is it the way that they speak? Is it the way that they smell? Is it the way that they act? Is it what I know about them personally?

Any of the factors you could list may contribute to a person's virtue: cleanliness, honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, friendliness, reverence, etc. Moreover, working towards demonstrating these ideas will only help your ethos.

Demonstrating good virtue may mean to consider the most appropriate ideas in writing, as well as being aware of your audience's conception of appropriateness. In addition, writing with good virtue may entail showing a strong command of language and style, in addition to being aware of how topic matter may affect others.

Suggestions:

-Consider personal traits affecting how people view us:

PERSONAL TRAITS ENCOURAGING GOOD ETHOS

Can you emit Courage (confidence and lack of fear)?

Can you emit Pride (is proud for the right reasons of his audience - non-condescending)?

Can you emit Justice (is lawful and law abiding)? "We become just by doing just acts."

Can you emit Friendship (fostering friendliness and promoting goodwill)?

Can you emit Prodigiousity (that is, nobility - by birth, by right, by credentials, by expertise, by evidence, by reason, or by truth - do we have a right to address the audience based on our credentials)?

Can you resist Self-Indulgence (show a lack of true self-indulgence but a concern with the interests/needs of our audience)?

PERSONAL TRAITS ENCOURAGING BAD ETHOS (FOR CONTRAST)

Sharing, Admitting, or Emitting Fear

Sharing, Admitting, or Emitting Fury

Sharing, Admitting, or Emitting Selfishness and Pride

Sharing, Admitting, or Emitting Criminality/Injustice

Sharing, Admitting, or Emitting a Sense of Harm or a Will to Harm
Sharing, Admitting, or Emitting Self-Indulgence

GOOD WILL

When using ethos, you should be aware that good will is very important.

To show good will is to show kindness and respect for others.

Good will does not necessarily facilitate ethos to everyone; some audience members may mistake good will for weakness. However, most individuals respond to good will positively, especially when they do not know the context of your writing initially.

Suggestions:

- Put the information in a reader-friendly and accessible form. Consider the reader's needs.
- In the same sense as recognizing opposing viewpoints for showing good sense, recognize the opposition to show good will. Be thorough with explanations and represent the facts effectively.
- Define all your terms for your reader.
- Explain any processes for your reader.

ETHOS: BORN OR LEARNED?

One philosopher suggested that people are either born inspiring trust, or they learn to inspire trust; further, he claims that virtue is a state of character concerned with choices...

Essentially, when we make bad choices, we lose trust. When we make good choices, we inspire trust.

INDIVIDUAL OR COLLECTIVE ETHOS?

Ethos may be individually-constructed or collectively-constructed.

That is, individuals may use ethos through their own individual acts, decisions, and indications.

Moreover, large groups may use ethos. For example, companies or businesses may present themselves as retaining virtue, displaying common sense, or showing respect for others.

Collective ethos can be shown collaboratively or by a single individual. For example, when a company chooses a spokesperson (e.g. a celebrity or a person of familiarity to the audience), then collective ethos is emitted by a single individual on behalf of the group. Consider the many advertisements or endorsements including celebrities or other individuals of importance.

When shown collaboratively, collective ethos can be even more powerful (in some contexts). For example, if a majority of individuals make a claim, then the majority of the audience will follow. And consequently, if a minority makes a claim, then less of the audience will follow.