

USING EMOTIONS

Strong emotions may affect judgment.

In fact, strong emotion can impair judgment or even change it. Consider how psychological fears can incapacitate particular individuals. In a sense, individuals with their personal experiences, fears, neuroses, and other motivations (affected by emotions) cannot necessarily be influenced by logical appeals or even by an entire argument.

Consider the following situation:

A pregnant woman who is in labor at a hospital (but is afraid of needles)

NURSE: Ma'am, you need this anesthesia.

WOMAN: No way! I don't want that thing; it's going to hurt!

NURSE: The anesthesia will help to alleviate the pain of labor, and it will help to precipitate a smoother pregnancy.

WOMAN: No, it's going to hurt! It's going to hurt!

NURSE: It will hurt much less than pushing something the size of a watermelon out something the size of a shower drain.

WOMAN: I don't care. I don't want any shots!

People are not necessarily rational. People often do not use reason, since their emotions (particularly fear, desire, and even biological needs) account for most of their decision making.

Therefore, having a solid understanding of emotions is vital to creating effective persuasion. Moreover, understanding how to evoke emotions (including sympathy and empathy) is useful to good writing and careful delivery of a thesis and its corresponding support.

In understanding how to use emotions, one should first understand motivation.

Understanding an audience's/reader's motivation is key to emotional persuasion. In addition, understanding an audience's/reader's plight is also key to emotional persuasion.

For example, if you know that an audience is mostly female, then evidently using examples related to female issues or circumstances may be prudent.

Likewise, if you know that an audience is mostly comprised of students, then using examples related to student issues or circumstances may be prudent.

Regardless, empathy (identification with and/or understanding a person's situations, feelings, intent, or motives) and the consequence of sympathy (the feeling of commiseration or of leading one to feel the same feelings) are everything.

The very meaning of the Greek word *pathos* is feelings. Pathos is very much about sharing, understanding, and identifying with the feelings of others whether you are the receiver or the giver.

EX:

If a little girl walks into the classroom by herself and says, "I can't find my mommy." Most of the class will quickly "understand her plight" (her problem) and work to help her. The connection that we feel with the possibility of missing our mothers, fathers, or other loved ones is therefore understood, prompting us to help.

This situation involves the idea of the audience empathizing with the little girl in order to promote action.

EX:

Similarly, aside from playing a game, if fans rally around a football team inspiring them with pomp and cheer, the football team feels the love of the fans which in turn prompts them into action.

As an audience member, we first identify with the author, then we are moved towards feeling or understanding the author's feelings.

This process works for:

Acceptance

Affection

Anger

Annoyance

Apathy

Anxiety

Awe

Boredom

Compassion

Contempt

Curiosity

Depression

Desire

Despair

Disappointment

Disgust

Ecstasy

Empathy

Envy

Embarrassment

Euphoria

Fear

Frustration

Gratitude

Grief

Guilt

Happiness

Hatred

Hope

Horror

Hostility

Hysteria

Joy

Jealousy

Loathing
Love
Pity
Pride
Rage
Regret
Remorse
Sadness
Shame
Suffering
Surprise
Wonder
Worry

The sympathy-empathy process works for everything.

EX:

If a significant other feels anxiety about taking a test, then we (because of understanding) move towards offering something towards alleviating the anxiety. We sometimes offer counsel or even the occasional "Pat-on-the-back."

In writing, using emotions can provide a definite advantage in helping to persuade your audience towards your thesis. Here are some ideas:

1) Make yourself, and your subject matter human. That is, connect your subject matter to everyday human experience. Even very mundane (or everyday) things can be particularly effective.

EX:

If you are talking about how pollution affects the environment, then you might connect to the reader by mentioning something related (such as Coughing). Use this idea to inspire sympathy and empathy towards your topic (such as, No one likes to cough; it hurts; it leaves a general feeling of fatigue; and, we really don't like it... Could you imagine having to wade through smog and a thick cloud of dust without feeling the overwhelming need to cough? Those particles are invading your space...).

2) Use vivid descriptions, and make things realistic.

Nothing in text is real, until we see how the words give it life. In other words, use strong descriptive words to describe things which need to be charged emotionally.

EX:

The old Motorcycle

Vs

The dirty old, two-wheel death-trap.

Vs

The donor cycle.

(Notice how the last two descriptions help to invest something like a motorcycle with strong feelings of dread).

3) Use strong examples. Strong examples help us to see the values and hazards in anything. The stronger the better.

4) Use hypothetical examples, if needed to make a point.

If you find yourself struggling to find an example, then make one for yourself. Paint a picture for the audience. Use a hypothetical situation to construct your example.

EX: (Internet Privacy)

Privacy on the internet is a major concern for many people. Can you imagine what might happen if a government entity monitored everything you browsed? Heck, you could probably go to jail just for looking at a risqué picture now and then. You might be labeled as incident if people lose their privacy rights.