

Ethos

Ethos Definition

In [rhetoric](#), ethos represents credibility, or an ethical appeal, which involves [persuasion](#) by the [character](#) involved.

Origin of Ethos

The term has its roots in Aristotle's "ingredients of persuasion," or "appeals." He divides means of persuasion into three distinct [categories](#): ethos, [pathos](#), and [logos](#). He says in his treatise *On Rhetoric*:

"Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. [...] Persuasion is achieved by the [speaker](#)'s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible."

It is a means of convincing others of the character or credibility of the persuader. It is natural for us to accept the credibility of people whom we hold in reverence.

In an [argument](#), it is of utmost value for a speaker or a writer to impress upon listeners and readers the idea that is worth listening to. In other words, the credibility of a speaker or a writer relies on his or her authority on the subject matter, as well as on how much he or she is liked and deemed worthy of respect.

Ethos and Ad Hominem Argument

In an attempt to confirm his credibility, a writer or speaker will make use of a typical type of argument called an "[ad hominem](#) argument." It is an argument "against the man," which undermines the ethos of a speaker or a writer in opposition. It is a strategy in which a speaker or a writer attacks

the character or personality of an opponent speaker or writer, rather than criticizing the matter of his or her [point of view](#). Such an argument, however, is generally thought to be a logical [fallacy](#). Nevertheless, it can prove to be exceptionally successful and is fairly common in politics.

Examples of Ethos in Literature

Classification of ethos may be based on its position, such as the following examples of ethos.

Example #1:

Choice of words can confirm ethos with customers:

“Our expertise in roofing contracting is evidenced, not only by our 100 years in the business and our staff of qualified technicians, but in the decades of satisfied customers who have come to expect nothing but the best.”

The advertisers try to build up their credibility with their customers by repeatedly mentioning the experience they have in the field, and the technical expertise of their staff.

Example #2:

“Doctors all over the world recommend this type of treatment.”

People tend to believe the opinions of doctors in the matter of medical treatments.

Example #3:

“John is a forensics and ballistics expert, working for the federal government for many years. If anyone’s qualified to determine the murder weapon, it’s him.”

Here, John is put forth as the most qualified person to determine the murder weapon – based on his ethos in working for the federal government as a forensic and ballistics expert

Example #4:

“If his years as a soldier taught him anything, it’s that caution is the best policy in this sort of situation.”

A soldier’s opinion is more credible than an ordinary man’s opinion in violent situations.

Example #5:

“My three decades of experience in public service, my tireless commitment to the people of this [community](#), and my willingness to reach across the aisle and cooperate with the opposition, make me the ideal candidate for your mayor.”

The public can easily be persuaded by giving them some knowledge about a candidate’s past experience, past actions, and preferred policies.

Example #6:

Ethos examples in TV ads are not only expressed in words. For instance, in a commercial for toothpaste, an actor puts on a white lab coat and talks about how that particular toothpaste is good for teeth. By putting on a white lab coat, an actor looks like a doctor, and thus gains credibility as people consider a doctor’s remarks to be more credible than an actor’s.

Function of Ethos

The above explanations and examples of ethos reveal the following facts about this device:

Ethos confirms the credibility of a writer or a speaker, and thus they become trustworthy in the eyes of listeners and readers who, as a result are persuaded by the arguments.

Ethos of a speaker or a writer is created largely by the choice of words he or she chooses to convince listeners or readers.

Being an expert on the subject matter determines his or her ethos.