

The Rhetorical Triangle

The rhetorical triangle is a theoretical tool that can help you think about important aspects of any writing project. It attempts to provide a visual that illustrates the relationships between writer, audience, and subject. This handout will break down the relationships between the elements of the rhetorical triangle.

Writer to Subject

The writer of an academic paper should approach the subject with a high level of integrity and, usually, objectivity. Research the subject thoroughly to ensure that you know what you should and can speak about with authority.

Subject to Writer

Be aware of how a given subject affects you as a person. It can be satisfying and valuable to approach issues that you find personally meaningful, but be sure to maintain the appropriate tone and approach.

Audience to Subject

Your audience will approach the topic and content of your paper with their own biases, knowledge sets, and expectations. The best thing you can do to influence their experience with the material is to consider the way you shape your subject to your audience. See the Subject to Audience relationship below.

Subject to Audience

Obviously, the success of your paper hinges substantially on the Subject

Rhetorical Appeals

To some extent, all papers and presentations are persuasive. When you write an essay or give a speech, you are asking the audience to give you credit for your integrity and authority, to accept your message as meaningful, to pay attention, to care, and to consider the ramifications of your message. Even if you do not explicitly request some action, you negotiate one end of a transaction between yourself and your audience that is essentially persuasive.

These are the Greek appeals, the three traditional strategies of eliciting the audience responses you seek.