

Successful students in an advanced course such as Advanced Placement English Language and Composition should be able to perform three tasks:

1. **Analysis.** A close examination of texts, with the awareness of a writer's purpose and the techniques the writer uses to achieve it.
2. **Argument.** A discourse intended to persuade an audience through reasons and/or evidence.
3. **Synthesis.** A bringing together of several texts, both written and visual, to form a coherent essay.

To do these tasks effectively, you should understand the rhetorical techniques of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as have insight into modern perspectives on rhetoric and argument. This chapter focuses on using ancient rhetorical techniques for analysis. Chapter 2 covers modern approaches to argument and synthesis.

In this chapter, you will learn some tools of rhetoric as you analyze a modern piece of persuasive writing, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This powerful essay demonstrates King's masterful application of rhetorical techniques.

About "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

In April 1963, the civil rights leader and clergyman Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, for leading anti-segregation protests. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail," dated April 16, is an open letter to eight white clergymen from Alabama. In it, King responds to a statement by these clergymen that expressed their belief that the battle against segregation should be fought in the courts and not in the streets. The letter was published in *The Christian Century* on June 12, 1963. For the full text, see <http://www.thekingcenter.org/prog/non/Letter.pdf>

The Five Canons of Rhetoric

The basic outline of classical rhetoric is composed of five categories, or "canons": • invention

- arrangement
- style
- memory
- delivery

Memory and delivery are concerned primarily with oral or spoken rhetoric and will not be treated in this chapter. Invention, arrangement, and style, however, are relevant to both oral and written rhetoric. You will examine these three canons in depth.

Invention

Invention is the process of coming up with ideas for speaking or writing. According to Aristotle, the great rhetorician of ancient Greece, under the heading of invention are three "proofs" or appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Ethos is the character or credibility of the speaker/writer.

Logos is the content of the written or spoken message.

Pathos is the emotional appeal to the audience by the speaker or writer.

Aristotle calls these proofs "artistic" because they are under the control of the speaker or writer, who creates them in the minds of the audience.

Aristotle points out that these three *artistic proofs* need to work together in balance for the speaker or writer to

achieve maximum persuasive effect. People use their hearts as well as their minds in making decisions, and these three proofs are tools for both analyzing and creating effective arguments.

Ethos

Ethos is an appeal based on the character or credibility of the speaker/writer. In "Letter from Birmingham Jail," how does King establish his credibility, his character? Instead of beginning the letter with the impersonal "Dear Sir," or "To Whom it May Concern," King opens with "My Dear Fellow Clergymen." The greeting is warm, but it is also more than that. By addressing his audience as fellow clergymen, he is reminding them that they are in fact equals, that they all work in the same profession, and that they all share a common ground.

King says he seldom takes the time to respond to criticism, but he makes an exception in this case because these are "men of genuine good will" and their "criticisms are sincerely set forth." The clergymen have accused King of being an outsider coming in to stir up trouble, and King uses the ethos appeal in three ways to respond to this accusation:

1. He points out that he is acting not as an individual but as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which has an affiliate organization in Birmingham. The local chapter invited him to "engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary."
2. King says that, like the prophets of the Old Testament and the New Testament, he goes wherever there is injustice. By citing scripture, he is appealing to the religious background and shared values of the clergymen, his audience.
3. King observes that it no longer makes sense to talk about an "outside agitator," because
"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

These three points establish that King is one of them, not an outsider, and therefore his words should be credible. King goes on to establish his character for his audience by pointing out the four basic steps of his nonviolent campaign. He is trying to convince his readers that he did not take these actions impulsively; but that they were the result of a four-step process. The steps, in King's words are

1. "collection of facts to determine whether injustice exists"
2. "negotiation"
3. "self-purification"
4. "direct action"

He wants his audience to see him as a person who carefully weighs all options before taking action.

As King concludes his letter, he makes further use of ethos. He apologizes for having taken so much of the audience's precious time, ironically noting that he has lots of time in jail. He goes on to beg forgiveness for any overstatement and hopes the letter finds the clergymen "strong in the faith." In his conclusion, he is again establishing that his character is the same as theirs because they share the same profession and have a shared common ground.

Logos

King's ethos is further established through his use of logical argumentation, logos. In Greek, *logos* means "word," the content of the argument. King answers each of the clergymen's arguments pragmatically and ethically. To illustrate King's response, it is useful to reduce the clergymen's arguments into a logical structure. Their objections can be restated in the following manner:

- "Outsiders" should not be leading local protests (major premise).
- King is an "outsider" (minor premise).
- Therefore, King should not be protesting (conclusion).

Syllogism

Arranged this way, those three statements are an example of a logical **syllogism**, which is a chain of reasoning moving from general, universal principles to specific instances.

While King is establishing his credibility, his ethos, he also responds to the clergymen's argument pragmatically, by countering their minor premise, that King is an outsider. He points out that he was invited by local leaders to assist in the protest and he is president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Therefore he is not an outsider.

Next King addresses the major premise ("Outsiders" should not be leading local protests) from an ethical point of view. He states that the Apostle Paul and the Old Testament prophets went wherever there was a need, wherever God sent them. He further writes that all communities in the modern world are interrelated:

"Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial 'outside agitator' idea."

Enthymemes

Aristotle states that under logos, or the content of the message, the two most powerful tools are the enthymeme and the example. Everyone knows what an example is, but the enthymeme, while used by all of us every day, is a little-known concept outside the realm of rhetorical studies. The **enthymeme** is a shortened syllogism that serves the purpose of a more practical and expedient way to argue. A well-known example of a syllogism turned into an enthymeme is the following:

- All people are mortal (major premise).
- Aristotle was a person (minor premise).
- Therefore Aristotle was mortal (conclusion).

Aristotle's syllogism, restructured as an enthymeme, would be the following:

Aristotle was mortal because he was a person.

Left out of the enthymeme is the major premise, or the universal principle that *All people are mortal*.

In an argument, the speaker or writer can leave out the universal principle because everyone would agree that all people are mortal. This principle does not need to be stated. It is an assumption shared by everyone. Therefore, enthymemes have great practical value in argumentation. However, an argument might be vulnerable if the audience does not accept the unstated principle that supports the argument.

The clergymen's syllogism, containing a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion, can be restated as an enthymeme in this way:

King should not be leading local protests, because he is an outsider.

This enthymeme leaves out the major premise that "outsiders" should not be leading local protests. The clergymen assume that this is a universal principle that supports their argument. King does not accept their unstated principle and thus finds a weakness in their argument. Addressing it effectively, he writes,

"Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial 'outside agitator' idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds."

Using Syllogisms and Enthymemes in Arguments

Syllogisms are used primarily in a logic course, but are rarely used in real-world argumentation. They are cumbersome and impractical, and, if we had to lay everything out in a syllogistic pattern, we would complete very few arguments. On the other hand, the enthymeme, a kind of shortened syllogism, has great practical value, and writers use them every day.

When you analyze arguments, an important step is finding the enthymemes and the unstated principles that support the enthymemes. An argument's vulnerable point is often that unstated principle. An argument's acceptability to an audience hinges on the audience's acceptance of that unstated principle, and a sympathetic audience is willing to accept unstated principles because they hold those principles in common with the speaker or writer. With a neutral or hostile audience, however, the speaker/ writer must work harder to gain the audience's acceptance of unstated principles. Therefore, the writer, like King, must understand the audience's values, beliefs, and priorities in order to use enthymemes successfully.

Combining Enthymeme and Logos

King next uses logos in the letter to address the issue of breaking the law. King did break the law, a court-ordered injunction against demonstrations, and he writes of this irony:

"Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws."

This argument is the crux of the letter, and King devotes eight paragraphs to justifying his position. The clergymen's argument runs as follows:

- It is always wrong to break the law (major premise).
- King broke the law (minor premise).
- Therefore, King is wrong (conclusion).

As an enthymeme, this syllogism could be restated as follows:

King is wrong because he broke the law.

In this instance, King cannot dispute the minor premise that he broke the law. He did break the law, and he admits it. Changing his tactics, he addresses the unstated principle of the clergymen's position that it is always wrong to break the law. King claims that there are just laws and unjust laws and that we have a "legal" and a "moral responsibility to obey just laws" and "a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws."

King next distinguishes between just and unjust laws. He makes three points:

"A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law."

"An unjust law is a code that ... a majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself."

"A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that ... had no part in enacting or devising the law."

Because of the three distinctions that King draws between just and unjust laws, he concludes that the segregation laws, and specifically laws against his public demonstrations, are unjust.

King then bolsters his argument by citing both biblical and historical figures who broke unjust laws. For example, the early Christians were fed to the lions or burned as candles for refusing to obey the unjust Roman law that required them to renounce their Christian faith. He also mentions Socrates, the patriots of the Boston Tea Party, and the Germans who disobeyed Hitler as examples of individuals who broke unjust laws. By using both biblical and historical references here, King appeals specifically to the clergymen and more broadly to the general public. He continues to establish his ethos as a traditionalist, not as an "extremist."

The clergymen, however, characterize King's "activity in Birmingham as extreme." To turn the clergymen's accusation into an enthymeme, it would read:

King is wrong because his actions are those of an extremist.

The unstated principle behind this enthymeme is *Extremism is wrong*.

King first responds directly to the accusation that he is an extremist. He points out that his voice is a moderate one in the civil rights movement, between the radical voice of Elijah Muhammad and the conservative voices of older African Americans who have "adjusted to segregation." King states,

"... we need emulate neither the 'do-nothingism' of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalists. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest."

King then addresses the unstated principle supporting the enthymeme: "extremism is wrong." He lists some of the great, often revered extremists of history—Jesus, Amos, the apostle Paul, Martin Luther, Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson. This is good company to keep if you are an extremist, and he uses the rhetorical technique of identification in aligning himself with such highly respected leaders.

Pathos

Logos appeals to the intellect. Pathos is an appeal to the emotions of the audience. People tend to follow their hearts more so than they do their minds, and King could have provided a display of emotional fireworks in his discussion of the evils of segregation. Instead, he spoke more from a logical and ethical perspective. Yet he presented this with passion:

But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see the tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking in agonizing pathos: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" men and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title of "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

King could have filled his letter with emotion-packed examples of civil rights abuse, but he writes the majority of

the letter as a more reasoned and principled argument. In the preceding paragraph, he uses the rhetorical appeal of pathos by piling emotional example upon emotional example in a concentrated way.

We will return to this paragraph in our discussion of style.

Arrangement

Invention, or the process of coming up with ideas to speak or write about, is the first step in forming an argument. Once you know what you are going to say, you must next decide in what order to present your ideas. This process is known as **arrangement**.

King's letter follows nicely the arrangement of the traditional classical oration, a form most commonly associated with the great Roman orator Cicero. These are the parts:

- **Exordium:** Introduction. The writer gains the audience's attention.
- **Narratio:** Background information. The writer gives the facts of the case.
- **Propositio:** The proposition. The writer presents his or her thesis, or main idea.
- **Partitio:** The main headings or topics. The writer outlines what will follow.
- **Confirmatio:** Arguments supporting the proposition. The writer gives evidence to prop up the thesis or main idea.
- **Refutatio:** The anticipation and refutation of counter-arguments. The writer answers in advance any objections that opponents may raise.
- **Peroratio:** Conclusion. The writer summarizes the chief arguments, calls for a specific response, and makes a final emotional appeal.

In classical oratory, not all parts are used in every speech. Often, the partitio is not stated directly because it is implicit in the document. Let's look at the King letter in terms of its classical structure.

Exordium

King opens with the *exordium*, or introduction, "My Dear Fellow Clergymen." As you already know, King uses this introduction to establish his ethos, build common ground, set a warm tone, and gain the acceptance of his ideas by his audience.

Narratio

The *narratio*, or background, is next. In this section, King addresses the current situation in Birmingham and attempts to explain why he is writing now. He is responding to an opportunity created by the letter from the clergymen, and he continues to build his ethos, or character, in this section of the letter by pointing out the following:

"If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence ... and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms."

Even in providing background information, he uses the *narratio* to convince the clergymen to view him as a patient and reasonable man.

Propositio

The *propositio* is King's main idea or thesis. Having gone through the four steps of preparation for nonviolent protest (collection of facts, negotiation, self-purification, direct action), King asserts, "We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action."

Confirmatio/Refutatio

King combines the *confirmatio* and *refutatio*, the main argument and the counterargument, by listing the clergymen's objections to his activities and showing how they are wrong. This is the longest section of the letter

and presents the logos of King's argument. He discusses just and unjust laws, justifies his actions on moral and ethical grounds, and responds to accusations that he is an extremist. Anticipating his audience's arguments and addressing them both demonstrates his perception and deals with their arguments before they have raised them.

Peroratio

The *peroratio* is the conclusion. In his conclusion, King expresses confidence in the future because the destinies of black and white people are tied together in striving for the common goal of freedom for all people. Then he adds a personal touch. He comes full circle, starting out with the personal "My Dear Fellow Clergymen" and ending with his hope that the letter finds the clergymen "strong in the faith" and his desire to meet them one day as "fellow clergymen."

Style

Invention is the process of coming up with ideas, and arrangement is putting those ideas in order. In using **style**, a writer must decide how to express those ideas. Stylistic choices can contribute to the writer's ethos, or character, make the content, or logos, of the message more memorable and artistic, and enhance pathos, or the emotional appeal of the writer's message.

King was a master of style. One could write a book just on the stylistic choices he made in his writing. In the following discussion of style, we analyze only the passage quoted previously from "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to demonstrate pathos. For our purposes, we focus on two of King's most commonly used tools:

- the periodic sentence
- figurative language

The Periodic Sentence

While King makes use of both short and long sentences in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," the long passage about the evils of segregation is only one sentence, consisting of 331 words. Commonly used in the ancient world, this is called *aperiodic*, or very long, sentence that is not grammatically complete until the end of the sentence.

There are two types of periodic sentence:

- one that delays the predicate until the end of the sentence
- one that delays both the subject and the predicate until the end

This delaying tactic in a periodic sentence builds anticipation, suspense, and excitement as the reader finally reaches the climax upon reading the end of the sentence.

King's pathos-packed periodic sentence delays both the subject and the predicate. After the first clause, "But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will," King then provides a long list of dependent clauses that end with the delayed subject and predicate in the main clause, "then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait."

But **when** you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim;

when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity;

when you see the vast majority of your 20 million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in

the midst of an affluent society;

when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see the tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people;

when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking in agonizing pathos: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?";

when you take a cross country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you;

when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" men and "colored";

when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title of "Mrs.";

when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a 25 Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments;

when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--

then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

Figurative Language

King uses figurative language throughout his letter, including metaphor, antithesis, alliteration, and anaphora.

Metaphor

Metaphor can best be described as a comparison between unlike things. Referring again to King's periodic sentence in "Letter from Birmingham Jail," we find the protesters characterized as dwelling in an "airtight cage of poverty," (line 6). Clearly, they are not in literal cages, but the imagery of the cage carries enormous visual power. It equates poverty with imprisonment.

Another metaphor from this passage is "ominous clouds of inferiority" that appear "in her little mental sky" (lines 11-12) when a six-year-old child cries upon being told that she cannot attend an amusement park because she is black. The tears and feelings of inferiority are equated with ominous clouds.

Antithesis

Antithesis--the juxtaposition of opposites, often in parallel structure--is a powerful device. Note the antithesis in the phrase "harried by day and haunted by night" (line 24) that King uses to describe living as a black person in American society at that time. Note also the antithesis in the phrase "inner fears and outer resentments" (line 26) that King uses to contrast the internal feelings and the external reality of a black person facing racism in America.

Alliteration

King makes extensive use of *alliteration*, which is the repetition of initial identical sounds in successive words. Here are two examples of King's alliteration in this passage:

- "curse, kick, ... and even kill your black brothers ... " (lines 3-4)
- "tongue twisted and your speech stammering ... " (line 7)

The first example shows alliteration of the *k* and *b* sounds, and the second example shows alliteration of the *t* and *s* sounds.

Anaphora

Anaphora is the use of repeated words at the beginnings of phrases, clauses, and sentences. King uses the phrase "when you" nine times to introduce clauses in his periodic sentence. In another pathos-laden passage, King again uses anaphora to highlight his point:

I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force
if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes.
I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen
if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail;
if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls;
if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys;
if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together.

King's stylistic use of the periodic sentence and figurative language enhance the rhetorical impact of his argument that nonviolent protest is the correct course of action in Birmingham. The devices also reveal him as a creative thinker, an excellent writer, and one of the most persuasive figures of the twentieth century.

While we have presented these ancient rhetorical tools as a way of analyzing a modern text, they can also be used for composing a modern argument as you make your way through the course in English Language and Composition. Practicing the use of these tools will eventually help you when you take the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition exam.

In the next chapter, we will look at modern approaches to making and synthesizing arguments.

Chapter One Review Questions

1. What is invention in rhetoric?
2. What is ethos?
3. What is logos?
4. What is pathos?
5. How do ethos, logos, and pathos work together to persuade an audience?
6. What is a syllogism?
7. What is an enthymeme?
8. How do you derive an enthymeme from a syllogism?
9. Why is an enthymeme more useful than a syllogism in analyzing and constructing an argument?
10. What is arrangement, and why is it important in analyzing and constructing arguments?
11. What is style?
12. What effect does style have in communicating an argument to an audience?