An Introduction to Rhetoric
Using the “Available Means”

To many people, the word rhetoric automatically signals that trickery or deception is afoot. They assume that an advertiser is trying to manipulate a consumer, a politician wants to obscure a point, or a spin doctor is spinning. “Empty rhetoric!” is a common criticism—and at times an accusation. Yet the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” At its best, rhetoric is a thoughtful, reflective activity leading to effective communication, including the rational exchange of opposing viewpoints. In Aristotle’s day and ours, those who understand and can use the available means to appeal to an audience of one or many find themselves in a position of strength. They have the tools to resolve conflicts without confrontation, to persuade readers or listeners to support their position, or to move others to take action.

Rhetoric is not just for Roman senators in togas. You might use rhetoric to convince a friend that John Coltrane is worth listening to, explain to readers of your blog why *Night of the Living Dead* is the most influential horror movie of all time, or persuade your parents that they should buy you a car. Rhetoric is also not just about speeches. Every essay, political cartoon, photograph, and advertisement is designed to convince you of something. To simplify, we will call all of these things texts because they are cultural products that can be “read,” meaning not just consumed and comprehended, but investigated. We need to be able to “read” between the lines, regardless of whether we’re reading a political ad, a political cartoon, or a political speech. Consider documentary films every decision—such as what lighting to use for an interview, what music to play, what to show and what to leave out—constitutes a rhetorical choice based on what the filmmaker thinks will be most persuasive.

It is part of our job as informed citizens and consumers to understand how rhetoric works so that we can be wary of manipulation or deceit, while appreciating effective and civil communication. And it is essential that each of us communicates as effectively and honestly as possible.

The Rhetorical Situation

Let’s start out by looking at a speech that nearly everyone has read or heard: the speech that baseball player Lou Gehrig gave at an Appreciation Day held in his honor on July 4, 1939. Gehrig had recently learned that he was suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a neurological disorder that has no cure (today it is known as Lou Gehrig’s disease). Although Gehrig was a reluctant speaker, the fans’ chant of “We want Lou” brought him to the podium to deliver one of the most powerful and heartfelt speeches of all time.

*Foreword Speech*

Lou Gehrig

“Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about a bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I have been in ballparks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans. Look at these grand men. Which of you wouldn’t consider it the highlight of his career just to associate with them for even one day?

Sure, I’m lucky. Who wouldn’t consider it an honor to have known Jacob Ruppert; also the builder of baseball’s greatest empire, Ed Barrow; to have spent six years with that wonderful little fellow, Miller Huggins; then to have spent the next nine years with that outstanding leader, that smart student of psychology—the best manager in baseball today, Joe McCarthy! Who wouldn’t feel honored to have roomed with such a grand guy as Bill Dickey?

Sure, I’m lucky. When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift—that’s something! When everybody down to the groundkeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies—that’s something!

When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles against your own daughter—that’s something! When you have a father and mother who work all their lives so that you can have an education and build your body—it’s a blessing! When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed—that’s the finest thing!

So I close in saying that I might have been given a bad break, but I have an awful lot to live for! Thank you.”
While in our time the word *rhetoric* may suggest deception, this speech reminds us that rhetoric can serve sincerity as well. No wonder one commentator wrote, "Lou Gehrig's speech almost rocked Yankee Stadium off its feet."

**Occasion, Context, and Purpose**

Why is this an effective speech? First of all, rhetoric is always situational. It has an occasion—the time and place the text was written or spoken. The occasion exists within a specific context—the circumstances, atmosphere, attitudes, and events surrounding the text. Purpose is the goal the speaker wants to achieve. In the case of Gehrig's speech, the occasion is Lou Gehrig Appreciation Day. More specifically, his moment came at home plate between games of a doubleheader. The context is first and foremost Gehrig's recent announcement of his illness and his subsequent retirement, but as is often the case, the context goes well beyond that. Gehrig, known as the Iron Horse, held the record for consecutive games played (2,130) and was one of the greatest sluggers of all time. For such a durable and powerful athlete to fall victim to a disease that strips away strength and coordination seemed an especially cruel fate. Just a couple of weeks earlier, Gehrig was still playing ball; but by the time he gave this speech, he was so weak that his manager had to help him walk out to the mound for the ceremony.

One of Gehrig's chief purposes in delivering this speech is to thank his fans and his teammates, but he also wants to demonstrate that he remains positive: he emphasizes his past luck and present optimism and downplays his illness. He makes a single reference to the diagnosis and does so in the strong, straightforward language of an athlete: he got a "bad break." There is no blame, no self-pity, no plea for sympathy. Throughout, he maintains his focus to thank his fans and teammates for their support and get on with watching the ballgame. Gehrig responds as a true Yankee, not just the team but the can-do Yankee spirit of America, by acknowledging his illness and accepting his fate with dignity, honor, humility, and even a touch of humor.

**The Rhetorical Triangle**

Another important aspect of the rhetorical situation is the relationship among the speaker, audience, and subject. One way to conceptualize the relationship among these elements is through the rhetorical triangle. Some refer to it as the Aristotelian triangle because Aristotle used a triangle to illustrate how these three elements are interrelated. How a speaker perceives the relationships among these elements will go a long way toward determining what he or she says and how he or she says it.

Let's use the rhetorical triangle (see p. 4) to analyze Gehrig's speech.

The speaker is the person or group who creates the text. This might be a politician who delivers a speech, a commentator who writes an article, an artist who draws a political cartoon, or even a company that commissions an advertisement.

Don't think of the speaker solely as a name, but consider a description of who the speaker is in the context of the text. The speaker of the speech we just read is not just Lou Gehrig, but baseball hero and ALS victim Lou Gehrig. Sometimes, there is a slight difference between who the speaker is in real life and the role the speaker plays when delivering the speech. This is called a persona. Personas come from the Greek word for "mask"; it means the face or character that a speaker shows to his or her audience. Lou Gehrig is a famous baseball hero, but in his speech he presents himself as a common man who is modest and thankful for the opportunities he's had.

The audience is the listener, viewer, or reader of a text or performance, but it is important to note that there may be multiple audiences. When making rhetorical decisions, speakers ask what values their audiences hold, particularly whether the audience is hostile, friendly, or neutral and how informed it is on the topic at hand. Sure, Gehrig's audience was his teammates and the fans in the stadium that day, but it was also the teams he played against, the fans listening on the radio, and posterity—us.

The subject is the topic. And the subject should not be confused with the purpose, which is the goal the speaker wants to achieve. Gehrig's subject is his illness, but it is also a catalog of all the lucky breaks that preceded his diagnosis.

**ACTIVITY 5**

Construct and analyze a rhetorical situation for writing a review of a movie, video game, or concert. Be very specific in your analysis: What is your subject? What is your purpose? Who is your audience? What is your relationship to the
In discussing the rhetorical situation surrounding a text, we’ve talked about some of the background that you should consider (like the occasion, context, and purpose) and relationships that are more directly related to the text (like those among the speaker, audience, and subject). One way to remember all of these things is to use the acronym SOAPS, which stands for Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, and Speaker. It’s a mnemonic device that offers a practical way to approach the concept of the rhetorical situation. Think of it as a kind of checklist that helps you organize your ideas rhetorically. Let’s use SOAPS to look at the rhetorical situation in a letter written by Albert Einstein.

Widely considered the greatest scientist of the twentieth century, Einstein (1879–1955) is responsible for the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, and other foundational scientific concepts. He won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921. In 1936, he wrote the following letter to a sixth-grade student, Phyllis Wright, in response to her question: Do scientists pray? And if so, what do they pray for?

**January 24, 1936**

Dear Phyllis,

I have tried to respond to your question as simply as I could. Here is my answer.

Scientific research is based on the idea that everything that takes place is determined by the laws of nature, and therefore this holds for the actions of people. For this reason, a research scientist will hardly be inclined to believe that events could be influenced by a prayer, i.e., by a wish addressed to a supernatural being. However, it must be admitted that our actual knowledge of the laws of nature is only imperfect and fragmentary, so that, actually, the belief in the existence of basic all-embracing laws in Nature also rests on a sort of faith. All the same this faith has been largely justified so far by the success of scientific research.

But on the other hand, every one who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is indeed quite different from the religious feeling of someone more naive.

I hope this answers your question.

Best wishes

Yours,

Albert Einstein

**ACTIVITY 1**

Using SOAPS, analyze the rhetorical situation in the following speech.

**9/11 Speech**

George W. Bush

Good evening,

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom come under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts.

The victims were in airplanes or in their offices—secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers. Moms and dads, friends and neighbors.

Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger.

These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation.
Appeals to Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

Now that we understand how to assess the rhetorical situation, the next step is to use the tools of rhetoric to persuade an audience. Let’s start with what Aristotle called rhetorical appeals. He identified three main appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Ethos

Speakers appeal to ethos (Greek for "character") to demonstrate that they are credible and trustworthy. Think, for example, of a speech discouraging teenagers from drinking. Speakers might appeal to ethos by stressing that they are concerned parents, psychologists specializing in alcoholism or adolescent behavior, or recovering alcoholics themselves. Appeals to ethos often emphasize shared values between the speaker and the audience: when a parent speaks to other parents in the same community, they share a concern for their children's education or well-being.

Pathos

Pathos (Greek for "feeling") appeals to the audience's emotions. It evokes feelings of compassion, fear, or anger, often through the use of imagery or vivid descriptions. For example, a speech to raise funds for a charity might describe the suffering of those it helps, invoking the audience's empathy.

Logos

Logos (Greek for "word" or "reason") appeals to the audience's intellect. It includes logical arguments, evidence, and data. A speech about the dangers of global warming might present scientific studies and economic analyses to support its claims.

Lou Gehrig brings the ethos of being a legendary athlete to his speech, yet in it he establishes a different kind of ethos—that of a regular guy and a good sport who shares the audience’s love of baseball and family. And like them, he has known good luck and bad breaks.

In some instances, a speaker's reputation immediately establishes ethos. For example, the speaker may be a scholar in Russian history and economics as well as the nation’s secretary of state. Or the speaker may be “the dog whisperer,” a well-known animal behavioralist. In these instances, the speaker brings ethos to the text; but in other cases, a speaker establishes ethos through what he or she says in the text by sounding reasonable, acknowledging other opinions, or being thoughtful and well informed. The speaker’s ethos—expertise, knowledge, experience, sincerity, common purpose with the audience, or a combination of these factors—gives the audience a reason for listening to this person on this subject.

Automatic Ethos

Let’s look at an example of how a speaker’s title or status automatically brings ethos to the rhetorical situation. On September 3, 1939, King George VI gave a radio address to the British people declaring that the country was at war with Germany. The very fact that he is king gives him a certain degree of automatic ethos to speak on the subject of war, yet King George also emphasizes the shared values that unite everyone.

The King’s Speech (September 3, 1939)

King George VI

In this grave hour, perhaps the most fateful in history, I send to every household of my peoples, both at home and overseas, this message, spoken with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.

For the second time in the lives of most of us, we are at war. Over and over again, we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between ourselves and those who are now our enemies, but it has been in vain. We have been forced into a conflict, for we are called, with every ally to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilized order in the world.

It is a principle which permits a state in the selfish pursuit of power to disregard its treaties and its solemn pledges, which sanctions the use of force or threat of force against the sovereignty and independence of other states. Such a principle, stripped of its disguise, is surely the more primitive doctrine that might be right, and if this principle were established throughout the world, the freedom of our own country and of the whole British Commonwealth of nations would be in danger. But for more than six, the peoples of the world would be kept in bondage of fear, and
all hopes of settled peace and of the security of justice and liberty among nations, would be wrecked. This is the ultimate issue which confronts us. For the sake of all we ourselves hold dear, and of the world order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge.

It is to this high purpose that I now call my people to arms and my people across the seas who will make our cause their own. I call them to stand and fight and win in this time of trial. The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield, but we can only do the right as we see the right and bravely commit our cause to God. For one and all we keep absolutely faithful to it, ready for whatever service or sacrifice it may demand, than with God's help, we shall prevail.

...We will... and keep us all.

At the outset, King George expresses his commitment to his people, his subject, knowing that he is asking them to make their own commitment and sacrifice. As their king he is expected to present himself as a common man, yet he establishes the ethos of a common experience. He tells them he speaks "with the same depth of feeling... as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself."

He uses "we" in order to speak as one of the people. He acknowledges that "we are at war" for "the second time in the lives of most of us." He also uses the inclusive first person plural possessive as he identifies "our enemies," not Britain's enemies. This personalization and emphasis on the people themselves is followed by several sentences that are much more abstract in discussion of a "principle." At the end of that discussion, King George reinforces the nation's shared values. "For the sake of all we ourselves hold dear, and of the world order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge."

Later on, he calls the citizenry to "this high purpose" and refers to them not as citizens or subjects but as "my people," a description that suggests a closeness rather than emphasizing the distance between a ruler and his subjects. The penultimate paragraph's references to "God" are another reminder of their shared beliefs: they worship the same god and "commit [their] cause" to him. King George brings ethos to his speech by virtue of his position, but when he assumes his audience that "we shall prevail," rather than saying that England or Britain shall prevail, he is building ethos based on their common plight and common goals. They are all in this together, from king to commoner.

Building Ethos

So, what do you do if you’re not a king? Writers and speakers often have to build their ethos by establishing their credentials or background to their readers, or by emphasizing shared values. You’re more likely to listen to someone who is qualified to speak on a subject or who shares your interests and concerns. Following is the opening from "The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria" by Judyth Oriz Cofrin. Note how she draws on her own Puerto Rican heritage as she describes her experience with prejudice as a young Latina.

From The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria

Judy Oriz Conrea

On a bus trip to London from Oxford University where I was serving on a graduate student committee one summer, a young man, obviously fresh from a pub, spotted me and us if struck by inspiration went down on his knees in the aisle. With both hands over his heart he broke into an Irish song's rendition of "Maria" from West Side Story. My politely amused fellow passengers gave his lively voice the sound of gentle applause it deserved. Though I was not quite as amused, I managed my version of an English smile, a show of thanks, no extreme contortions of the facial muscles—I was at this time of my life practicing reserve and cool. Oh, that British control, how I coveted it. But Maria had followed me to London, reminding me of a primal fact of my life: you can leave the island, master the English language, and travel as far as you can, but if you are a Latina, especially one like me who so obviously belongs to Rita Moreno's gene pool, the Island travels with you.

This is sometimes a very good thing—it may win you that extra minute of someone's attention. But with some people, the same things can make you an island—not so much a tropical paradise as an Alcatraz, a place nobody wants to visit. As a Puerto Rican girl growing up in the United States and seeing like most children its "belong," I seized the stereotype that my Hispanic appearance called forth from many people I met.

As Cofrin develops her argument about common stereotypes of Latin women, she establishes her authority to speak on the subject of racial prejudice through her background (Puerto Rican, Latina), education (graduate student at Oxford University), and experience (firsthand encounter with ethnic bias)—and thus she gains her reader's trust.

CONCLUDE

Think of a situation in which you are presenting your view on the same subject to two different audiences. For instance, you might be presenting your ideas on ways to stop bullying (1) to the School Board or a group of parents and (2) to a group of middle schoolers. Discuss how you would establish ethos in each situation.
Logos

Speakers appeal to logos, or reason, by offering clear, rational ideas. Appealing to logos (Greek for "embodied thought") means thinking logically—having a clear main idea and using specific details, examples, facts, statistics, or expert testimony to back it up. Creating a logical argument can involve defining the terms of the argument and identifying connections such as causality. It can also require considerable research. Evidence from expert sources and authorities, facts, and quantifiable data can be very persuasive if selected carefully and presented accurately. Sometimes, writers and speakers add charts and graphs as a way to present such information, but often they weave this information into their argument.

Although our first reading or hearing, Lou Gehrig's speech may seem largely emotional, it is actually based on irrefutable logic. He starts with the thesis that he is "the luckiest man on the face of the earth" and supports it with two points: (1) the love and kindness he's received in his seventeen years of playing baseball, and (2) a list of great people who have been his friends, family, and teammates in that time.

Conceding and Refuting

One way to appeal to logos is to acknowledge a counterargument—that is, to anticipate objections or opposing views. While you might worry that raising an opposing view might poke a hole in your argument, you'll be vulnerable if you ignore ideas that run counter to your own. In acknowledging a counterargument, you agree (concede) that an opposing argument may be true or reasonable, but then you deny (refute) the validity of all or part of the argument. This combination of concession and refutation actually strengthens your own argument; it appeals to logos by demonstrating that you understand viewpoint other than your own, you've thought through other evidence, and you stand by your view.

In longer, more complex texts, the writer may address the counterargument in greater depth, but Lou Gehrig simply concedes what some of his listeners may think—that his bad break is a cause for discouragement or despair. Gehrig refutes this by saying that he has "an awful lot to live for." Granted, he implies his concession rather than stating it outright, but in addressing it at all, he acknowledges a contrasting way of viewing his situation—that is, a counterargument.

Let's look at an example by Alice Waters, a famous chef, food activist, and author. Writing in the Nation, she argues for acknowledgment of the full consequence of what she calls "our national diet."

from Slow Food Nation

Alice Waters

It's no wonder our national addiction is as short: We get Hammered with the message that everything in our lives should be fast, cheap and easy—especially food.

from King Coal: Re Imagining in China

George Washington

Half of the 6 billion tons of coal burned globally each year is burned in China. A spokesman for the Sierra Club, which in recent years has helped to block construction of 1,500 proposed coal-fired plants in America, says, "This is reining everything we've accomplished." America, says environmentalists, is exporting global warming.

Can something really be exported if it supposedly affects the entire planet? Never mind. America's partners in this crime against nature, if such it is, One Australian company proposes to build the Coalon facility; another has signed a $50 billion contract to supply Chinese power plants with Australian coal. The Times says ships—billed hydroconforms—headed to the coal this year, up from 385 million in 2001. China, which
Pathos

Pathos is an appeal to emotions, values, desires, and hopes, or, on the one hand, or fears and prejudices, on the other. Although an argument that appeals exclusively to the emotions is by definition weak—it is generally propagandistic in purpose and more polemical than persuasive—an effective speaker or writer understands the power of evoking an audience's emotions by using such tools as figurative language, personal anecdotes, and vivid images.

Lydia Gehrig uses the infernal first person (I) quite masterfully, which reinforces the friendly sense that this is a guy who is speaking on no one's behalf but his own. He also chooses words with strong positive connotations, grand, generous, wonderful, honored, blessing. He uses one image—power of strength—that may seem very original but strikes the right note. It is a well-known description that his audience understands—in fact, they probably have used it themselves. But, of course, the most striking appeal to pathos is the poignant contrast between Gehrig's horrible diagnosis and his public display of courage.

Let's look at a more direct example of pathos. As a vice presidential candidate, Richard Nixon gave a speech in 1952 defending himself against allegations of inappropriate use of campaign funds. In it, he related this anecdote, which is the reason that the speech will forever be known as "the Checkers speech":

from The Checkers Speech

Richard Nixon

One other thing I probably should tell you, because if I don't they'll probably be saying this about me, too. We did get something, a gift, after the election. A man down in Texas heard that [his wife] on the radio mentioned the fact that our two youngsters

would like to have a dog. And believe it or not, the day before we left on this campaign trip we got a message from Union Station in Baltimore, saying they had a package for us. We went down to get it. You know what it was? It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate that he'd sent all the way from Texas, black and white, spotted. And our little girl, Tricia, the six-year-old, named it "Checkers." And you know, the kids, like all kids, love the dog, and I just want to say this, right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're going to keep it.

This example of pathos tugs at every possible heartstring: puppies, children, warm paternal feelings, the excitement of getting a surprise package. All of these images fill us with empathetic feelings toward Nixon, our emotions are engaged far more than our reason. Despite never directly addressing the campaign funds issue, Nixon's speech was a profound success with voters, who sent enough dog food to feed Checkers for a year! And yet, history has come to view this part of the speech as badly manipulative.

Images and Pathos

You can often appeal to pathos by using striking imagery in your writing, or it's no surprise that images often serve the same purpose. A striking photograph, for example, may lend an emotional component that greatly strengthens an argument.

Advertisements certainly make the most of photos and other visual images to entice or persuade audiences. In the accompanying example, which appeared in both the New York Times and the New Yorker magazine in 2000, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) makes a dramatic assertion, an appeal to pathos through both visual images and written text, as a call to support its organization. According to its mission statement, the ACLU seeks "to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone in this country."

The headline below the pictures reads:

It happens every day on America's highways. Police stop drivers based on their skin color rather than for the way they are driving. For example, in Florida 88% of those stopped and searched were black and Hispanic, while they constituted only 9% of all drivers. These humiliating and illegal searches are violations of the Constitution and must be fought. Help us defend your rights. Support the ACLU.

The advertisement does not name the two men pictured, assuming the audience will recognize several civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. on the left and convicted serial killer Charles Manson on the right. The headline on the top is an assertion that is bound to evoke a visceral response. The written text below the photos makes a series of logical appeals by pointing out that racial profiling accounts for the police stopping drivers on the basis of their race, and by offering statistical evidence from the state of Florida. The words appeal, however, is to pathos through the juxtaposition of a hero with a madman presented in a form reminiscent of a "wanted" poster.
THE MAN ON THE LEFT
IS 75 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE STOPPED
BY THE POLICE WHILE DRIVING THAN
THE MAN ON THE RIGHT.

Humor and Pathos

Another way to appeal to pathos is through humor. Since we like to hear things that we already believe are true, our first reaction to anything that challenges our beliefs is often negative: we think "that's all wrong!" and get defensive or outright offended. Humor works rhetorically by wrapping a challenge to our beliefs in something that makes us feel good—a joke—and thus makes us more receptive to the new idea.

This goes not just for new ideas, but for the people who are presenting those ideas. Whether it is gentle tongue-in-check teasing or bitter irony, humor may help a writer to make a point without, for instance, seeming to preach to the smugness or take himself or herself too seriously. Political commentator Ruth Marcus employs gentle humor in the following essay from 2010 in which she addresses the speaker of the House of Representatives and objects to the members of Congress using electronic devices during hearings and other deliberations. Even the title, a play on words, signals the humorous tone: "Cockberry Congress." Let's look at a few passages:

from Cockberry Congress
Ruth Marcus

Mr. Speaker, please don't.

The current rules bar the use of a "wireless telephones or personal computer on the floor of the House." The new rules, unveiled last week, add three dangerous words. They prohibit any device "that impairs decorum."

In other words, as long as you've turned down your cell phone ringer and you're not strutting around the floor chatting with your broker or helping the kids with their homework, feel free to tap away.

If the Senate is the world's greatest deliberative body, the House is poised to be the world's greatest dawdling one.

A few upshot acknowledgments. First, I'm not one to tear stabs. I have been known to sneak a peek, or two, at my Blackberry during meetings. For a time my daughter had my ringers set to sound like a scratching chicken; when I invariably forgot to switch to silent, the phone would cock during meetings. In short, I have done my share of decorum impairing.

Second, let's not get too dreary about the House floor. John Boehner, the incoming speaker, once passed out campaign checks from tobacco companies there. One of his former colleagues once came to the chamber with a paper bag on his head to demonstrate his supposed embarrassment at fellow lawmakers' overdrafts at the House bank. "Money flows happen on the House floor than a game of Angry Birds—check it out!"—on the Pod.

Nonetheless, lines have to be drawn, and the House floor is not a bad place to draw them. Somehow, it has become acceptable to stroll away in the midst of meetings. Even Emily Post has blurred what once would have been obvious redlines, ruling that "tapping on a handheld device is okay if it's related to what's being discussed."
The larger war may be lost, but not the battle to keep some remaining space in life free of godlessness and its distractions. I'm not talking about religion—just a few minutes of living the ungodly life. There are places—church, school, and yes, the House floor—where multilegging is inappropriate, even disrespectful.

First of all, Marcus structures her criticism as a letter, which obviously is a fiction and not a humorous note right away. Who, after all, would begin a letter to the Speaker of the House by saying, "Most don't? Marcus often works by testing about "decency," yet she makes a serious point about "connectivity" as she exaggerates her fear that "the House is pitiful to be the world's greatest whatever (body)."

Humor is also one of her strategies for establishing ethos in this case, so she says, "I'm not one to throw stones" and admits to checking her own BlackBerry during meetings. Overall, by using a more lightweight approach and not sounding like Ms. Manners, Marcus makes her point about the inappropriate nature of elected officials interacting with their electronic devices while colleagues and others are discussing important issues.

Marcus could have mentioned all manner of examples that illustrate the decline in civility and courtesy in modern life, but readers would likely have dismissed her as old-fashioned or dull. By taking a humorous approach, she appeals to readers' sense of humor as well as their community values: don't we want our elected officials to forge "instantaneous communication" for more thoughtful deliberations when they are making decisions about the laws of the land?

Combining Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

Most authors don't rely on just one type of appeal to persuade their audience; they combine these appeals to create an effective argument. And the appeals themselves are intrinsically bound together: if you lay out your argument logically, that will help to build your ethos. It is only logical to listen to an expert on a subject, so having ethos can help build a foundation for an appeal to logos. It's also possible to build your ethos based on pathos—for example, who better to speak about the pain of losing a loved one than someone who has gone through it? The best political satirists can say things that are both perfectly logical and completely hilarious, thus appealing to both logos and pathos at the same time.

Let's examine a letter that Tania Morrison, the only African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, wrote to then-president Barack Obama endorsing him as the Democratic candidate for president in 2008. The letter was published in the New York Times.

Dear Senator Obama,

This letter represents a feat for me—a public endorsement of a Presidential candidate. I feel driven to tell you why I am writing. One reason is it may help gather others; another is that this is one of those singular moments that nation ignores at their peril. I will not rehearse the multiple crises facing us, but of one thing I am certain: this opportunity for national unity (even revolution) will not come again soon, and I am convinced you are the person to capture it.

May I describe to you my thoughts? I have admired Senator [Hillary] Clinton for years. Her knowledge always seemed to me exhaustive; her negotiation of politics expert. However, I am more compelled by the quality of mind (as for your I can measure it) of a candidate. I cared little for her gender as a source of my admiration, and the idea I did care was based on the fact that no female has ever ruled in America. Only committed or "new-credal" users are allowed into that realm. Nor do I care very much for your...
I would not support you if that was all you had to offer or because it might make me "proud."

In thinking carefully about the strengths of the candidates, I sternly myself when I come to this following conclusion: that in addition to having intelligence, integrity, and a rare authenticity, you exhibit something that has nothing to do with age, experience, race, or gender and something I don’t see in other candidates: That something is a creative imagination which coupled with brilliance equals wisdom. It is too bad if we associate it only with grey hair and old age. Or if we call seeing vision naive. Or If we believe trusting is foolish. Or if we settle for licensing waterfalls for each navigable tree in the forest while ignoring the precious landscapes that feeds and surrounds it. Wisdom is a gift: you can’t train for it, inherit it, learn it in a class, or wear it in a workplace—that access can foster the acquisition of knowledge, but not wisdom.

When I wondered, was the last time this country was guided by such a leader? Someone whose moral center was unshakeable? Someone with courage instead of mere ambition. Someone who understands what it will take to help America realize the virtues it forfeited about itself, what it desperately needs to become in the world?

Our future is ripe, outrageously rich in possibilities. We understand the glory of real letters will require a difficult labor, and some may be so frightened of its birth they will refuse to abandon their nostalgias for the womb.

There have been few presidential leaders in our past, but you are the man for this time.

Good luck to you and us.

Reu Morrison

Let's take a step back. Who is Morrison's audience for this letter? Of course, she claims Senator Obama is, yet it is an open letter printed in a newspaper. Thus, we have a sense that while she does express that she read the letter, she also understands that her public endorsement of her candidate, and not Senator Hillary Clinton, will have an impact on a much larger audience than Obama himself: her audience is the huge national and international readership of the Times, readers who value the viewpoint of a Nobel Prize winner.

Given that audience, Morrison need not establish her ethos as a credible person whose opinion should carry some weight. After all, both Obama and the readers of the New York Times—indeed, readers in general—know her as an award-winning author, someone who has written many novels, a professor at Princeton University, and the winner of a Nobel Prize. She is not, however, a person accustomed to publicly weighing in on political campaigns, so she opens with her announcement that this endorsement is "a first" for her. She does not assume that she has the authority or position to make Senator Obama (or others) listen to her; instead, she asks, deferentially, "May I speak to you my thoughts?" As a woman in her seventies with a proven record as a respected author and thinker, she could demand that Obama listen to her, but she does not; asking a question rather than

Launching into her viewpoint presents herself as courteous and reasonable. The ethos she establishes is as a person who cares deeply for the future of America and is moved to speak out because she believes that the country is at a crossroads ("This is one of those singular moments that nations ignore at their peril").

Although she does not offer facts and figures nor the expert sources, Morrison develops a logical argument. She addresses two counterarguments: (1) Senator Clinton is the better candidate, and (2) her support of Obama is driven primarily by race. In paragraph 3, she concludes and refutes both. She points out that she has "admired" Senator Clinton over the years and offers reasons gender is not, however, among them. She effectively makes that argument and lays out evidence that she would not support Obama purely because of race, saying, "I would not support you if that was all you had to offer or because it might make me proud." In paragraph 4, Morrison provides reasons for her support of Obama. She acknowledges that he is a person of "intellect, intelligence, integrity, and a rare authenticity," yet those qualities are neither her only nor her chief reason for supporting his candidacy. She claims that he sees in him "a creative imagination which coupled with brilliance equals wisdom." Once Morrison makes this point, she addresses another counterargument: that Obama is too young. She refutes that belief by claiming that wisdom is not necessarily a matter of age.

Morrison continues to develop her reasons for supporting Obama as she adds appeals to pathos. By making a series of rhetorical questions, she calls up the shared values of the country; for instance, she asks when the country was actually guided by "someone whose moral center was unshaken." She chooses language likely to evoke emotion, such as her distinction between "courage instead of mere ambition." By the end of the letter, she uses images of birth ("the glory of that future will require a difficult labor, and some may be so frightened of its birth they will refuse to abandon their nostalgias for the womb") and language that pulls at our heartstrings, such as "Our future is ripe, outrageously rich.

She draws the conclusion, again appealing to logos, that even all the evidence presented in the letter Senator Obama is "the man for this time." Morrison closes with a final appeal to ethos as she emphasizes that she is an integral part of the community of the country: "Good luck to you and us." The "us" is definitely not just African Americans but all Americans.
Rhetorical Analysis of Visual Texts

Many visual texts are full-fledged arguments. Although they may not be written in paragraphs or have a traditional thesis, they are occasioned by specific circumstances, they have a purpose (whether it is to comment on a current event or simply to urge you to buy something), and they make a claim and support it with appeals to authority, emotion, and reason. Consider the cartoon on page 21, which cartoonist Tom Toles drew after the death of civil rights icon Rosa Parks in 2005. Parks was the woman who in 1955 refused to give up her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, that act came to symbolize the struggle for racial equality in the United States. We can discuss the cartoon rhetorically, just as we've been examining texts that are exclusively verbal. The occasion is the death of Rosa Parks. The speaker is Tom Toles, a respected and award-winning political cartoonist. The audience is made up of readers of the Washington Post and other newspapers—that is, it's a very broad audience. The speaker can assume that his audience shares his admiration and respect for Parks and that they view her passing as the loss of a public figure as well as a private woman. Finally, the context is a memorial for a well-loved civil rights activist, and Toles's purpose is to remember Parks as an ordinary citizen whose courage and determination brought extraordinary results. The subject is the legacy of Rosa Parks, a well-known person loved by many.

Readers' familiarity with Toles—along with his obvious respect for his subject—establishes his ethos. The image in the cartoon appeals primarily to pathos. Toles shows Parks, who was a devout Christian, as she is about to enter heaven through the pearly gates; she is attended by an angel, probably Saint Peter, who is reading a ledger. Toles depicts Parks wearing a simple coat and carrying her pocketbook, as she did while sitting on the bus so many years ago. Her features are somewhat detailed and realistic, making her stand out despite her modest posture and demeanor.

The commentary at the bottom right reads, "We've been holding it [the front row in heaven] open since 1955," a reminder that more than fifty years have elapsed since Parks resolutely sat where she pleased. The caption can be seen as an appeal to both pathos and logos. Its emotional appeal is an acknowledgment that, of course, heaven would have been waiting for this good woman; but the mention of "the front row" appeals to logic because Parks made her mark in history for refusing to sit in the back of the bus. Some readers might even interpret the caption as a criticism of how slow the country was both to integrate and to pay tribute to Parks.

The following advertisement is from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a conservation organization that "combines global reach with a foundation in science, involves action at every level from local to global, and ensures the delivery of innovative solutions that meet the needs of both people and nature."

What rhetorical strategies does the WWF use to achieve its purpose in this advertisement? Pay particular attention to the interaction of the written text with the visual elements. How does the arrangement on the page affect your response? How does the WWF appeal to ethos, logos, and pathos? How effective do you think the advertisement is in reaching its intended audience? Explain.
Feeding Kids Meat Is Child Abuse

To argue against further use of nuclear power, As you read the article, analyze it rhetorically and ask yourself if she is likely to achieve her purpose or if her strategies miss the mark.

If the Japanese Can't Build a Safe Reactor, Who Can?

Anne Applebaum

In the aftermath of a disaster, the strengths of any society become immediately visible. The cohesion, resilience, technological brilliance and extraordinary competence of the Japanese are on full display. One report from Minamisoma—a town of 25,000, annihilated by the tsunami that followed Friday’s massive earthquake—describes volunteer firefighters working to clear rubble and search for survivors; troops and police efficiently directing traffic and supplies; survivors not only “calm and prognostic” but also coping “with patience and sometimes amazingly good cheer.”

Thanks to these strengths, Japan will eventually recover. But at least one Japanese reactor power complex will not. As I write, three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station appear to have lost their cooling capacity. Engineers are flooding the plant with seawater—effectively destroying it—and leaving off radioactive steam. There have been two explosions. The situation may worsen in the coming hours.

We Japan’s nuclear power stations were designed with the same care and precision as everything else in the country. Made to the point, as the only country in the world to have experienced true nuclear catastrophe, Japan had an incentive to build well, as well as the capability, laws and regulations to do so. Which leads to an unanswerable question: If the competent and technologically brilliant Japanese can’t build a completely safe reactor, who can?

I can—and will—argue that the Japanese situation is extraordinary. Few countries are as vulnerable to natural catastrophes as Japan, and the scale of its earthquake is unprecedented. But there are other kinds of extraordinary situations and unprecedented circumstances. In an attempt to counter the latest worst-case scenario, a French-German company began constructing a super-safe, "next-generation" nuclear reactor in Finland several years ago. The plant was designed to withstand the impact of an airplane—no test Sept. 11 terrorism—and includes a chamber allegedly able to contain a core meltdown. But it was also meant to cost $4 billion and to be completed in 2009. Instead, after numerous setbacks, it is still unfinished—and may now cost $6 billion or more.

Ironically, the Finnish plant was meant to launch the resurgence of the nuclear power industry in Europe—an industry that has, of late, enjoyed a renaissance around the world, thanks almost entirely to fears of climate change. Nuclear plants win no carbon. As a result, nuclear plants, after a long, post-Chernobyl lull, have