

WHAT IS LOGOS?

For Aristotle, the most important means of persuasion was *logos*. For Plato, it was the only legitimate one. The word looks like this in Greek:

λόγος

In Greek, *logos* can mean simply "word," or it can mean, "the underlying point that makes sense or meaning behind everything else," or it can mean "logic, reason, rational thinking." This is the pun that appears in the fourth gospel, when John writes,

"In the beginning, there was the word [logos], and the word was with God, and the word was God" (John 1:1).

Most English translators simply insert "word" here, but as you can see, the Biblical text implies at least two alternative translations. Modern Christians often think of faith as something separate and antithetical to logic. In the Bible, at least, the disciple John implies that in some ways God perhaps *is* logic, or perhaps God is the underlying point that makes sense behind everything else.

For our purposes, leaving aside mysticism that would equate God with *logos*, logic is the third persuasive technique Aristotle mentions besides *pathos* and *ethos*. It is a way to build an effective argument. In many ways, *logos* is the most important of the three persuasive appeals because it is the most honest. It's possible for a liar to misuse *pathos* to play on an audience's heartstrings, It's possible for a cheat to don false *ethos* and create an impression of trustworthiness he shouldn't have. However, if the audience is also trained in logic, a writer's arguments must stand or fall on their own rational merits. The argument is either logical or based on fallacious reasoning. In general, there are three types of logic, which follow below.

(1) Inductive: A type of reasoning that moves from the specific to the general. The argument is based on a limited number of examples, and from these examples, the rhetor attempts to fashion a more general or universal rule. The trick here is making sure the examples used truly are representative of the whole.

(2) Deductive: Also called **sylogistic reasoning**, deduction is a type of reasoning that moves from the general to the specific. The argument is based on a general or universal rule that both the reader and the writer agree upon. The rhetor takes this general or universal rule, and then she tries to show how a specific example fits into that larger category. The trick here is to distinguish between **validity** and **truth** (see next page).

(3) Reductive: Also called "**eliminary logic**," this type of logic involves listing all the known proposed solutions to a problem, then cutting out those proposals that demonstrably do not work, trying to arrive at a single remaining answer. Typically, this is less useful than deduction or induction because it assumes that the proposed solutions are the only possible ones (they may not be!) and the correct answer lies in that list of proposals (but it might not exist or might have been discovered yet!).

The danger of this technique is that clumsy thinking can result in **logical fallacies**. Logical fallacies are statements that may appear to make sense on the surface, but in actual point of fact, they don't follow the rules for reasoning. If you use induction and deduction flawlessly, and avoid logical fallacies, your essay will have good *logos*. If not, intelligent readers may dismantle and demolish your argument even as you are trying to build it.