



## Classical Argument

Get ready for some old-school rhetoric! Teachers call this method classical for a reason – the structure has been around for a lonnnnggg time and it still works! To write an effective classical argument, you need to know about rhetorical appeals and overall structure.

### Rhetorical Appeals

Aristotle identifies three ways writers can appeal to their audiences. **Logos** is logical proof that appeals to the audience's reason and common sense, including facts, data, statistics, and reasonable examples. **Pathos** is emotional proof that appeals to the audience's emotions, such as descriptions, narrative, and personal examples. **Ethos** is the presentation of self. Arguers who appear credible, authoritative, and reliable will appeal more effectively to their target audience. In each part of your argument, consider how best to appeal to your intended audience.

### Structure

A classical argument has five main parts: exordium, narratio, propositio and partitio, refutatio, confirmatio, and peroratio.

**Exordium:** Think of the exordium as your attention-getter. Here is your first opportunity to grab your intended audience by relating the topic specifically to their interests and concerns. An effective exordium also sets the rhetorical tone. Convince the audience of the timeliness (the fancy rhetorical term is *kairos*) and importance of your argument in the exordium and they will be more likely to think about your argument or be called to action. If I were writing a classical argument about the benefits for teenagers in listening to rap music and my intended audience is parents of teenagers, I should consider, for example:

- Hip-hop culture and rap music is part of mainstream society (timeliness or *kairos*)
- Parents are concerned about the well-being of their children (audience concerns)
- Teenagers are influenced by media and advertising (audience concerns)

A way to gain the attention of my intended audience (parents) may be to start with a fact from a research study on effects. A logical appeal such as this may be convincing to parents and grab their attention. In the exordium I will also emphasize my background in diversity as a college professor to strengthen my ethos. Ethos is the fancy rhetorical term for the way I present myself to the audience. The exordium is my (and when you argue YOUR) first impression!

**Narratio:** Think of the narratio as context. An effective narratio includes background information and the circumstances, events, and context to which your argument is responding (what Lloyd Bitzer calls the rhetorical situation). For my narratio, I should consider things such as:

- The history of hip-hop culture and rap music in the United States (background)
- The rise in popularity of rap music (background)
- The negative portrayal of rap music by the media (context)

In my narratio I will want to give context about how rap music got started and its growing influence on American society, especially young people. I will also need to explain how and why issues arose by considering: When and why did rap music start to be thought of as having negative influences? Who (what groups of people) believe it has a positive influence? A negative influence?

**Propositio and Partitio:** These two function together. The propositio tells where you stand on the issue. The partitio lays out your argument and the main points you will address along the way. For example: To prove that teenagers experience positive effects from listening to rap music, it is best to first discuss the controversy surrounding the influence of rap, then to disprove negative and prove positive influences on teenagers, and finally to encourage parents to get involved in the issue.

**Confirmatio:** There are two types of proofs in classical argument. The confirmatio are positive proofs. Positive proofs are the reasons that support your argument. For my confirmatio, I might include:

- Rap music can help teenagers understand complex notions of race
- Rap music sheds light on the socioeconomic disparity between classes
- Rap music is thought-provoking and may help teenagers become critical thinkers

**Refutatio:** Refutatio are negative proofs. Here you will acknowledge opposing claims and either concede (accept) or refute (prove faulty or flawed). An effective refutatio shows respect for the opposition. An opposition point might be: Rap music contains lyrics that are misogynistic.

- I *concede* that rap music contains lyrics that are misogynistic. (*When you concede it is like saying, "Yes, that is a good point, opposition. I cannot find fault with your point."*)

Another opposition point might be: Rap music promotes violence.

- I *refute* the opposition's point that rap music promotes violence. Rather, rap music sheds light on violence that already exists in society. (*When you refute you acknowledge the opposition's point but do not agree with it and, further, that you can prove it faulty or flawed. It is like saying, "Your point has some flaws, opposition."*)

In your refutatio, consider the most common opposition points and address them directly. A well-rounded refutation shows you understand the issue from both your own and the opponent's perspective.

**Peroratio:** The peroratio is the concluding section. It is your last opportunity to appeal to your audience. Most effective peroratio remind the audience of what you have proven. However, for the rest of the section, a classical arguer has options. One option is to encourage your audience to act. Another option is to provide future implications. What might happen if the issue continues? Consider your topic when choosing your options. For instance, for my classical argument about rap music, the action I might recommend to my audience of parents is to:

- Examine their preconceived notions about rap music and hip-hop culture
- Discuss with their teenagers which rap artists they listen to and why
- Encourage their teenagers to listen to rap music with positive lyrics
- Listen to rap music themselves (Yep, get ready for your Mom to quote Common and Jay-Z!)

Your peroratio is not only your final impression, but the final thoughts the audience will take with them about the topic. To argue effectively, consider how you will use rhetorical appeals throughout.

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