Persuasive Speaking

Inquire: Persuasion in Real Life

Overview

Have you ever watched a television infomercial? Have you ever thought about the ways they try to convince you to buy their product? They use persuasive techniques similar to the ones we will discuss in this lesson. You will learn what persuasive speaking is, persuasive organizational topics, artistic proofs, and how to identify persuasion when you are an audience member. You will also learn about two different paths to persuasion: the central path and the peripheral path.

Big Question: What persuasive messages have been the most effective in getting you to do something?

Watch: Persuasion at Work

Persuasion is a speech act designed to convince another person to change their mind, attitude, or behavior. This lesson focuses on the foundations of persuasion: what persuasion is, what persuasive topics look like, what artistic proofs are, and how to identify persuasion as an audience member. Attempts to persuade happen all around you, and many people use persuasion almost instinctively. It's just a matter of being able to identify attempts and understand what you're wanted to do.

Infomercials attempt to convince us that we have an unmanageable problem when we can't use scissors correctly and tell us the only way to fix that problem is to buy their “super scissors.” This is a persuasive act. When colleges try to convince you to attend their school, or when the military recruiter tries to get you to sign on in order to get tuition assistance, they are both engaging in persuasive acts.

Artistic proofs are persuasive arguments designed to get you to change your mind based on a speaker's credibility, appeals to emotion, and appeals to logic. Let’s imagine you want to convince your roommate to let you bring home a baby goat. How might you go about doing this? Maybe you would explain that you pay more in rent, so you should have a larger say in the matter. This kind of argument uses credibility, or ethos. Perhaps you say that the goat will eventually give milk and that it can “mow” the lawn. So, the goat will save money in the long run. This would be a logical appeal, or logos. Then, you go for the finisher and explain that the goat is an orphan with nowhere else to go. This argument is intended to make your roommate feel bad for the goat — an appeal to pathos. While this example might sound silly, these kinds of arguments happen daily, and with a little practice, you can make use of them effectively, too!
Read: Persuasive Messages

Overview

Persuasion is one of the most useful skills you can have as a speaker. In this lesson, you will learn what persuasive speaking is and what persuasive topics are. You'll also learn about ethos, pathos, and logos.

What is Persuasive Speaking?

Persuasive speaking is a speech act designed to convince someone else to change their mind, attitude, or behavior. This definition provides the important parts of the persuasive process. First, we will address convincing someone else. When you speak persuasively, you attempt to change how someone thinks or views a topic. The second part — “change their mind, attitude, or behavior” — breaks down into two parts. When you persuade someone, you don’t change someone’s mind for them; rather, they change their own mind based on the information you provide. The second part — “mind, attitude, or behavior” — deals with someone’s actions. Persuasion attempts to make visible change in someone, be it how they think about something or act toward something.

What are Persuasive Topics?

In this lesson, we will cover two kinds of persuasive topics: problem-solution and problem-cause-solution. Problem-solution topics are simple in their approach. You point to a problem and try to convince your audience to fix it. A problem-cause-solution is more complicated. You attempt to convince your audience of solutions, but you also have to convince them of what is causing those problems. For both topics, be sure everything connects and flows together. When you identify a problem, make sure to include a topic for that specific problem and a specific cause, if it exists. Using a flow chart can help you keep things straight and make sure your presentation addresses everything it needs to.

Persuasion Techniques: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

In the 4th century BCE, in ancient Greece, Aristotle explained what he called artistic proofs. These proofs are means of proof chosen by a speaker to convince an audience. These artistic proofs are ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos is a speaker’s credibility. A speaker gets to decide how they establish their credibility with an audience, which is why Aristotle argued it was an artistic proof. Pathos is a speaker’s attempt to appeal to emotions. When commercials show a giggling baby or sad puppies to make the audience feel a connection to their cause, that’s pathos. It is all about making the audience feel something and using that feeling to make them change their behavior. Logos is a speaker’s attempt to appeal to logical arguments. Things like facts, numbers, and data are used to present a logical argument and convince people that the data supports a certain action.

Identifying Persuasion as an Audience Member

When you are an audience member, it is important to be able to identify persuasion. A series of questions can help you identify the elements of a persuasive message. First, is there a call to action? If the speaker calls you to do something, this is the most obvious calling card of persuasive messages. Not all persuasive elements are that obvious, though. Second, what do they want you to do? If a speech does not call on you to act, it isn’t persuasive. Less obviously, if the speech does not explain specifically what you need to do, it isn’t persuasive. There is a difference between someone saying “this needs to be done”
and “you need to do it.” The first statement might be persuasive, but it might also just be a statement of fact. The second statement is expressly persuasive and attempts to convince an audience that they need to make something happen. Thirdly, how do they motivate you to do it? When a speaker gives a persuasive speech and calls for action, they will use certain motivating techniques. Knowing how they are prodding you to change your mind can give you insight into the persuasive attempts being made by a speaker. Lastly, what tools do they give you to do it? A persuasive message should provide you with enough information and guidance to change your mind and follow through the action they want you to take.

Reflect Poll: Which Proof Works for You?

Which artistic proof is the most important to change your mind?
- Ethos
- Pathos
- Logos

Expand: Paths to Persuasion

Overview

When making a proposal, it is important to know that it is an attempt at persuasion. When you make a business proposal, you persuade the buyer to believe in your product or idea. There are two ways you can go about persuading someone: the central path and the peripheral path.

The Central Path

The central path to persuasion is a method that relies on presenting a strong logical argument built on data and facts. This method relies on the presenter to make a strong case with research to support the argument. The receiver then thinks critically about the information they have received. They become an active participant in the decision making process and engage with the sender to make the best decision. The central path is often the stronger route to take, but is the route taken least often. It requires more work from both the sender and the receiver and more time to be effective.

Because the central path is so thorough, there are no shortcuts to be had. You must put in the work if you decide to persuade someone with the central path. The benefit of the work is that once you have done the work and engaged your audience, it becomes easier to persuade them. The other issue with the central path is that it requires the audience to decide to engage that path as well. If they aren’t willing to be as engaged with the argument as you are, they might not be willing to listen to the data you bring to the argument.

The Peripheral Path

The peripheral path to persuasion is a method that relies on an appeal to certain personal cues of audience members. If the members of the audience are engaged with the peripheral path, they might agree with a message simply because the speaker seems to be an expert or because it makes them feel good to support the cause of the speaker. These shortcuts make it easier for the audience to engage and are easier to build for the speaker. So, often persuasive speakers use these appeals instead of the central path. The appeals to emotion, authority, or tradition are all different forms of logical fallacies. Logical fallacies are flaws in reasoning that render an argument invalid. Just because an argument is
invalid doesn't mean it is incorrect or goes ignored, though. Some speakers employ logical fallacies, even if they shouldn't, because often, they are effective. You should never try to use these fallacies when making your arguments, but knowing they exist and the influence they have is important to creating the best argument you can.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
A website explaining logical fallacies and giving specific definitions and examples of the various kinds of fallacies
  ● Link to resource: https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/

An article providing a brief summary of persuasion and the paths to persuasion
  ● Link to resource: http://www.psychologyandsociety.com/routestopersuasion.html

An article providing an in-depth look at ethos, pathos, and logos
  ● Link to resource: https://pathosethoslogos.com/

Lesson Glossary

persuasive speaking: a speech act that tries to convince someone else to change their mind, attitude, or behavior
ethos: a speaker's credibility
pathos: a speaker's attempt to appeal to emotions
logos: a speaker's attempt to appeal to logical arguments
central path to persuasion: a persuasion method that relies on presenting a strong logical argument built on data and facts
peripheral path to persuasion: a persuasion method that relies on appealing to certain personal cues of audience members
logical fallacies: flaws in reasoning that render an argument invalid

Check Your Knowledge

1. Persuasive speaking is a speech act designed to teach an audience about something new.
   a. True
   b. False
2. The central path to persuasion relies on appeals to emotions.
   a. True
   b. False
3. The peripheral path to persuasion relies on strong logical support to arguments.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:
Citations

Lesson Content:
Authored and curated by Alexander Amos, Elizabeth Amos for The TEL Library. CC BY NC SA 4.0