Checklist: Argument Composition and Critique

According to Aristotle, a good argument appeals to ethos (ethics), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic). While we should be able to argue or debate on logic alone, humans are run just as much by their hearts as their minds, and so to keep the audience engaged we must address all three appeals in our work.

When crafting or evaluating an argument, consider the following questions. These questions may also be used to generate ideas for an argument critique or evaluation. Ask yourself how well the writer speaks to these three appeals:

**LOGOS**

- Is the thesis or main premise clear and debatable?
- Does the author provide necessary background information, including the definitions of key terms, review of facts, basic timelines, or historical or topical context?
- Does each paragraph or section of the text offer support and evidence to “prove” the thesis?
- Is there any unnecessary information or detail that detracts from the impact of the argument?
- Is there a balance between types of evidence: facts, research, statistics, and expert testimony?
- Does the author offer enough evidence as support, or are there holes in the argument?
- Is the argument logically organized with clear transitions to help move the reader through the text?

**ETHOS**

- If you are critiquing an argument, what are the author’s credentials? Is he/she associated with an organization or university? Is he/she an expert in the field?
- Has the author provided credible, reliable, and recent sources to support the argument?
- Are all sources documented accurately and ethically?
- Is the author fair and balanced in his/her assessment of opposing viewpoints?
- Does the author use moderate tone and diction, or is there clear bias in inflammatory language and tone?

**PATHOS**

- Does the author answer the “so what” question? That is, does the audience understand the significance of the issue or topic?
- Does the author attempt to make connections to the audience through emotional appeals, such as through narratives/anecdotes, sensory imagery, or descriptive detail?
- Does the author’s pathos overwhelm ethos and logos, making the emotion of the text manipulative? Or does the author attempt to use emotional appeals to draw attention away from defects in the argument?