WHY FOREIGN-LANGUAGE STUDY

SHOULD BE REQUIRED

NIA TUCKSON



**Appeals in arguments:**

A careful persuasive writer uses sound, accurate, appropriate, and convincing evidence, thereby **appealing to our intellect.** We can accept the argument because the evidence-no matter what kind it is-persuades us to accept it, or at least to give it some consideration.

Persuasive writers and advertisers-whose aim, after all, is to persuade us to part with our money-often cleverly manipulate our thinking by adopting various **appeals to our emotions, to our sense of patriotism, to our** **prejudices**, and so forth. To perceive the truth and to make an informed decision, you **must strip away the** **"fluff" from the argument**, ignore the appeal, and examine the claim for itself, unobscured by emotion or sentiment. Look at a piece of writing or promotional piece and ask yourself: How good is this argument or product without the appeal? Is there any evidence underneath the appeal? Let us examine the false appeals:

**Appeals to emotions:**

Maintaining objectivity in light of controversial issues is difficult, for writer and reader alike. But to be a good critical reader (and thinker), it is essential to recognize when a writer is deliberately firing your emotions and when you are responding more from emotion than from reason. To paraphrase an old adage: The more emotional the appeal, the weaker the argument. For example:

"Lower your taxes. Vote No on Proposition 21!" • "Stop the land grab! Don't let greedy corporations take your most cherished possession away from you!" • "Don't let the homeless invade Montclair! Vote no on the city's proposal to build a homeless shelter in our neighborhood!" • "A vote for the school bond issue to build a new gym is a vote for our children. "

We respond to emotional appeals on a visceral level because they sound good. After all, who wants higher taxes, a homeless shelter next door, or a school with no gym? Yet, in the absence of reasoned discourse, arguments resting on emotional appeals are unsound and sneaky-because they rest on oversimplification. And they need not be accepted, no matter how stirring the claim. Here, briefly, are five common emotional appeals:

**Flattery :**

A writer who uses flattery tries to put us into a group of people that we might hope to identify with, whether we share their convictions or not. For example, if a writer says, “Women with good taste shop at Talbot's." We like to think of ourselves as having good taste, so by subtle flattery, we are enticed to become part of the group

**Just plain folks:**

This appeal lies in the writer's desire to have himself or herself perceived as just an "ordinary citizen" or just plain folks. It is the opposite of snob appeal. A politician might give a speech to small-town people and use the "plain folks" appeal by stating that he, too, came from a similar little town, went to a school very much like the one there, or came from a family much like theirs

An example of restaurants claiming that their food is "just like Mom's" or brand names like "Mrs. Smith's Pies." By means of transfer, we are supposed to picture "Mom" or "Mrs. Smith" cooking up their old favorites just for us.

**Testimonial:**

Television advertisements abound with appeals using testimonial as an appeal, using the testimony or endorsements of famous people ,movie or television stars, athletes, or other celebrities who are paid large sums of money to plug products.

**Appeal to fear:**

This appeal is obvious: the writer hopes to arouse our fear of what will happen if we adopt a certain course. As with most other appeals, the appeal to fear replaces evidence in the form of good reasons or facts. • Why would anyone voluntarily move to California? That's earthquake country. And there's no question that the "Big One" will hit sometime in the next 25 years

**Appeal to patriotism:**

The appeal to patriotism is a deceptive tactic to make us think that we are disloyal to our country if we don't accept an argument.

**Appeal to prejudice:**

Like the appeal to fear, appeal to prejudice works by inflaming negative feelings, beliefs, or stereotypes about racial, ethnic, or religious groups, or gender or sexual orientation. Once again, emotion replaces reasoned discourse. Example :

Letting so many immigrants into this country is a mistake. They take jobs away from Americans who are out of work, and they don't share our traditional values.

• Why would a man ever want to become a nurse? After all, women are traditionally the caregivers in our culture

**Appeal to tradition:**

The appeal to tradition asks us to accept a practice because it has always been done that way.

The Roman Catholic Church has forbidden women to become priests for nearly 2,000 years. Why should the Church abandon such a longstanding practice ?

**Appeal to sympathy:**

By arousing our sympathy, writers and advertisers gain a real advantage over us. We have all seen the advertisements for pet foods using glossy photos of cute kittens and puppies. Consider this example:

• A recent television commercial for StainStick-a pre-wash product manufactured by DowBrands-showed a mother preparing the wash with her little girl, who clearly has Down's syndrome. The mother says, as the daughter applies StainStick to the spots, "We use StainStick because the last place we need a challenge is in the laundry room.

Critics charged that DowBrands was exploiting the child and preying on the viewing public's sympathy to buy the product. In fact, other television ad campaigns are making greater use of the handicapped, showing people in wheelchairs and the like. But the criticism seems justified, since the purpose of the advertisement was to sell StainStick, not to remind us to treat the handicapped fairly.

**Exercise:**

Using the information in the preceding section, study these examples and identify the appeal or appeals each contains.

1. By the year 2030, if we continue to admit immigrants at the same level we are today, whites will constitute only 51 percent of the U.S. population. That will be the death of American culture as we know i
2. When Oliver North and John Poindexter admitted that they were committing illegal acts when they plotted to sell arms to Iran and divert money to the Contras during the Irangate scandal, they claimed they acted out of love for their country.
3. Try Auntie Em's frozen pies in five delicious flavors. Low-fat, lowcholesterol, and microwaveable, too. Just like Grandma used to make!
4. Thanks to Megan's Law [a federal law that allows people to view a CD at police stations containing the names and addresses of registered sex offenders], we found out that a scumbag offender has been paroled and is living just two streets away from the park. So what if he's paid his debt to society? We parents won't stand for any sex offenders lurking near our children!
5. The US should not abandon its policy on immigration. This country has always been the refuge for people from all over the world seeking new opportunities.
6. In December 1996, Hawaii Circuit Court Judge Kevin Chang ruled that same-sex marriages are legal. The ruling goes against an earlier federal ban on such unions. (As of this writing, however, Hawaii has yet to implement Judge Chang's ruling.) In response, Reverend Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition in Anaheim, California, said: "Losing this battle doesn't mean that we've lost the war. It means that the very foundation of Western civilization is being given another wake-up call that the homosexuals want to change the culture and want to change the rules in the seventh inning." (Quoted in San Francisco Chronicle, December 4, 1996.