

Arguments Based On Character – Ethos

Three main elements make up ethos:

- trustworthiness/credibility
- authority
- unselfish or clear motives

If you make an argument based on character, you will often be arguing that:

- A person (or group or institution) is or is not trustworthy or credible on this issue.
- A person (or group or institution) does or does not have the authority to speak to this issue.
- A person (or group or institution) does or does not have unselfish or clear motives for addressing this subject.

Establishing trustworthiness and credibility

- Humor
- Connect your own beliefs with well-established beliefs/principles
- Show respect for reader's intelligence (citing trustworthy sources, acknowledge them properly, present ideas clearly and fairly, use details where needed, use attractive presentation, use correct spelling, punctuation, grammar)
- Acknowledge any exceptions, qualifications, or even weaknesses in your arguments
- Sometimes effective to speak directly to audience using "I" or "you"

- **Claiming authority**
- What do they know about the subject?
- What experiences do they have that make them especially knowledgeable?
- Why should the reader pay attention to this writer?

Clean Motives

- Whose interests are they serving?
- How will they profit from their proposal?

Establishing ethos in your own writing

- Establish your credibility by connecting to your audience's values, showing respect for them, and establishing common ground where possible. How will you convince your audience you are trustworthy? What will you admit about your own limitations?
- Establish your authority by showing you have done your homework and know your topic well. How will you show that you know your topic well? What appropriate personal experience can you draw on?
- Examine your motives for writing. What, if anything, do you stand to gain from your argument? How can you explain those advantages to your audience?