Persuading Your Audience

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT
OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

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By Laurie Lesser
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projectmgmt.brandeis.edu
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Abstract

"The fool tells me with his reasons, but the wise man persuades me with my own."
— Aristotle

Persuasion involves convincing others to give positive attention to our point of view. This paper examines the definition, purpose, and techniques of persuasion. It contrasts persuasive messages with informative messages, and provides a framework from which to develop persuasive proofs and presentation designs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Laurie Lesser, MA, is the Associate Director of Instructor Recruitment and Development at Brandeis University, Division of Graduate Professional Studies. In addition to developing and teaching professional communication at GPS, she has been consulting, developing, and teaching communication classes at Babson College since 1998. She has also been an adviser and Vice President at the Sinnott School, a local nonprofit computer training institution where she worked for more than twenty years. She was instrumental at expanding the school through her expertise in management, organization, and leadership.
Defining Persuasion

Persuasion is the art of convincing others to give favorable attention to our point of view. Persuasive communication is any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the response of another.¹

The purpose of persuasion is to change or reinforce four things among your audience:

1. Values
2. Beliefs
3. Attitudes
4. Behaviors

As we move from the outer parts of the circle to the inner core, we see that it becomes more challenging to influence change. For example, attitudes are much easier to change than beliefs, and values are the most deeply ingrained.

If we know our audience’s attitudes, beliefs and values, we can anticipate their responses and develop strategies to change or reinforce them. We do this by developing proofs to support our point of view.

We need to provide reasons for a person or group to reinforce or change attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors. Our reasons are our “proofs” of persuasion.

Aristotle points out two broad kinds of proofs that affect persuasion:

1. **Inartistic**: not controlled by speaker.
2. **Artistic**: controlled by the speaker.

Let’s focus on those proofs we can control: artistic proofs. These include Proof by Logos, Proof by Pathos, and Proof by Ethos.

### Proof by Logos

- a. Is based on the power of reason
- b. Rely primarily on facts, figures, and expert testimony to substantiate claims
- c. Is basic to all ethical persuasion

### Proof by Pathos

- a. Appeal to emotions such as fear and a sense of belonging
- b. Rely primarily on examples and narratives
- c. May be necessary for moving audiences to action
- d. Can boomerang if misused
- e. Should be used in conjunction with proof by logos

### Proof by Ethos

- a. Is based on credibility
- b. Involve using expert, prestige, or lay testimony
- c. Can supplement proof by logos
Ethos is based on credibility, and in the context of delivering a persuasive speech to an audience, there are three types: initial, derived, and terminal.

**Initial** is composed of:
- Your reputation
- Your appearance
- The introduction you receive from the host/hostess
- The context in which the speech is given

**Derived** is demonstrated to the audience when you possess it:
- Good sense: expertise or competency on an issue
- Good will: having the best interests of the community in mind
- Good moral character: this is the measure of your trustworthiness

**Terminal**
- Is the final assessment of credibility from the audience

Aristotle did not identify Mythos as a proof, however many scholars confirm the presence of this fourth dimension.

**Proof by Mythos**
- Assume people value their cultural heritage
- Rely on examples and narratives
- Can promote a sense of cultural identity, or be used to advocate elitism and intolerance

Presidential addresses are filled with appeals to mythos.
To illustrate the differences between the types of persuasive proofs, let’s review a few examples.

1. A television commercial aimed at raising money for deprived children

   **Ethos:** Someone with goodwill delivers the message. The person is usually someone famous, who is helping with his or her time and money.

   **Logos:** The advertisement cites how much of your donated dollar will go to the food, medicine and educational tools vs. administrative costs.

   **Pathos:** Pictures are shown of unhappy children who have little clothing on, are thin and sickly, and our emotions are stirred.

2. A salesperson is selling computer training to corporate clients

   **Ethos:** When providing reasons a potential client should choose his company, he builds the company’s reputation by providing a client list.

   **Logos:** The salesman shares numerical data on student evaluations.

   **Pathos:** The salesman lets the potential client know that funds gained through corporate training helped pay for programs the company provided to economically disadvantaged individuals to help them gain employment.

3. A parent needs to explain to a child why he needs to eat his vegetables, or share with his friends

   **Ethos:** Because I said so! Or, because I’m your parent (aunt, uncle, grandparent, elder)...

   **Logos:** Because vegetables have vitamins and nutrients essential for you to be healthy.

   **Pathos:** Share with your friends, because if you do, they might share with you too.
Persuasion is a process. Persuasion is typically not an all or nothing situation, and it’s unreasonable to expect listeners to change their value/belief systems as a result of hearing one speech. Osborn and Osborn describe five major categories of the persuasive process phases:

1. **AWARENESS**
   - Tell the audience how the issue impacts their life
2. **UNDERSTANDING**
   - Audience needs to know how to carry out your proposal
3. **AGREEMENT**
   - Secure by presenting indisputable facts
4. **ENACTMENT**
   - Get listeners to raise hands, sign petitions
5. **INTEGRATION**
   - New attitudes and beliefs enter into ones value system

Determine what phase you’re in before you begin your persuasive message. Is your audience already aware how your message impacts their lives, or do you need to start in the first phase?
Motivated Sequence Design for Persuasive Presentations

As the additional readings this week illustrate, problem-solution, comparative advantage, and motivated sequence are three potential designs for persuasive presentations. You will use the Motivated Sequence design for your persuasive presentation assignment. Below are the 5 steps in relation to the basic organizational structure. More details can be viewed in your other readings this week.

Introduction

Step 1  **Attention:** Convince the audience that you have something interesting/important to say

Body

Step 2  **Need:** Describe the problem reflected from Attention
Step 3  **Satisfaction:** Present a solution to the problem described
Step 4  **Visualization:** Encourage listeners to visualize benefits of your proposal

Conclusion

Step 5  **Action:** In the conclusion of your speech, tell the audience what you want them to do
This week we have looked at the definition, purpose, types, and processes pertaining to persuasive speaking. We will continue this theme during our other readings, discussions, and course assignments. As you prepare your persuasive speech, keep in mind:

• Determine your purpose
• Analyze your audience
• Structure your material effectively
• Use a combination of supporting material (facts/statistics, examples, testimony, narratives)
• Use a combination of appeals (ethos, logos, pathos and mythos)
• Select your language carefully, utilizing rhetorical devices such as parallel construction and alliteration
• Choose visual aids that aid what you’re saying
• Build your credibility
• Be ethical
• Call to action

As you work on your persuasive speech, remember:

“The fool tells me with his reasons, but the wise man persuades me with my own.” — Aristotle
Master of Science in Management of Projects and Programs

Managing projects and programs brings together the hard skills of planning, estimating and budgeting with the soft skills of negotiation, conflict management, influencing and effective communication. It requires an integrated understanding of business functions and challenges at various levels of corporate operation, and involves the interdisciplinary study of management, leadership and technology.

Brandeis University’s Master of Science in Management of Projects and Programs prepares students already working in project management for assignments of increasing complexity and responsibility. It also provides a significant advantage to those wishing to advance into the field of project management.