Logos: Appeal to Logic

What is it?

When an author relies on logos, it means that he or she is using logic, careful structure, and objective (non-biased) evidence to appeal to the audience. An author can appeal to an audience's intellect by using information that can be fact checked (using multiple sources) and thorough explanations to support key points.

Example:

If I were trying to convince my students to complete their homework, I might explain that I understand everyone is busy and they have other classes (non-biased), but the homework will help them get a better grade on their test (explanation). I could add to this explanation by providing statistics showing the number of students who failed and didn't complete their homework versus the number of students who passed and did complete their homework (factual evidence).

How do you use it?

- **Comparison** – a comparison between one thing (related to your topic) and another, similar thing to help support your claim. It is important that the comparison is fair and valid – the things being compared must share significant traits of similarity.

  Example: comparing going to a party because your friends are going to jumping off a bridge because your friends are doing it is NOT an effective use of logos, because the two things share minimal similarities.
- **Cause/effect thinking** – you argue that X has caused Y, or that X is likely to cause Y to help support your claim. Be careful with this, because it can be difficult to predict that something "will" happen in the future.

  Example: if you're arguing that I shouldn't eat chocolate because it causes health problems, that is NOT an effective use of logos. You have to explain how/why one thing causes the other with facts and evidence.
- **Deductive reasoning** – starting with a broad, general claim/example and using it to support a more specific point or claim.

  Example: "All men die. You are a man. Therefore, you will die." This is an effective use of logos, because your general claim is a fact, and you can conclude your claim from it. However, when using deductive reasoning, your general claim MUST be true, as well as all the other premises (parts of your argument). If you are not a man, then my conclusion wouldn't be logical. If all men didn't die, then my conclusion wouldn't be true.
- **Inductive reasoning** – using several specific examples or cases to make a broad generalization.

  Example: "She has given us a quiz every Monday so far. Today is Monday. Therefore, she will give us a quiz today." This can be effective, but you have to be careful not to generalize too much. If you said, "All dogs I've ever seen are brown. My neighbor just got a dog. His dog will be brown," then you would be making a generalization that is too broad.
- **Exemplification** – use of many examples or a variety of evidence to support a single point

  Example: "He donates money to charity, picks up trash at public parks, tutors kids for free after school, and builds houses for the homeless. Therefore, he is a good person." This can be very effective, because it is harder to argue against a claim when you provide many examples of it.
- **Elaboration** – moving beyond just including a fact, but explaining the significance or relevance of that fact

  Example: "Cigarette smoke contains thousands of chemicals. Therefore, you shouldn't smoke." This example doesn't have any elaboration—only a fact and a claim. An example of elaboration would look more like this: "Cigarette smoke contains thousands of chemicals. These chemicals affect your respiratory system by making it more difficult for your lungs to separate the chemicals from the clean air you breathe. Over time, inhaling these chemicals permanently damages your lungs, leading to illnesses like cancer. Therefore, you shouldn't smoke." Notice that the elaboration clearly explained the relevance of the fact provided.