

Student says:

To help us learn more about how to appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos in our own writing, my professor assigned us an article to read and then asked us to locate the appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos the author used.

She assigned us an article called "The Height Gap." In the article, the author explains that the average American is getting shorter while people in other countries, ones with better health care and diet, are getting taller.

The topic feels a little controversial, and I can see how the author carefully makes his case using all three ethical appeals really well.

Right away, I noticed an appeal to pathos.

When the author introduces his expert, John Komlos, he gives the reader some background designed to help the audience make an emotional connection to this man.

In this paragraph, the author writes, "His parents were Hungarian Jews who lived in Budapest during the Second World War. In 1944, when his mother was pregnant with him, the Nazis took control of the city and the Russians were poised for a counterattack. His parents managed to get to a bombed-out hospital, using fake identity papers, and to take the baby back safely to the family hideout. But there was little food, and Komlos cried incessantly. One relative told his mother to throw the baby outside, since he wasn't going to make it anyway."

This background information is used to provide some context for Komlos's interest in this topic, but it also serves as a reminder to the audience about how difficult life can be. These kinds of events impact our height, but mainly, this information helps the audience connect to Komlos on an emotional level, which increases the chances that the audience will believe him.

In this paragraph, I see the author appealing to logos and beginning to make a logical case about the height issue he explores.

The author explains, "Biologists say that we achieve our stature in three spurts: the first in infancy, the second between the ages of six and eight, the last in adolescence. Any decent diet can send us sprouting at these ages, but take away any one of forty-five or fifty essential nutrients and the body stops growing."

Here, the author is building the foundation of his argument by presenting logical information about the connections between diet and growth.

Finally, I see some appeals to ethos as well. The author provides the audience with clear evidence related to the credibility of his sources.

He writes, “Fogel, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1993, is the man most responsible for Komlos’s interest in height. In the fall of 1982, when Komlos was working on a Ph.D. in economics at the University of Chicago (he had earlier earned a Ph.D. in history there), Fogel gave a lecture on stature that Komlos attended.”

Here, as the author sets up his source information, he establishes clear credibility for that source information. As Fogel and Komlos are key sources of information in his argument, when he describes their background to the audience, it makes these sources more believable. The author appeals to ethos in order to help the audience believe his overall argument.

I thought it was interesting to see all three ethical appeals so clearly at work here. Ultimately, they all come together to help a writer build a more persuasive argument.