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# The Use of Pathos in IPDA Debate: Justifications and Guidelines

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Use of Pathos in IPDA Debate: Justifications and Guidelines

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*Simply put, pathos is the use of emotional appeals in argument. The reasons for using pathos include putting your audience into a favorable state of mind for accepting your message, to provide motivational warrants for your arguments, to provide a catalyst for action, to create a balance or working relationship between ethos, logos, and pathos, and to ensure that your participation in IPDA debate teaches you real-world argumentation skills. Guidelines for using pathos include carefully choosing your words, telling compelling stories, picking your motivations carefully by determining what is at the top of your judge's value hierarchy, avoiding the logical fallacy of emotive language, using a variety of motivational appeals, using pathos ethically, and considering the risks involved in using personal appeals.*

When we debate, should our arguments and decisions be based on logic alone or should our arguments and decisions also be based on our emotions? Would reason freed from emotion lead to better decisions? One answer to this question is contained in the episodes of the original "Star Trek." Spock represented the tendency to make decisions on logic alone and his logic often helped the Starship Enterprise undertake a successful mission. Bones, the doctor, represented the tendency to make decisions on emotion alone. He, too, was valuable to the Enterprise. However, the real hero of the series was Captain Kirk who represented the ability to balance logic with emotions when making a decision. The purpose of this essay is to help you become the "Captain Kirk" of the IPDA universe—"boldly arguing where no one has argued before."

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Aristotle, in *The Rhetoric*, wrote that rhetoric involved determining the means of persuasion in any given situation. He classified the three means of persuasion as logos (logic), ethos (source credibility), and pathos (emotional appeals). Brockriede and Ehninger (1960), in an article merging Aristotle with Toulmin, called pathos a motivational warrant. Warrants are permissions given by the audience that allow a speaker to use specific data as proof of a claim (Toulmin, 1958). Motivational warrants involve the emotions, motives, values, and desires of the audience (Brockriede & Ehninger, 1960). For example, advertisements often rely on pathos or motivational warrants. Data: "Our toothpaste will give you a sexy smile." Warrant: "You want a sexy smile." Claim: "You should buy our toothpaste." Obviously, if you don't want a sexy smile, you have no motivation to buy the toothpaste. This essay will proceed by discussing the purposes of using pathos and suggesting guidelines for using pathos in IPDA debate.

### **The Purposes of Using Pathos**

The first purpose of using pathos is to put your audience into a favorable state of mind for accepting your message. People's moods and emotions can influence how they respond to your arguments. For example, if your friend is in a bad mood, you know that this isn't the time to ask for a favor. Movies are known for having music playing in the background to set the mood. This music, among other things, may frighten us, make us sad, or make us feel hopeful. Thus, you might think of pathos as "background music" for the debate round. What emotions and motivations will lead the audience to accepting your arguments? Are there emotions and motivations that could work against you? Should you really tell that dead baby joke in a debate on consumer product safety laws or would that simply destroy the mood?

The second purpose of using pathos, as already mentioned, is to provide motivational warrants for your arguments. Pathos is a means of persuasion. Always ask yourself, why would your judge accept your evidence as proof of the claim you are making? The audience has to grant you permission to say that your evidence means that your claim is true. Sometimes the permission or warrant needed is authoritative (ethos), sometimes it is substantive (logos), and sometimes it is motivational (pathos). If the necessary warrant is motivational, does the judge have this motivation? If not, is there another emotion or motivation that you can appeal to that the judge does possess? Republicans and Democrats, Christians and atheists, and college students and college professors are often motivated by different things. You need to know your audience in order to supply the proper warrant. For example, you chose the resolution "Good fences make good neighbors." You are on the affirmative and would like to run a policy case increasing border security between Mexico and the United States to reduce illegal immigration. Would it be easier to find motivational warrants for this policy with a democrat or with a republican as a judge? If your judge is a democrat, would another interpretation of the resolution make appropriate motivations easier to find? In debate, you always take calculated risks that you feel will fall in your favor; choosing motivations based on pathos is just another set of calculated risks.

The third reason for using pathos is to provide a catalyst for action. You might remember from your chemistry class that catalysts speed up reactions. People often know logically what they should do. They know that, if they quit smoking and lost weight, they would be healthier. But, they still eat too much, exercise too little, and

smoke. Why? They lack the motivation to act. Something needs to get them started. Pathos can serve as this catalyst for action. In debate rounds, pathos serves to make the issue have personal validity by putting a face on the problem. There is a reason why commercials wanting you to adopt stray animals use sad music and videos of adorable, helpless animals, it moves us towards action. Unfortunately, many debates fall short by moving the judge towards action, yet, failing to provide the judge an action to move toward. In a round concerning the use of Native American mascots, the affirmative did a great job of establishing the cultural harms of using Native American mascots, including how it trivializes the culture and continues the ideological notion of a “savage.” Unfortunately, the affirmative had a fatal flaw because the case only focused on the “catalysts” and did not provide a means of solving the problem. The judge felt the need to act, but had been given no suggested actions to adopt.

The fourth reason for using pathos is to create a balance or working relationship between ethos, logos, and pathos. *Dissoi Logoi* posits that one side of an argument defines the existence of the other, creating a rhetorical situation in which, at least, two *logoi* (arguments or appeals) struggle for dominance (Johnson-Sheehan, 1998). When debaters offer arguments based on pathos, the judge must determine how the different proofs clash with each other. *Dissoi Logoi* acts as a means to evaluate how the three means of persuasion (ethos, logos, and pathos) can interact within a debate as “argumentative proofs.” This helps transform pathos from merely an appeal to emotions into emotions as argumentation. Micheli (2010, p. 5) asserted, “In its broadest sense, the term “pathos” has to do with the idea of change, movement or alteration.” When evaluating a debate, pathos appeals act as motivation for change and are an important part of argumentation. Foster (1945) reminded debaters that reason and emotion work together in all successful argument. The symbiotic nature between logos and pathos allows arguments to establish a complete narrative, breaking out of the traditional dichotomy between the rational and the emotional. London (1966, p. 14) encouraged debaters to appeal to the judge as a complete human being by making arguments that address both the judge’s intellect and emotions. By legitimizing Aristotle’s persuasive proofs as an equilateral triangle, a debater is promoting responsible argumentation. The move towards balancing Aristotle’s persuasive proofs within argumentation and debate is dependent on a greater understanding of the use of pathos within the round.

The fifth reason for using pathos is to ensure that your participation in IPDA debate teaches you real-world argumentation skills. People are motivated by their emotions, wants, and needs. To believe that debate should be characterized by logic alone is living in a fantasy world. The nature of words themselves should teach us that emotions can not be separated from logic as words have both denotative (logical) and connotative (emotional) meanings. According to the IPDA Constitution, “The speaking style of the top Public Debaters should be highly effective when transferred into real world settings.”

### **Guidelines for Using Pathos**

Having examined some of the purposes for using pathos, it is now time to discuss various guidelines for using pathos. In other words, how does a debater use pathos effectively in a debate?

1. Carefully choose your words.

Within debate rounds, there are several variables that the debater does not have control over; therefore, debaters must focus on what they can control. One thing debaters can control is the words they say in the round. When deciding what case or arguments to forward, it is important to keep in mind the connotative meanings of words. People attach connotative meanings to words based on their experiences, so words can have more than one meaning within a round. Specifically, debaters should focus on the impact pathos has on connotation. One apparent place that pathos intertwines with connotations is displayed within a debater's personal values or worldview. Often, worldviews (such as feminism, Marxism, or capitalism) influence how debaters and judges evaluate the meanings of words in the resolution and arguments in the round. During a debate round over the resolution, "Might makes Right," the negative spent time preparing a feminist kritik over the use of power and domination. This kritik was a strategy that stemmed from the resolution's use of "might." While in many debate rounds, this would be an effective strategy, the affirmative interpreted the resolution as a case about the legalization of hemp as an energy source. The affirmative framed "might" as the potential hemp has as a renewable energy. While both teams had arguments to forward surrounding their definition of "might," the affirmative garnered a lot of ground because of its right to define. It is important for debaters to remember that, since words often gain their meaning from an individual's experience, clearly explaining your meaning for a term is very important. It is also important to realize that one's ability to prepare for the arguments that are likely to be advanced by your opponent in the debate will be improved once you consider your opponent's experience with the words in the resolution. Additionally, one must choose words based on their connotative meanings in order to set the right mood for your arguments. Words can have either positive or negative connotations to the listener based on his or her experiences. The word "bar" will evoke different emotions in a prisoner, an alcoholic, a ballet dancer, and a lawyer. If you want to inspire sadness, joy, anger, or peace, what words should you use? Choose your words carefully to create the right pathos.

2. Tell compelling stories

Within IPDA debate, one of the most common ways to introduce pathos into the round is by telling stories. A story is an extended example and offers more psychological proof than logical proof (Campbell & Huxman, 2003). Walter Fisher has taught us that humans are story tellers (and listeners) by nature. The use of stories in debate rounds helps by providing a sense of personalization—putting a face on the issue. Fisher (1985, p. 349) argued that the way a story is to be judged in regards to its merit is through narrative rationality—using the principles of probability and fidelity. This means, when sharing stories within a round, there are two ways in which the judge will evaluate the stories as evidence: probability and fidelity. The principle of narrative probability asks, "Does the story hang together and make sense?" Does the plot tell a consistent story that is free of contradictions? The principle of fidelity asks the question, "Does the story provide good reasons to guide or future action or decisions?" Judging a story as having fidelity means that we believe that the values within the story should influence our actions because the story is consistent with other stories we know to be true in our lives. When using stories in a debate, it is important to maintain ethical narratives. For example, you should only tell "personal" stories that really happened to you. Properly cite the origin of any story when you are telling

a narrative that is not your own. In a classroom debate, where students were asked to debate the effectiveness of cause marketing, a student started her case with a heartfelt story of her grandmother's battle with cancer. The student used this story to support why individuals should donate to the Susan G. Komen foundation. After the mock debate, a student consoled the young lady about her loss of her grandmother, and the student responded, "My grandmother is fine, that was just something I read online." This becomes an unethical use of narrative as it manipulates the audience into action. While the student met the criteria of the narrative paradigm, the story loses effectiveness for not being properly cited as someone else's experience. The unfortunate part of this debate is that the student would have won the classroom debate if she had properly cited the narrative.

3. Pick your motivations carefully by determining what is at the top of your judge's value hierarchy.

One of the first things a debater should do in any round is look at the judge's paradigm or worldview. Debaters should then filter their argumentation through this paradigm. This means, pick your arguments and motivations carefully in order to construct the debate in the most effective manner. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 81) reminded us that the audience determines how arguments will be evaluated. In the case of IPDA debate, the judge that you have in the back of the room should influence what type of arguments you choose to run. In debate, arguments are filtered through the judge's paradigm, or value hierarchy. As a debater, one must consider which arguments best interact with this paradigm. For example, some judges look for in round change ('real world impacts' that, for example, can come from how we talk about a subject) versus 'debate world impacts' (such as nuclear war body counts). If a debater has such a judge in the back of the room, the type of impacts that will help ensure his or her victory need to be social and real world—that is, one needs to offer the judge something he or she can actually enact without the magic of fiat. For example, in a round on feminism, you argue that the judge can personally oppose sexist oppression by refraining from the use of sexist stereotypes when telling jokes. Wallace (1972, p. 388) further explains the importance of value hierarchies in regard to how they organize arguments in regard to strength of appeal. This fact should influence debaters to keep their link stories and impact stories very clear. Essentially, debaters need to explicitly compare arguments on points of clash in order to reduce judge intervention. Of all of the variables that exist within a debate round (judge paradigms, opponent's arguments, the resolution, et cetera), one factor that the debater can control is the argumentation that is extended on his or her side. Adapting this argumentation to the judge's paradigm can help create clash stories involving how the lines of argument meet the judge's value hierarchy. In other words, what motivates one person will not motivate another—what does the judge value, want, or need above all other things? What emotions matter most to the judge? The dangers of picking a motivation that is too low of a priority in the judge's value hierarchy is that, first, it gives your opponent a competitive edge if they picked a higher motivation and, second, your argument may not reach the brink of becoming a catalyst for action. As an illustration of how value hierarchies can influence decisions, consider the following example. In a debate round where students were debating whether or not the security of society outweighs the personal freedoms of individuals, the negative asserted that Maslow's concept of self-actualization proved why we needed to safeguard individual freedom. The student impacted this claim with a story concerning the importance of freedom of expression to prevent tyranny. In response,

the affirmative was able to argue that Maslow's value hierarchy existed as a pyramid, and a person could never reach personal freedom without first meeting security needs. The affirmative continued by arguing that Maslow admits that self-actualization is rarely ever attained. In this round, both debaters asserted a catalyst for action, but the affirmative ended up winning because the negative's narrative was dependent on security being met.

4. Avoid the logical fallacy of emotive language.

The logical fallacy of emotive language involves the substitution of logic and evidence with overly emotional language. The goal is to replace the reasoning process with emotions rather than to use emotions as an aid to reasoning. The line between the proper use of emotions and language with the improper use of such can be very fine. It is often a matter of degree that is open to differing opinions. So, err on the side of caution. Recent political discourse in the United States seems to be favoring the use of emotive language in the way that one's opponents are labeled (pro-choice advocates become "baby killers," favoring welfare programs becomes "socialism," favoring equality in marriage rights becomes "destroying the traditional family," and so on). The goal is to try to strengthen an argument that is weak in evidence and logic with emotional terms that circumvent the reasoning process.

5. Use a variety of motivational appeals.

There are a plethora of emotions, values, needs, and desires to choose from. Don't limit yourself to just a few. If you limit your options, your opponents will soon learn how to prepare for your arguments and your win-loss record will suffer. Also, if you rely on a limited set of motivations, you might find yourself without the ability to match your arguments with the particular value hierarchies of some judges. People can be motivated by fear, joy, family, patriotism, religious fervor, and many more. It will be worth your time to experiment with using new appeals in practice rounds to see how they suit you, the topics involved, and your audience.

6. Use pathos ethically.

An IPDA debater should always strive to be ethical. It is simply the right thing to do. The use of ethical arguments will increase your credibility (ethos) and contribute to your success in the long run. One's arguments should always be worthy of acceptance. It is true that you can win with unethical arguments, but is that really what you want to do? "I won debates by cheating" isn't the best line to put on one's resume. One way to be ethical in the use of pathos is to balance pathos with logos. As discussed above under the subject of emotive language, don't try to substitute one for the other. Another way to put this is that one should strive to use pathos as a catalyst for action, not as the sole reason for action. Olbricht (1964) noted that ethical argumentation requires that one give his or her audience the information (evidence) that they need to process (reason logically) in order to make an authentic choice. An authentic choice is one that is true to the self-image of a person. A person should not be emotionally tricked or forced into accepting a position that is not true to who they are.

7. Consider the risks involved in using personal appeals.

With any argument, a debater needs to consider the following questions: What is my rhetorical responsibility in using pathos? And, what type of competitive risk am I willing to take? When using pathos within a round, the debater faces unique circumstances when she or he is calling on personal appeals in order to forward an argument. First, as a speaker, the debater is opening up areas of vulnerability in regards to risking face. Personal narratives and pathos appeals can ask for the judge to emotionally intervene and cast judgment on the debater within a personal realm. For example, during a debate round regarding equality in marriage, a student decided to “come out” in her constructive speech despite warnings that this was a dangerous strategy. For the remainder of the debate, the student felt all comments designed to refute equality in marriage acted as ad hominem attacks on her. The student was emotionally unable to view the arguments outside of her personal connection. Furthermore, she felt that the judge voting against her meant that the judge felt LGBT members should not have rights. As a side note to this story, we believe that coaches as educators should allow students to pick their own arguments. Coaches should educate students about what distinguishes a good argument from a bad argument and should warn debaters about the risks involved in certain arguments, but the choice of what to argue should ultimately be the debaters.

Secondly, it is important for the debater to evaluate how their use of pathos will impact the audience. Audience members, including judges, can be emotionally moved by appeals involving pathos. When rhetorically engaging pathos, the debater should avoid trigger terms (words that purposely evoke overly strong emotions or reactions—often due to traumatic experiences) such as terrorism, rape, dehumanization, and exclusionary language (sexist language, racist language, ageist language, classist language, et cetera). Debate rounds involve captive audiences, such as judges, other competitors, and timekeepers, leaving them susceptible to rhetorical attacks posed by the use of trigger terms. For example, in one policy debate, a team decided to run a pornography kritik against a team from a religious institution. The offensive and obscene language within the kritik caused a negative emotional reaction in the opposing team and placed the judge in a position of having to determine whether or not the kritik violated the debate organization’s sexual harassment code. This use of pathos as a strategy to emotionally excite the other team violated rhetorical ethics.

To extend on how pathos affects the audience, we should look at exclusionary language. Unfortunately, debaters often times assume homogeneity within the activity and society and use sexist language. When making arguments like “all men [sic] are created equal,” the debater makes man the standard by which everyone is judged. Exclusionary language can be used in many forms within a debate round, whether it is the debater referring to a social position others in the room do not belong to or placing judgment on social categories. Therefore, debaters should avoid using exclusionary language as this can cause emotional noise within the audience, nullifying the debater’s personal effectiveness. For example, personally, we have a hard time accepting arguments when debaters assert ethnocentric beliefs on other cultures, most often when speaking on foreign policy concerns. With the use of kritiks becoming more viable as a debate strategy, debaters need to remain aware of how the use of trigger terms and exclusionary language can impact audiences and in round performance.

## **Conclusion**

This essay provided several reasons for using pathos and a list of strategies for effectively using pathos in IPDA debate. Go forth and “boldly argue where no one has argued before.”

#### Checklist for Using Pathos in IPDA Debate

- I have determined what mood is needed to put the judge into a favorable state of mind for accepting my message.
- I have discovered appropriate motivational warrants for my evidence and conclusions.
- I have considered how pathos can be used as a catalyst for action in the debate round.
- My arguments create a balance or working relationship between ethos, pathos, and logos.
- My arguments involving pathos would work in the real world.
- I have carefully chosen words for my arguments by considering both their denotative and connotative meanings.
- I have chosen compelling stories to add pathos and personalize my arguments.
- I will properly acknowledge the source of the story in the debate.
- I have chosen motivations that are at the top of my judge’s value hierarchy.
- My arguments avoid the fallacy of emotive language.
- My arguments use a variety of motivational appeals.
- I have experimented with using a variety of motivational appeals in practice rounds.
- My use of pathos is ethical.
- My arguments are worthy of acceptance.
- I have considered the risks involved in using personal appeals.
- I have considered the experiences of my opponents, the judge, and my audience in order to avoid trigger terms.
- I have avoided the use of sexist and other forms of exclusionary language in the construction of my arguments.

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