

# Empirical Study of Rhetoric Appeal Based Writing Model

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## Abstract

Nowadays, there is an increasing awareness of the upset situation concerning English writing among college English teachers. More and more teachers come to expose themselves to various approaches to teaching writing in order to remedy the unsatisfying teaching situation. Process and product approaches are most commonly used in English writing teaching. But with product approach, composing process skills are given relatively small role and to a certain degree students' motivation and interests remain undeveloped, while when applying process approach to teach writing, more and more teachers realize the disadvantages of this so-called "enabling" approach. Based on the study of interrelationship between rhetoric and writing, the purpose of this paper is finding an effective model of writing instruction for students from rhetorical perspective, and through an experiment of composition writing, testing the feasibility of rhetorical model in writing action.

*Keywords:* Rhetoric Appeal, Writing Model, Ethos, Pathos, Logos

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## 1 Introduction

For a long time, English writing is regarded as a means of testing EFL's language proficiency. The focus is language usage and syntax. However, to communicate effectively requires more than just words, pronunciation, syntax, or the desire to convey ideas. To persuade others of speaker and writer's intent and meaning, learners depend on transactions between the speaker and writer and the audience, and on logical connection between ordered information sets [1]. In general, university faculties may ask students to produce two types of writing: descriptive and persuasive. Bliss noticed that most of multicultural students could handle descriptive writing fairly well [1]. However, when they are asked to write to inform or persuade, many of them have serious difficulties. Persuasive writing at the university level includes a variety of genres and formats that require students to develop an assertive thesis, by making claims and supporting the claims logically with substantive evidence. When students are faced with such writing assignment, they may face logical and structural problems because they may not know how to connect their ideas and their evidence in the expected rhetorical structure. They may present a kind of story or analogy as a way to explain their point of view. In many cases, these students rely on their native cultural and linguistic patterns of explanation, and as a result, to their instructors, their writing seems disorganized and neither informative nor persuasive [2]. Persuasion is important and commonly used in our daily life; it ranges from advertising to scholarly arguments [3]. Between these extremes lie dozens of situations in which persuasion is fundamental to everyday life. For example, when you apply for a job, propose marriage, or try to borrow money, you are using persuasion in an attempt to get someone to do something

you want done, or at other times you use persuasion to achieve benefits for others- as in trying to raise money for the victims of a famine or trying to persuade the government to protect an endangered species of wildlife [4]. What all of these examples have in common is that they assume to persuade other people. Therefore learning rhetoric may help students in their English writing.

## 2 Rhetoric and Rhetoric appeals

The term rhetoric has had different meanings throughout its long history. In ancient Greek, rhetoric referred to public speaking, not writing. "rhetor" in Greek means orator or public speaker. For many people rhetoric has had a negative connotation, "verbal profusion calculated to manipulate an audience, an operation whose aim are suspected and whose typical procedures are most trivializing" [2]. Interest in rhetoric revived in the 1950s and 1960s. Weaver and other scholars who took part in the rhetorical revival applied the lessons of the rhetorical tradition to composition, arguing that rhetoric was the true basis of the discipline for both pedagogy and research[5]. Today, many linguistics studying writing are finding the notion of rhetoric useful. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some philosophers including I. A .Richards, Kenneth Burke, Chiam Perelman, Stephen Toulmin, and Richard Weaver revived and developed rhetoric [6]. Though Richards says that the central theme of traditional rhetoric is persuasion, and in the history of rhetorical study different schools advocate different persuasion models [7]. Classical rhetoric recognized that persuasion was accomplished through three means: the credibility of the writer (ethos), the logic of the argument (logos), and the skill with which appropriate feelings are inspired (*pathos*) [3]. This threefold approach to persuasion has prevailed in the West

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for almost two thousand years.

## 2.1 ETHOS

The Greek word “ethos” means “ethics” or “ethical”. It has to do with the speaker or writer’s character and his credibility. So the term is sometimes translated as “ethics”, “authority”, “charisma”, “image”, or “credibility”. In fact, ethos embodies all these aspects. Aristotle lists three components of ethos, which are “good sense, good moral character, and goodwill”. He believes that any one who is thought to have all three of these good qualities will inspire trust in his audience [8].

Here, “good sense” means the speaker or writer must appear to be a competent, intelligent person who knows what he is talking about. First, common sense is essential in demonstrating this quality. Second, the audience consists of as many opinions as people; therefore, recognizing these viewpoints helps the speaker or writer in building his persuasion and discussing the viewpoints exhibits a certain amount of intelligence [9].

“Good moral character” means the writer or speaker must appear to be an honest person. If he could state his beliefs, values, and priorities in connection with the topic it will assist him in convincing the audience of his argument. If these beliefs and values coincide with the majority of the audience, he is well on his way to success.

“Goodwill” means the writer or speaker must be interested in what is best for the audience rather than one motivated by self-interested profits. This component concerns the audience’s benefit and respects their intelligence, sincerity and common sense.

## 2.2 PATHOS

Pathos refers to the emotional appeals and means how well the writer taps into the audience’s emotions[10]. The most powerful speakers and speeches in history used the emotional appeals. Quintilian, understands the advantages of the emotions, “profits, it is true, may induce the judges to regard our case as superior to that our opponent, but the appeal to the emotions will do more, for it will make them wish our case to be better. And what they wish, they will also believe” [4].

Many people are familiar with Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’. As they listen to a recording of the address, they can hear the roaring cheers and applause of the audience during his speech and can sense that deep emotions flowing through the crowd like an electric charge. Nobody doubts that King successfully persuades his audience. Although there are many reasons for his success and he appeals not to pathos only, pathos is the most remarkable feature of his speech. “I have a dream that one day...” identifies his dreams with the black people’s, his ideals with them and while they experiencing the same feeling, the audience is easily and successfully persuaded.

## 2.3 PATHOS

In Greek, logos can mean simply “word” or it can mean “the underlying point that makes sense or meaning behind everything else,” or it can mean “logic, reason or rational thinking” [11]. As a way to build an effective argument,

logos in many ways are the most important of the three persuasive appeals because it is the most honest. It is possible for a liar to misuse pathos to play on an audience’s heartstrings. It is possible for a cheat to use false ethos and create a trustworthiness he shouldn’t have. However, if the audience is also trained in logic, a writer’s arguments must stand or fall on their own rational merits.

Induction means a type of reasoning that moves from the specific to the general [12]. The argument is based on a limited number of examples, and from these examples, people can draw a general or universal rule.

Deduction is a type of reasoning that moves from general to specific. The argument is based on a general or universal rule that both the reader and the writer agree upon [13]. The writer takes this general rule and then he tries to show how a specific example fits into that larger category.

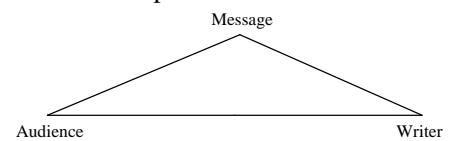
Example here doesn’t have the same meaning with what people usually use today. It means to draw a conclusion from a series of examples—the same as induction does today. Examples are especially useful in arguments that attempt to establish something about the future. People know what is likely to happen in the future because they compare it with the past. When they draw an example from the past, they often call it a precedent, an instance from the past which is very similar to the one being considered.

## 3 Rhetoric appeal based Writing Model

To construct a more cogent or persuasive discourse is the aim of every writer, but “what kind of text or discourse is more persuasive” is a long-time asked question. Here are two jokes about marriage; are they persuasive?

- a. Marriage gives you three rings:  
engagement ring, wedding ring, and suffering.
- b. Marriage is a bomb;  
kills two!!!

We find that some people are deeply identified with them, others are neutral, and still some people are laughing at them. To those who are deeply identified with them, these two jokes are out of question persuasive. But their persuasiveness is reduced with the decrease of the degree of identification. So to different people the persuasiveness of the same discourse is different. Therefore audience is the most important element in any kind of persuasion—from commercial or advertising to writing assignment in college. If a writer thinks in advance about his audience, it will pay off when he begins to write. According to previous illustration, we may draw a diagram, which connect rhetorical persuasion process and discourse construction process.



Logos→ Message; Pathos → Audience; Ethos→ Writer

FIGURE 1 Rhetorical Triangle 1

So the rhetorical appeals should be considered through three aspects, namely, message aspect, audience aspect and writer's aspect. But in practical writing, the three often mingle together and influence each other[5]. Hence based on the gist of traditional rhetorical theory, we try to make a persuasion model which can be easily applied in English writing. The model can be clearly shown by the Fig.2

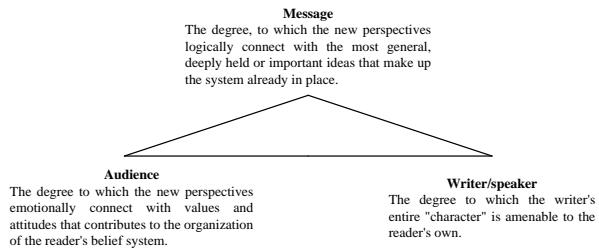


FIGURE 2 Rhetorical Triangle 2

The triangle is essentially equilateral because the equal sides and angles illustrate the concept that each appeal is as important as the others. It also suggests that a balance of the three is important. Hence the degree of persuasiveness is related to the following three points:

- (1) The degree, to which the new perspectives logically connect with the most general, deeply held or important ideas that make up the system already in place.
- (2) The degree to which the new perspectives emotionally connect with values and attitudes that contributes to the organization of the audience's belief system.
- (3) The degree to which the writer's entire "character" is amenable to the audience's own.

#### 4 Design of the Experiment

A writing experiment is designed to test the applicability and effectiveness of the new rhetorical framework. This experiment consists of two parts: classroom instruction and essay writing, and the results were observed through the comparative study of a controlled group and an experimental group. First, the necessary concepts and theories involved in the rhetorical appeals were taught to 46 students (including the experimental group). After learning the appeals twice a week for three months, two classes were assigned the same writing task. The writing task was designed to be debatable and thought provoking so that the students may be interested in it. Finally, the raters were asked to perform various evaluative tasks, such as holistic scoring, persuasive force rating, the analysis of rhetorical appeals and T-unit analysis.

##### 4.1 THE SUBJECTS

The subjects in the experiment were 91 sophomores from two classes of the Xi'an University of Technology. The experimental group, which had listened to the materials, consisted of 46 students and the controlled group who was not exposed to the rhetorical appeals and therefore knew nothing about them, consisted of 45 students.

##### 4.2 PROCEDURES

##### (1) Preliminary work: teaching the rhetorical framework

The teaching plan was designed into 3 parts:① rhetorical framework instruction, ② application of the framework in material analysis, ③ free discussion. This special teaching work went on for three months, twice per week.

##### (2) Essay writing

The subjects were asked to write an argumentative essay of at least 400 words on the topic of "Video Games, Blessing or Curse". They were expected to write a letter to the students who were indulged in video games.

All the participants were given enough time for the writing task. They could first write an outline, then revise their drafts and finally hand them in. In order to make sure that the experimental group would not forget to apply the appeals to their writing, the teacher offered a few prompts as follows:

- a) What is my attitude on this issue?
- b) Who is my potential reader?
- c) What are the facts related to the subject matter?
- d) What are the needs and values of the readers related to the subject matter?
- e) How can I make the audience believe what I say?

#### 4.3 EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS

Since it was hard to demonstrate the difference between the experimental group and the controlled group and it was subjective to evaluate essay writing, three raters and three rating methods were employed. All the raters are American native speakers who have taught English in China for many years. The three rating methods are: persuasive force rating, holistic rating, and the T-unit analysis.

The reasons to choose these three rating methods are the following: Holistic rating is essentially necessary to evaluate essay-writings. Persuasive force rating is appropriate to evaluate argument. T-unit analysis is fundamental for measuring natural syntactic development.

##### (1) Persuasive Force Rating

Persuasive force rating aims at showing how the subjects, by their argument, persuade their audiences, which are the readers of their letters [6]. As the writing task indicated, the participants were required to write an argument to the students' newspaper to state their position, so their audience was the students' newspaper readers. The essays were scored along the scale of 1-7. The scores thus obtained for the students of the experimental group and of the controlled group were added up and the mean persuasive force scores of each group were then computed. Table 1 shows the difference between the two groups.

TABLE 1 Persuasive Force Rating

Parameter Group	Experimental Group(N=46)	Controlled group(N=45)
Persuasive force rating	6.7	5.16

##### (2) Holistic Rating

It is believed that holistic rating can best reflect the overall effectiveness of a piece of writing by focusing on the total effect in stead of on disparate language points. Factor analysis was used to sort the readers into groups on the basis of their tendency to agree with each other [7]. Readers' written comments were then analyzed to

determine what accounts for the rating of quality. Five factors emerged: Ideas, Form, Wording, Flavor and Mechanics. After a few years' practice, the final version of the scale includes idea, organization, wording, flavor, usage, punctuation, spelling and handwriting[8].

TABLE 2 Reshuffled Holistic Rating

	Low		Middle		High
Ideas	2	4	6	8	20
Organization	2	4	6	8	10
Wording	1	2	3	4	5
Flavor	1	2	3	4	5
Mechanics	1	2	3	4	5

The result of holistic rating is in the following table of data.

Table 3 Holistic Rating (total=45)

Experimental Group (N=46)	Controlled group (N=45)
24.24	22.38

### (3) T-unit Analysis

T-unit stands for "terminable unit", which means, as its inventor, Kellogg Hunt puts it, that "one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses happen to be attached or embedded within it" [9]. Perhaps the most frequent use of the T-unit in second language research is in the measurement of complexity in written text. The measure is the average number of words per T-unit, or to put it in another way, the average length of T-unit in the text. By applying T-unit analysis to the essays of all the participants, the following table of data is obtained.

TABLE 4 T-unit Analysis

Group Parameter	Experimental Group (N=46)	Controlled group (N=45)
Mean number of T-units	13.8	14.6

### (4) Essay length

Word-count was applied to show the length or content of the participants' essays, resulting in the following table of data:

TABLE 5 Essay Length

Experimental Group (N=46)	Controlled Group (N=45)
409.9	374.8

### (5) Relationship between mean essay length and mean number of T-units

The following data compares the results from the T-unit analysis and the word-count regarding the relationship between the mean essay length (MEL) and the mean number of T-units (MTU).

TABLE 6 Relationship between MEL and MTU

Group Parameter	Experimental Group (N=46)	Controlled group (N=45)
Mean number of words Per T-unit	21.36	20.07

The subjects in the experiment were 91 sophomores from two classes of the Xi'an University of Technology. The experimental group, which had listened to the materials, consisted of 46 students and the controlled group who was not exposed to the rhetorical appeals and therefore knew nothing about them, consisted of 45 students.

## 4.4 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

As the experimental group was well equipped with the knowledge of the audience-oriented rhetorical appeals, it was reasonable to believe that when they composed their essays they consciously applied the appeals to their essays. They were obviously doing well in the above aspects concerning how well an argument was produced. The controlled group, as they did not know about the rhetorical appeals, just composed their essays in their own way and thus exposed a list of common problems of Chinese students: unaware of the audience and unconscious to appeals. The contrast will be presented in the table 7.

TABLE 7 Contrasts between Groups One and Group Two

Group Parameter	Experimental Group (N=46)	Controlled Group (N=45)
Persuasive force Rating	6.7	5.6
Holistic Rating	24.24	22.38
Mean number of words per T-unit	21.36	20.07

The results above show clearly that the experimental group did a better job than the controlled group in producing a well-presented argument.

First of all, the argument essays of the experimental group were more convincing than those of the controlled group. This is strongly supported by the persuasive rating. The reason is that the experimental group had a clear awareness of the process of persuasion in human cognition. During their writing, they always tried to identify with their audiences' cognitive process. The holistic rating result may also indicate the conclusion that the experimental group did better than the controlled group. In the aspects of the ideas, organization, wording, flavour and mechanics, the experimental group scored higher than the controlled group. According to the holistic rating rubric, the parameter of Ideas takes the biggest share of the total score. Since both the experimental group and the controlled group were roughly comparable in terms of syntactical competence, therefore, the experimental

group's superiority over the controlled group in terms of the holistic score should be attributed to the application of the rhetorical appeals.

In addition, the difference in the numbers of T-units between the experimental group and the controlled group also suggests that the former one generated better essays than the latter one do. Composition studies in the West have shown that the higher the syntactical competence, the more words per T-unit. The experimental group's mean number of words per-unit is 21.36 while that of the controlled group is 20.07, which shows the former was syntactically better than the latter, although not too much.

## 6 Conclusion

According to Douglas Ehninger (1972) "Rhetoric" is the discipline that studies how human beings may influence one another's thoughts and actions through the "strategic use of symbols." To this view, I would add that "rhetoric" also includes the study of the means by which human beings form their own thoughts and actions, for the "internal" parallels the "external," and "dialectic" marks

their interaction. "Rhetoric" is not something "added" to discourse to serve "knowledge," but something, which inheres inescapably in human thought and action that produces knowledge. It is that which "informs and conditions" us, whether or not we "will" it, for we are "bound by and to it". The results obtained from the experiment and the all point to the conclusion that armed with the knowledge of cognitive rhetorical appeals, the students naturally tend to apply different appeals to their writing to persuade their audience and therefore write more persuasive and substantial compositions. The findings indicate that the cognitive model of rhetorical appeals could be a valuable tool for composing writing and daily communication.

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