



Ethos

What is ethos?

Ethos is the technique authors use to gain credibility and earn readers' trust. For example, why do you trust a doctor with your health? Is it a medical school diploma hanging on the wall of their office, their professional demeanor, their knowledge in the field of medicine, or the fact that they received great reviews on the internet? It's usually a few elements that work together to give us a sense of a person's credibility. Let's examine some examples of what can make or break an author's trustworthiness.

Techniques to gain credibility

- **Credentials** – Who knows more about college football offense: Patrick Mahomes or Raider Red? Novice coaches would trust a playbook written by Superbowl LIV winner and TTU alumnus, Mahomes, more than one written by Raider Red because Mahomes has experience running an offense, while Raider Red is only a passionate fan.
- **Honesty** – Can you trust the author? Consider their agenda. What are they trying to accomplish, and how far would they go to try to convince you of their point? You can usually tell if something is suspicious.
- **Knowledge** – Does the author seem to know enough about the topic to build a strong case? Writers gain credibility by providing evidence. They can gain knowledge through first-hand experience or research. For example, one of the most credible authors on the history of war, Stephen Ambrose, hasn't served a single day in the military yet is a credible author on the topic.
- **Origin of the source** – Where did you access the source? Consider two articles on the topic of the "freshman fifteen." One is from a credible scholarly journal and another from WebMD. Which should you cite? The scholarly journal is more trustworthy because the publishers take greater care making sure the information is backed up by scientific research.
- **Logic** – Do the author's arguments seem reasonable? You wouldn't trust a doctor who wants to treat the "freshman fifteen" by prescribing a slice of cheesecake three times a day. That seems illogical. In this case, the doctor has undermined their credibility and you should question the truth of their other arguments as well.

A key takeaway is this: Ethos is an author's appeal to gain our trust. Look for more cues than just their credentials; closely examine the smallest details to determine how well authors have established their expertise.