

Pathos

What is pathos?

Pathos is the use of emotional appeals to strengthen the effectiveness of an argument. You can recognize pathos in charitable organizations' ads and their use of touching pictures and music to get you to donate money for a good cause.

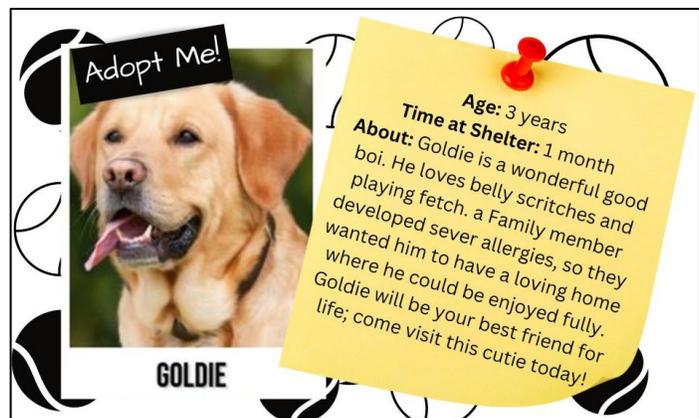
When you see an example of pathos, think critically about what emotion the communicator is trying to evoke in the target audience. Once the emotion is identified, ask how the communicator is trying to persuade the audience and to what purpose?

Check out the following quick steps of analysis:

1. Find an example of pathos. Look for anything that makes you think the communicator is trying to make the audience laugh, be sad, get angry or excited, or feel proud.
2. How will those emotions help the communicator accomplish their purpose? What/how do they want their main or secondary audiences think, believe, or act?
3. What makes this appeal to pathos effective or ineffective? Did the communicator try too hard, or was the emotional appeal spot on? How did it contribute to the text's overall effectiveness?

We realize it is difficult to put a specific label on an emotional appeal. Let's consider the pet adoption ad to the right:

The **audience** is people wanting a dog. The **purpose** is to find Goldie a forever home. **Emotions:** sympathy (he had a good family, but allergies separated them); excitement (playing fetch and scratching bellies are ideal activities); desire (person looking to adopt a dog is looking for a best friend).



What other emotions can you identify? Was the appeal effective or ineffective for the audience?

A key takeaway is this: Emotional appeals are easy to spot but hard to label and analyze. Figuring out who the target audience is and the communicator's purpose will help determine if the emotional appeal is effective or ineffective.