

## Appeals

Those wishing to persuade us to adopt their point of view often seek to tap into values and views that we hold dear. They seek to position the reader or listener to agree with them by appealing to a view or value that is important to the reader.

### Appeals to tradition

If a writer or speaker wants to argue against a proposed change, he or she will often use an appeal to tradition. For example:

- ▶ 'We've always done it like this...'
- ▶ 'This practice has a long and noble history.'
- ▶ 'Our forefathers fought for this.'

The readers or listeners are meant to feel that if they do not support the writer's point of view, then they are undervaluing the importance of tradition.

## Appeals to the Reader

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### Appeals to a sense of responsibility

An appeal to a sense of responsibility seeks to make the reader feel that there are strong moral reasons for taking action on a particular issue. For example:

- ▶ 'We can't just stand by and let this happen.'
- ▶ 'For the sake of future generations, we must take action now.'

### Appeals to fear

There are many kinds of fear to which a writer or speaker can appeal. There is the fear of change, the fear of loss and the fear of violence. For example:

- ▶ 'If this happens, then we will see a vast increase in crime.'
- ▶ 'If we allow the government to do this, individual rights will be severely eroded.'
- ▶ 'This could lead to social unrest.'
- ▶ 'People will lose their jobs if this goes ahead.'

Because of the possibility of these fears being realised, the readers or listeners are more likely to be persuaded to agree with the point of view being put forward.

### Appeals to 'family values'

'Family values' are based on the importance of the family as a 'unit'. Families are thought to value such things as security, belonging, caring and nurturing.

For example, the following claims might appeal to or be of interest to people who value the family.

- ▶ 'Working mothers are unable to give sufficient attention to their children.'
- ▶ 'Corporate businessmen working long hours are alienated from their families.'
- ▶ 'Insecurity in employment is preventing couples from starting families.'
- ▶ 'Unemployed parents cannot afford to buy Christmas presents for their children.'
- ▶ 'The breakdown of the family in our society is leading to an increase in drug-taking among adolescents.'

Special concern for the vulnerable (the children and the aged) are central to these family values. If it can be demonstrated that a proposal benefits or threatens families, readers and listeners may be persuaded accordingly.

### Appeals to compassion

A description of the plight of the underprivileged is an appeal to the readers' or listeners' sense of compassion. Sometimes this might also be designed to elicit outrage and a desire to take some action to rectify the situation. For example, a description of the condition of those living in a war-afflicted zone or in the aftermath of a disaster can be used to encourage donations to a special fund.

### Appeals to self-interest

Appeals to self-interest can take many forms. For example, if a writer or speaker shows readers or listeners that they will be better off in some way as a result of a particular proposal, they may be more likely to agree with the proposal. Statements such as those below are appealing to self-interest.

- ▶ 'Residents of the City of Kingsville should realise that if the government's proposal goes ahead, there will be an increase in tourism to the area.'
- ▶ 'If you vote for my party, interest rates will not go up.'

### Appeals to group loyalty

With this sort of appeal, the readers or listeners are positioned so that they feel they should support the point of view out of loyalty to a particular group. For example:

- ▶ 'If this proposal goes ahead, then many of your fellow workmates will lose their jobs.'
- ▶ 'Students should stand together on this issue.'

### Appeals to patriotism

The term 'un-Australian' is an example of an appeal to patriotism. When a politician or commentator uses this term, the reader or listener is made to feel that supporting a particular point of view or action is not a patriotic thing to do. References to national interest, Australia's position in the world and its economic well-being are other examples of this sort of appeal. For example:

- ▶ 'We must take this action if Australia is to be a credible force in our region.'
- ▶ 'We must not change the flag because Australian soldiers fought under it in past wars.'
- ▶ 'Australian performers are capable of great things!'

Although 'un-Australian' can be seen as an appeal to patriotism — we 'true' Australians wouldn't want to identify with behaviour or ideas that are regarded as 'un-Australian' — it can also be seen as a term of chastisement, a way of reprimanding particular ideas or behaviour. The following Opinion column by Hugh Mackay explores the meaning of this term.

### Appeals to the desire to be modern

Advertisers make extensive use of this appeal, urging customers to buy the latest in technology, the most up-to-date in fashion or the most recent model car. But there are fashions in ideas, too, and writers and speakers can position readers and listeners to agree with them by indicating that opposing ideas are old-fashioned. For example:

- ▶ 'The dinosaurs who resist change must not be allowed to stand in the way of progress.'
- ▶ 'We have to change with the times; we cannot become embedded in the past, embracing old-fashioned ideas.'

### Appeals to guilt

A feeling of guilt is a powerful emotion, and writers and speakers who make their readers and listeners feel guilty about an issue exercise considerable appeal. For example:

- ▶ 'If we sit back and do nothing, this building proposal will go ahead and the surrounding environment will be destroyed.'
- ▶ 'If shareholders continue to insist on bigger dividends, companies will improve their efficiency by sacking workers.'

### Appeals to a sense of justice

An appeal to a sense of justice or fairness is often used when the rights of two opposing sides come into conflict. The following arguments are examples:

- ▶ 'It's all very well to talk about the rights of non-smokers, but what about smokers? Don't they have any rights?'
- ▶ 'So single mothers are getting more concessions from the government, are they? Why aren't the disabled being helped too?'

The following editorial appeared in the *Herald Sun* newspaper on 31 December 2005. Read it and then answer the questions that follow.