

Cultivate Ethos in the 21st Century

Brief: Cultivating ethos requires adopting character-building behaviors such as demonstrating goodwill towards your audience, trustworthiness, and competency.

Learning Objective: Identify behaviors that increase personal ethos.

Key Terms:

- Eunoia: Behaviors that demonstrate goodwill towards the audience.
- Derived credibility: How the audience perceives the speaker while they are delivering the speech.
- Initial credibility: What the audience knows about the speaker prior to the speech.
- Terminal credibility: The lasting impression the audience has of the speaker as they leave the speech.

The Key to Cultivating Ethos: Build Character

More than two thousand years ago, when Aristotle proposed that a public speaker's persuasive appeals should include ethos (an appeal to the speaker's character), pathos (an appeal to the audience's emotion), and logos (an appeal to logical reasoning), he intentionally placed ethos first on his list. He wrote, "Character may be considered the most effective means of persuasion."

Aristotle's assertion that character is a primary ingredient in establishing credibility remains true today. In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey presents an approach to being effective in attaining goals by aligning oneself to what he calls "true north" principles based on a character ethic that he presents as universal and timeless.

The 5th Habit

Covey's 5th Habit, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood," has its roots in Aristotle's concept of "eunoia," which means "goodwill towards the audience."

You can demonstrate eunoia by:

1. Finding common ground with your audience.
2. Appealing to shared beliefs and values.
3. Identifying a shared goal.
4. Returning to this shared goal throughout the speech.
5. Demonstrating that you have considered other perspectives on the issue.
6. Showing that you understand the appeal of opposing positions.
7. Making a case for your own position.



State Representative Isela Blanc speaking with attendees at an event titled "The Future of Public Education" hosted by Arizona Talks at the First Baptist Church of Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The Three Stages of Building Speaker Credibility

Building your credibility unfolds in three stages. The first stage of credibility, known as “initial credibility,” is what the audience knows prior to the speech. The second stage, “derived (during) credibility,” is how the audience perceives you while delivering the speech. And the third stage, “terminal credibility,” is the lasting impression that the audience has of you as they leave the speech.

Build Initial Credibility

What does the audience already know about your expertise? Does the audience think you are trustworthy? Most speakers build initial credibility during an introduction by a host or moderator prior to the speech, during a self-introduction, or by a combination of both. If you will need to include a brief self-introduction, make sure it relates to the topic and your motivation for speaking. Why should they want to listen to you talk about this topic?

Build Derived Credibility

How does the audience perceive you during your speech? How does your audience respond to what you wear, the words you use, your delivery, and the way you handle yourself in general during the speech? If you use strong supporting evidence and explain it to the audience, you will enhance your perceived competence. If you communicate sincerely and honestly with the audience, you will enhance the perception of your character. If you speak confidently and assertively while demonstrating a genuine concern for the audience, you will increase your credibility with the audience.

Build Terminal Credibility

As a speaker, you want to build a rapport with the audience so they leave with as good or a better impression of you than when you began your speech. Rapport occurs when two or more people are on the same wavelength because they feel similarly or relate well to each other. In a sense, the audience sends back what you send out. If you are honest and ethical with your audience and share your values and beliefs, you establish a rapport that will carry over beyond the speech.

From Concept to Action

Imagine you're the host at a public speaking event and you are the next speaker you need to introduce. Based on who you are as an individual (not on a specific topic) how would you highlight your areas of expertise and reinforce your credibility?

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