Aristotle introduced the Rhetorical Triangle in his work "Rhetoric." According to Aristotle, the purpose of rhetoric is to persuade others through argument by appealing to their emotions, in order to sway their thinking. Aristotle lists three types of rhetoric: political discourse, forensic or legal persuasion and epideictic or ceremonial speaking. Each type of rhetoric employs the three elements of the rhetorical triangle, also called the Aristotelian Triad: ethos, pathos, and logos.

**Ethos** refers to the character or presence of the speaker. The author must have -- or seem to have -- a credible argument and appear to be a trustworthy individual. If the argument is technical or requires expert knowledge, the speaker must establish the position as an expert. If the individual is not credible or trustworthy, the audience will not attend to the argument or be persuaded by it. The speaker must also use the appropriate tone or voice for the situation to make an effective presentation.

**Pathos** refers to the role of an audience in a rhetorical situation. The argument must appeal to the emotions or values of the audience if it is to be effective. The rhetoric must stimulate the imagination of the reader or listener. The speaker or author must develop a sense of empathy in the audience. However, the speaker must take care not to appear manipulative or the speaker risks losing ethos.

**Logos** refers to the logic of the argument itself. A rhetorical speech must be structured in a clear, logical manner. If an argument is illogical and unclear, the audience will not be able to follow it. Regardless of how charismatic the speaker is, if the argument is difficult to understand, the speaker is unlikely to persuade the listeners. A text that is logical and easily understood is far more likely to sway the audience. An illogical argument can affect the audience’s perception of the speaker, decreasing the speaker’s ethos.

The **Rhetorical Triangle** is typically represented by an equilateral triangle, suggesting that logos, ethos, and pathos should be balanced within a speech. However, which element(s) of the rhetorical triangle is used more heavily depends on both the audience and the purpose of the speech.

*Ford’s Rhetorical Triangle Lesson*