

King writes both to the ministers who published the letter in the Birmingham newspaper and also to the people of Birmingham. He seems to want to justify his group's actions. He challenges white moderates, but he also tries to avoid antagonizing them. Given this purpose and his readers, his supporting statements are generally appropriate. He relies mainly on assertions of shared belief with his readers and on memorable analogies. For example, he knows his readers will accept assertions like "law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice"; it is good to be an extremist for "love, truth, and goodness"; and progress is not inevitable, but results from tireless work and creativity. His analogies seem appropriate for his readers. For example, he compares injustice to a boil that nonviolent action must expose to the air if it is to be healed. Several times, King invokes authorities (Socrates, Jesus, Amos, Paul, Luther, Bunyan, Lincoln, Jefferson) his readers revere. Throughout his argument, King avoids fallacies of inappropriateness.

Likewise, his support is believable in terms of the well-known authorities he cites; the facts he asserts (for example, that racial tension results from injustice, not from nonviolent action); and the examples he offers (such as his assertion that extremism is not in itself wrong—as exemplified by Jesus, Paul, and Luther). If there is an inconsistency in the argument, it is the contradiction between King's portraits of himself both as a moderating force and as an "extremist for love"; but his redefinition of extremism as a positive value for any social change is central to the overall persuasiveness of his logical appeal to white moderates.

CHECKLIST

Evaluating the Logic of an Argument

- To determine whether an argument makes sense, apply the ABC test:
1. **Test for Appropriateness** by checking to be sure that each piece of evidence is clearly and directly related to the claim it is supposed to support.
 2. **Test for Believability** by deciding whether you can accept as true facts, statistics, and the testimony of experts, and also whether you can accept generalizations based on the examples given.
 3. **Test for Consistency and Completeness** by ascertaining whether there are any contradictions in the argument and also whether any important objections or opposing arguments have been ignored.
 4. Write a few sentences, exploring the appropriateness, believability, consistency, and completeness of the argument.

RECOGNIZING EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION

Writers often try to arouse emotions in readers—to excite their interest, make them care, move them to action. Although nothing is wrong with appealing to readers' emotions, it is wrong to manipulate readers with false or exaggerated emotional appeals.

Many words have connotations, associations that enrich their meaning and give words much of their emotional power. For example, we used the word *manipulation* in naming this particular critical reading strategy to arouse an emotional response in readers like you. No one wants to be manipulated. Everyone wants to feel in control of his or her attitudes and opinions. This is especially true in reading arguments: we want to be convinced, not tricked.

Emotional manipulation often works by distracting readers from relevant reasons and evidence. To keep from being distracted, you will want to pay close attention as you read and try to distinguish between emotional appeals that are acceptable and those that you consider manipulative or excessive.

As you read, look for and annotate evidence of the following kinds of emotional appeals:

- *Appeal to pity*: attempting to arouse sympathy by telling hard-luck stories or by excessive or inappropriate sentimentality
 - *Scare tactics*: attempting to induce fear in readers through veiled or explicit threats, alarming statistics, or frightening stories
 - *Demonizing opponents*: making opponents look like devils by exaggerating their faults
 - *Name calling*: using loaded words like *fascist* or *racist* to discredit opponents
 - *Guilt by association*: lumping together everyone who might disagree with the writer, no matter how extreme or moderate their views
 - *Ad hominem arguments*: personal attacks on opponents, perhaps criticizing their motives or ethics rather than refuting their arguments
 - *Ridicule*: using humor or contempt to downplay or discredit an opponent's argument
 - *False flattery*: praising readers to get them to accept the writer's views
- If you find appeals that you think might be manipulative, writing about them can help you explore your response. Here is an example of one student's reaction to the emotional appeal of "Letter from Birmingham fall":

As someone King would probably identify as a white moderate, I can't help reacting negatively to some of the language he uses in this reading. For example, in the first paragraph, he equates white moderates with members of the Ku Klux Klan even though he admits that white moderates were in favor of racial equality and justice. I guess this would fall under the category of guilt by associa-

tion. He also uses name calling when he puts down white moderates for being *paternalistic*. Finally, he uses scare tactics when he threatens “a frightening racial nightmare.” This is probably also an example of demoralizing—with the demons being black nationalists like Malcolm X.

CHECKLIST

Recognizing Emotional Manipulation

To assess whether emotional appeals are unfairly manipulative.

1. Annotate places in the text where you sense emotional appeals being used.
2. Write a few sentences exploring your responses and identifying the kinds of appeals you found.

JUDGING THE WRITER'S CREDIBILITY

Writers often try to persuade readers to respect and believe them. Because readers may not know them personally or even by reputation, writers must present an image of themselves in their writing that will gain their readers' confidence. This image cannot be made directly but must be made indirectly, through the arguments, language, and the system of values and beliefs implied in the writing. Writers establish credibility in their writing in three ways:

- By showing their knowledge of the subject
- By building common ground with readers
- By responding fairly to objections and opposing arguments

Testing for Knowledge

Writers demonstrate their knowledge through the facts and statistics they marshal, the sources they rely on for information, and the scope and depth of their understanding. As a critical reader, you may not be sufficiently expert on the subject yourself to know whether the facts are accurate, the sources reliable, and the understanding sufficient. You may need to do some research to see what others are saying about the subject. You can also check credentials—the writer's educational and professional qualifications, the respectability of the publication in which the selection first appeared, any reviews of the writer's work—to determine whether the writer is a respected authority in the field. King brings with him the authority that comes from being a member of the clergy and a respected leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Testing for Common Ground

One way writers can establish common ground with their readers is by basing their reasoning on shared values, beliefs, and attitudes. They use language that

includes their readers (*we*) rather than excludes them (*they*). They qualify their assertions to keep them from being too extreme. Above all, they acknowledge differences of opinion and try to make room in their argument to accommodate reasonable differences. As a reader, you will be affected by such appeals.

King creates common ground with readers by using the inclusive pronoun *we*, suggesting shared concerns between himself and his audience. Notice, however, his use of masculine pronouns and other references (“the Negro . . . he,” “our brothers”). Although King addressed this letter to male clergy, he intended it to be published in the local newspaper, where it would be read by an audience of both men and women. By using language that excludes women, King misses the opportunity to build common ground with half his readers.

Testing for Fairness

Writers display their character by how they handle objections to their argument and opposing arguments. As a critical reader, you want to pay particular attention to how writers treat possible differences of opinion. Be suspicious of those who ignore differences and pretend everyone agrees with their viewpoint. When objections or opposing views are represented, you should consider whether they have been distorted in any way, if they are refuted, you want to be sure they are challenged fairly—with sound reasoning and solid evidence.

One way to gauge the author's credibility is to identify the tone of the argument. Tone is concerned not so much with what is said as with how it is said. It conveys the writer's attitude toward the subject and toward the reader. By reading sensitively, you should be able to evaluate the writer's stance and attitude through the tone of the writing. To identify the tone, list whatever descriptive adjectives come to mind in response to either of these questions: How would you characterize the tone of this selection? Judging from this piece of writing, what kind of person does the author seem to be? Here is an answer to the second question, based on the excerpt from “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (pp. 417–421).

I know something about King from television programs on the civil rights movement. But if I were to talk about my impression of him from this passage, I'd use words like *patient, thoughtful, well educated, moral, confident*. He doesn't lose his temper but tries to convince his readers by making a case that is reasoned carefully and painstakingly. He's trying to change people's attitudes; no matter how annoyed he might be with them, he treats them with respect. It's as if he believes that their hearts are right, but they're just confused. If he can just set them straight, everything will be fine. Of course, he also sounds a little pompous when he compares himself to Jesus and Socrates, and the threat he appears to make in

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