As Figure 3.1 shows, each point on the triangle corresponds to one of the three persuasive appeals:

- **Logos** (Greek for "word") focuses attention on the quality of the message—that is, on the internal consistency and clarity of the argument itself and on the logic of its reasons and support. The impact of logos on an audience is referred to as its logical appeal.

- **Ethos** (Greek for "character") focuses attention on the writer’s (or speaker’s) character as it is projected in the message. It refers to the credibility of the writer. Ethos is often conveyed through the writer’s investment in his or her claim, through the fairness with which the writer considers alternative views, through the tone and style of the message, and even through the message’s professional appearance on paper or screen, including correct grammar, flawless proofreading, and appropriate formats for citations and bibliography. In some cases, ethos is also a function of the writer’s reputation for honesty and expertise independent of the message. The impact of ethos on an audience is referred to as the ethical appeal or appeal from credibility.

- **Pathos** (Greek for "suffering" or "experience") focuses attention on the values and beliefs of the intended audience. It is often associated with emotional appeal. But pathos appeals more specifically to an audience’s imaginative sympathies—their capacity to feel and see what the writer feels and sees. Thus, when we turn the abstractions of logical discourse into a tangible and immediate story, we are making
a pathetic appeal. Whereas appeals to logos and ethos can further an audience’s intellectual assent to our claim, appeals to pathos engage the imagination and feelings, moving the audience to a deeper appreciation of the argument’s significance.

A related rhetorical concept, connected to the appeals of logos, ethos, and pathos, is that of kairos, from the Greek word for “right time,” “season,” or “opportunity.” This concept suggests that for an argument to be persuasive, its timing must be effectively chosen and its tone and structure in right proportion or measure. You may have had the experience of composing an argumentative e-mail and then hesitating before clicking the “send” button. Is this the right moment to send this message? Is my audience ready to hear what I’m saying? Would my argument be more effective if I waited for a couple of days? If I send this message now, should I change its tone and content? This attentiveness to the unfolding of time is what is meant by kairos. We will return to this concept in Chapter 6, when we consider ethos and pathos in more depth.

Given this background on the classical appeals, let’s turn now to logos—the logic and structure of arguments.

**Issue Questions as the Origins of Argument**

3.3 To distinguish between issue and information questions and between genuine and pseudo-arguments

At the heart of any argument is an issue, which we can define as a controversial topic area such as “the labeling of genetically modified foods” or “racial profiling,” that gives rise to differing points of view and conflicting claims. A writer can usually focus an issue by asking an issue question that invites at least two alternative answers. Within any complex issue—for example, the issue of abortion—there are usually a number of separate issue questions: Should abortions be legal? Should the federal government authorize Medicaid payments for abortions? When does a fetus become a human being (at conception? at three months? at quickening? at birth?)? What are the effects of legalizing abortion? (One person might stress that legalized abortion leads to greater freedom for women. Another person might respond that it lessens a society’s respect for human life.)

**Difference between an Issue Question and an Information Question**

Of course, not all questions are issue questions that can be answered reasonably in two or more differing ways; thus not all questions can lead to effective arguments. Rhetoricians have traditionally distinguished between explication, which is writing that sets out to inform or explain, and argumentation, which sets out to change a reader’s mind. On the surface, at least, this seems like a useful distinction. If a reader is interested in a writer’s question mainly to gain new knowledge about a subject, then the writer’s essay could be considered explication rather than argument. According to this view, the following questions about teenage pregnancy might be called information questions rather than issue questions:

How does the teenage pregnancy rate in the United States compare with the rate in Sweden? If the rates are different, why?
Although both questions seem to call for information rather than for argument, we believe that the second one would be an issue question if reasonable people disagreed on the answer. Thus, different writers might agree that the teenage pregnancy rate in the United States is seven times higher than the rate in Sweden. But they might disagree about why. One writer might emphasize Sweden's practical, secular sex education courses, leading to more consistent use of contraceptives among Swedish teenagers. Another writer might point to the higher use of oral contraceptives among teenage girls in Sweden (partly a result of Sweden's generous national health program) and to less reliance on condoms for preventing pregnancy. Another might argue that moral decay in the United States or a breakdown of the traditional family is at fault. Thus, underneath the surface of what looks like a simple explication of the "truth" is really a controversy.

How to Identify an Issue Question

You can generally tell whether a question is an issue question or an information question by examining your purpose in relationship to your audience. If your relationship to your audience is that of teacher to learner, so that your audience hopes to gain new information, knowledge, or understanding that you possess, then your question is probably an information question. But if your relationship to your audience is that of advocate to decision maker or jury, so that your audience needs to make up its mind on something and is weighing different points of view, then the question you address is an issue question.

Often the same question can be an information question in one context and an issue question in another. Let's look at the following examples:

- **How does a diesel engine work?** (This is probably an information question, because reasonable people who know about diesel engines will probably agree on how they work. This question would be posed by an audience of new learners.)
- **Why is a diesel engine more fuel efficient than a gasoline engine?** (This also seems to be an information question, because all experts will probably agree on the answer. Once again, the audience seems to be new learners, perhaps students in an automotive class.)
- **What is the most cost-effective way to produce diesel fuel from crude oil?** (This could be an information question if experts agree and you are addressing new learners. But if you are addressing engineers and one engineer says process X is the most cost-effective and another argues for process Y, then the question is an issue question.)
- **Should the present highway tax on diesel fuel be increased?** (This is certainly an issue question. One person says yes; another says no; another offers a compromise.)

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION  Information Questions versus Issue Questions

Working as a class or in small groups, try to decide which of the following questions are information questions and which are issue questions. Many of them could be