MADAM,

I hope you will believe that my delay in answering your letter could proceed only from my unwillingness to destroy any hope that you had formed. Hope is itself a species of happiness, and, perhaps, the chief happiness which this world affords: but, like all other pleasures immoderately enjoyed, the excesses of hope must be expiated by pain; and expectations improperly indulged, must end in disappointment. If it be asked, what is the improper expectation which it is dangerous to indulge, experience will quickly answer, that it is such expectation as is dictated not by reason, but by desire; expectation raised, not by the common occurrences of life, but by the wants of the expectant; an expectation that requires the common course of things to be changed, and the general rules of action to be broken.

When you made your request to me, you should have considered, Madam, what you were asking. You ask me to solicit a great man, to whom I never spoke, for a young person whom I had never seen, upon a supposition which I had no means of knowing to be true. There is no reason why, amongst all the great, I should choose to supplicate the Archbishop, nor why, among all the possible objects of his bounty, the Archbishop should choose your son. I know, Madam, how unwillingly conviction is admitted, when interest opposes it; but surely, Madam, you must allow, that there is no reason why that should be done by me, which every other man may do with equal reason, and which, indeed, no man can do properly, without some very particular relation both to the Archbishop and to you. If I could help you in this exigence by any proper means, it would give me pleasure: but this proposal is so very remote from usual methods, that I cannot comply with it, but at the risk of such answer and suspicions as I believe you do not wish me to undergo.

I have seen your son this morning; he seems a pretty youth, and will, perhaps, find some better friend than I can procure him; but though he should at last miss the University, he may still be wise, useful, and happy.

June 8, 1762

*choose

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In his refusal to recommend a woman for patronage to a university, Samuel Johnson carefully constructs his argument against a title to the bishop and gradually builds support for his position. His denouement is marked by and successful due to the use of definition, a subtle shift in tone, and the application of the appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos. Combined, these devices successfully convey Johnson's unwillingness to complete the task while still allowing him to remain cordial.

Initially, Johnson anticipates the emotion of the mother awaiting receipt of the letter: hope. Rather than occurring out of being wrong in holding this emotion, Johnson defines the term hope as an "pleasure immediately enjoyed" and as an "expectation immediately indulged" (H 687).

Through definition, Johnson is able to couple these two aspects of hope to "disappointment" and to define as "anguish" (H 808). While obvious in intent and meaning, the indirect connection of disappointment with hope allows Johnson to let the mother down more tactfully than if he had
directly stated his rejection. Furthermore, the use of definition allows the reader to make the connection and accept the conclusion (rejection) on her own, rather than being able to directly place blame on Johnson. The use of definition allows the writer to distance himself from the action of denial.

Between the first and second paragraphs, a tonal shift occurs, leaving behind the soft-voiced tactic of definition and entering the harsh and somewhat eccentric use of logic. This shift in tone serves two purposes. At first, it prepares the reader for the tone she is to receive.

By shifting in tone at this point, Johnson also indicates that beyond preparation for blame, the matter should also leave behind any lingering “hope.” Johnson’s tonal shift indicates that when constructing this rejection letter, he saw two different methods for relating the news: the more emotionally friendly approach of definition and the harder logic. His decision to utilize both methods in this dynamic denial indicates his anticipation of various reactions.

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Johnson's second paragraph is marked by a logical explanation as to why he will not seek patronage for the lady's son. The use of this rhetorical device has several implications. At base, it indicates a respect for the knowledge and thought process of the mother in that he is willing to explain his decision in plain terms rather than dumbing it down. Additionally, it conveys a certain severity as Johnson forces the mother to admit that "there was no reason" why she should write the letter. Similar to definition, but harsher in nature, logos forces the mother to recognize faults in her decision to ask Johnson for his assistance. This further repudiates herself from the rejection.

In his use of definition and logos, Samuel Johnson simultaneously distances himself from the denial by forcing the mother to see the error of her ways in hoping and in asking for the letter to start with. Additionally, his tone shift between paragraphs allows the reader to anticipate the母er to anticipate the writer's tactics. Overall, Johnson's denial is firm and unapologetic but allows the mother to follow a gradual progression in acceptance or rejection.

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