

# The Art of Speech

by *Tod Olson*

Whenever there is an election, whether in the United States or Norway, candidates who are running for office are expected to give speeches. What's the point? Anytime you're listening to a speech, you're not just getting information; speakers are trying to persuade you of something vital to them. If they're good, they've crafted their words to make their version of reality seem like the only version. In other words, they're engaging in the art of rhetoric.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle had something to say about this. He was one of the first great students of rhetoric (the art of persuasive speech). He named three ways in which speakers can get you on their side, and we still use the Greek words for each. Speakers can stir your emotions (*pathos*), appeal to your reason (*logos*), or convince you that they themselves are credible (*ethos*).

We've picked an example of each kind of appeal from the great speeches in history. As you read each excerpt, ask yourself: What's the speaker's main purpose? Who is the audience? How exactly is the speaker trying to pull them in?

## Pathos (the appeal to emotion)

"I have a dream today."

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

### THE SCENE:

Some 250,000 people crowded in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. It was August 28, 1963, a crossroads in the civil rights movement. For eight years, African-Americans had been demanding relief from segregated buses and schools, from inferior jobs and unjust laws.

Martin Luther King Jr., spiritual leader of the movement, was the last speaker of the day. He insisted that now was the time for America to live up to its ideals, but warned against using violence to force the issue. Then his voice rose with the cadence of a preacher into a refrain that was more poetry than argument. He appealed to a set of values so deeply and widely held that barely anyone could argue against it, and he did it with a set of soaring images that spoke to the heart, not the head.



Martin Luther King

*craft* forme/forme  
*credible* troverdig/truverdig  
*cadence* tonefall  
*soaring* høytflyvende/høgt-flygande

#### THE EXCERPT:

*I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.*

*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."*

*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

*I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

*I have a dream today. ...*

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."*

#### THE AFTERMATH:

Less than a year later, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which guaranteed voting rights to all. Today, millions read King's speech every year, and it remains one of the most eloquent appeals for justice ever delivered.

#### Logos (the appeal to reason)

"The only question left to be settled is: Are women persons?"

*Susan B. Anthony*

*creed* trosbekjennelse/tru-  
vedkjenning  
*swelter* være overopphetet /  
vere overoppheta  
*oppression* undertrykking  
*exalt* prise, opphøye / prise,  
oppbølge  
*reveal* åpenbare/openberre  
*eloquent* veltalende/velta-  
lande  
*poll* stemmegivning / stem-  
megiving, røysing  
*suffrage* stemmerett

#### THE SCENE:

Susan B. Anthony was an American citizen. But when it came time to exercise the fundamental right of citizenship – the right to vote – the law said she had to stay home. In 1872, she got tired of staying home. She led a group of women to the polls in Rochester, New York, to vote in the presidential election – and got arrested for her efforts.

While Anthony awaited her trial, she traveled to New York State to make the case for woman suffrage. "It shall be my work this evening," she started out, "to prove to you that ... I not only committed no crime, but instead simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me and

all United States citizens by the National Constitution.” With knife-sharp logic she launched into her argument, challenging her audience, and history itself, against the claim that women were the “emotional” sex.

#### THE EXCERPT:

*For any State to make sex a qualification, which must ever result in the disfranchisement of one entire half of the people, is ... a violation of the supreme law of the land. By it the blessings of liberty are forever withheld from women and their female posterity. For them, this government has no just powers derived from the consent of the governed. For them this government is not a democracy; it is not a republic. It is the most odious aristocracy ever established on the face of the globe.*

*It is urged that the use of the masculine pronouns he, his, and him in all the constitutions and laws, is proof that only men were meant to be included in their provisions. If you insist on this version of the letter of the law, we shall insist that you be consistent and accept the other horn of the dilemma, which would compel you to exempt women from taxation for the support of the government and from penalties for the violation of laws. ...*

*The Fourteenth Amendment settled that question forever in its first sentence:*

*“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States, and of the State wherein they reside. ...”*

*The only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons? I scarcely believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens, and no State has a right to make any new law, or to enforce any old law, which shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several States is today null and void.*

#### THE AFTERMATH:

Anthony was convicted and fined \$100, but she refused to pay, and no one attempted to collect. Little by little, the arguments of the suffragists won Americans over. But it took New York another 44 years to pass a woman-suffrage law. Finally, in 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution granted all American women the right to vote.

*launch into* kaste seg ut i  
*disfranchisement* det å miste stemmerett  
*posterity* her: avkom  
*derive* utlede, komme / utleie, komme  
*consent* tilslutning  
*odious* avskyelig/avskyeleg  
*provision* foranstaltning/ordning  
*exempt* fritta  
*reside* bo/bu  
*abridge* beskjære / avkorte, redusere  
*null and void* ugyldig

Susan B. Anthony



Ethos (the persuasive appeal of a speaker's character)

"I worked my way through college."

*Richard M. Nixon*

ticket fellesplattform

THE SCENE:

Richard M. Nixon was under fire. In the fall of 1952, the young Republican Senator from California was running for Vice President on a ticket with Dwight D. Eisenhower. The campaign was going well – until a story broke that Nixon had a "secret fund," set up by a group of California millionaires. He was accused of using \$18,000 for personal expenses and promising political favors to the people who put up the money.

Richard Nixon

Calls went out for Ike to pick another Vice President. So, on September 23, 1952, with his political future on the line, Nixon went on nation-



al TV and radio. He denied the accusations. Then, with his wife, Pat, by his side, he launched into a long personal history. It was something politicians rarely did back then. But Nixon decided it was more important to make people sympathize with him than to directly disprove the charges.

THE EXCERPT:

*I was born in 1913. Our family was one of modest circumstances and most of my early life was spent in a store out in East Whittier. It was a grocery store – one of those family enterprises. The only reason we were able to make it go was because my mother and dad had five boys and we all worked in the store.*

*I worked my way through college and to a great extent through law school. And then, in 1940, probably the best thing that ever happened to me happened, I married Pat – sitting over here. ...*

*Pat and I have the satisfaction that every dime that we've got is honestly ours. I should say this – that Pat doesn't have a mink coat. But she does have a respectable Republican cloth coat. And I always tell her that she'd look good in anything.*

*One other thing I probably should tell you because if I don't they'll probably be saying this about me too, we did get something – a gift – after the election. A man down in Texas heard Pat on the radio mention the fact that our two youngsters would like to have a dog. And, believe it or not, the day before we left on this campaign trip we got a message from Union Station in Baltimore saying they had a package for us. We went down to get it. You know what it was?*

*It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate that he sent all the way from Texas. Black and white spotted. And our little girl – Trisha, the 6-year-old – named it Checkers. And you know, the kids love the dog and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it.*

THE AFTERMATH:

Letters of support poured in. Ike kept Nixon on the ticket and they won in a landslide six weeks later. Today, politicians are expected to bare their personal lives in great detail, and many people trace the trend to what's now known as the "Checkers Speech."

*crate kasse  
landslide valgscred/valskred*

# Activities

## 1 DISCUSSION

- Which of the three speeches bases its argumentation on logical facts and the conclusions that can be drawn from these facts? How effective is this?
- Which speech uses repetition as one of its main tools? What is the effect of doing this?
- Which speech makes you feel like you are listening to the man next door? Why do you think this approach was chosen rather than the two other approaches?
- Which speech did you find most convincing and why?

## 2 A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROOTS OF WORDS (ETYMOLOGY)

The etymology of the words sympathy, empathy and pathetic is *pathos*.

- Which word do you think means “pitiful, or marked by sorrow or melancholy”?
- Which word means “pity or compassion for another”?
- Which word means “the capacity for participation in another’s feelings or ideas”?
- In what way are all three words related?
- Which words do you think stem from the words *ethos* and *logos*? Look at the beginning of the words and look for one noun, one adjective and one adverb that can be created from each of these words.

## 3 GOING FURTHER

On the *Access* website you will find links to some of the greatest speeches in history – including Martin Luther King’s immortal speech. Pick one of the speeches on the site to analyze in class. Which rhetorical devices does the speaker use? Does he appeal to your logic, your emotions or your sense of morality?

You will also find links to practical help in preparing your own speeches on the *Access* website.

### Guidelines for oral presentations

There are many different categories of public speaking. Speeches held at confirmation celebrations, birthdays etc. are examples of public speaking. However the type of public speaking that you will most often encounter as a student is the oral presentation where your aim is not to *persuade* but rather to *inform* your audience. Some students find this a relatively easy task while others lose both sleep and appetite when they have to stand in front of their classmates or their teacher and an external examiner in an exam situation. Here are a few tips to help you.

### *How do I get started?*

Many speech therapists suggest using a “*grabber*” which could be a question, a gesture, an anecdote, a personal experience, an unusual fact etc. In other words anything that “grabs” the audience’s attention. For example:

- Question – “How many of you would like to be a millionaire by the time you are thirty?” (speech on Bill Gates)

- Unusual fact – “Did you know that during a severe windstorm or rainstorm the Empire State Building may sway several feet to either side?” (speech on architecture)
- Personal anecdote – “When I was a child I used to think that the older you were, the better you became at speaking Spanish and the worse you became at speaking English. My older brothers and sisters spoke more Spanish than I did, my parents spoke both Spanish and English and my grandparents spoke only Spanish.” (speech on bilingualism).
- Once you have “grabbed” your audience’s attention remember to clearly state your *topic*.
- Remember to *speak* to your audience rather than read from a manuscript. This is crucial. Nothing puts an audience better to sleep than a speech read from a manuscript.
- Remember *eye contact* with the entire class (not just the teacher!).
- *Visual aids* are useful and have the advantage of redirecting attention from you the speaker to whatever you show the audience. These can be:
  - Pictures or objects.
  - Whatever you write on the blackboard.
  - Transparencies.
  - Power point presentations. (Be on your guard here, however! If everyone in your class has a power point presentation, that too loses the effect of variation and can become monotonous).
- Use your *voice* as a tool.
- Speak loudly and slowly. Think of the person furthest from you and make sure he or she can hear you.

- Try to appear confident even if you are not. You know your topic well and your audience doesn’t. That means that you are the expert.
- Remember *transitions* between different parts of your presentation. A transition is a point where you move from one topic to another or from one section of your talk to another. In a speech this can be done in various ways.
  - Pauses
  - State clearly that you have finished one section and are about to begin another. (For example: All Right. Those are the main characters ... And now I’d like to turn to the plot ...)
- Use body language (e. g. change your position, rearrange your notes etc.)
- Have a clear, strong *conclusion*. Do not just fade away. You could thank your audience for their attention, for example, and open for questions.

#### A word of caution about your notes

Your notes should be just that – notes. They should not be a written manuscript. The temptation to read is too great to resist and you will tax your audience’s patience if you read to them.

- Don’t write full sentences or paragraphs. You can “fill out” what is missing when you deliver your talk.
- Type your notes in large print (size 14 or 16). They should be easy to see and read at a glance.
- Number your pages or cards.
- If possible, try not to hold your notes in your hand. Place them in front of you on a table or desk.