

# speech analysis essay sample



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Throughout the course of history, there have been copious amounts of famous speeches, given by many different people. From political figures to sports players, these people have provided deep thoughts and great insights about who they are and the world we live in today. Speeches also play an important and powerful role in both persuading and convincing large groups of people. Adolf Hitler, for example, somehow managed to persuade much of Germany to follow his beliefs, and actually convinced them to perform unspeakable actions towards his enemies. Even today, there are political figures around the world who utilize the power of speech to induce people into supporting their party in elections. Although powerful, constructing an effective and persuasive speech can prove to be difficult.

To form a powerful oration, the speaker must consider what diction they will use, the organization of their speech, and the rhetorical devices they will implement. Specifically, Lou Gehrig's Farewell speech, Mark Twain's speech to Ms. Tewksbury's School for Girls, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and finally Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, are all excellent examples of using effective diction and rhetorical devices. Each oration was brilliantly constructed to persuade each of their audiences, and they each share similarities as well as differences.

Being a sports enthusiast, one particular memorable speech comes to my mind. Lou Gehrig's Farewell speech, on July 4th, 1939, to more than 62,000 fans at New York City's Yankee Stadium, has become a cornerstone in the history of baseball in America. Lou Gehrig, one of the most under-rated sports players of all time, exhibits a great speech. Gehrig heavily utilized ethos to "argue" his point, and it was this rhetorical appeal that allowed him

to establish himself as a humble and thankful man who considered himself nothing but lucky to have been given the opportunities he had in life.

Gehrig knew that this speech was very important and it was necessary that he establish an ethos that would be taken more seriously than just simply a baseball player. So throughout his speech, Gehrig carefully used different grammatical techniques to establish himself as a reliable and effective orator. For instance, he poses questions and then answers them with the same phrase: " Sure, I'm lucky." Later on in his speech, he notes specific people and moments in his life where he has felt extremely blessed and he follows them all with the phrase " That's something." The repetition of these phrases allows Gehrig to emphasize how truly fortunate he has been in his life in a rhetorically effective way.

The entirety of Gehrig's speech also demonstrates parallel structure. In the second part of the speech, Gehrig describes those individuals that he had grown to know professionally throughout his career and then gives them a name at the end of the sentence. In the last part of the speech, he does the reverse and names the people that he has grown with personally at the beginning of the sentence and then goes on to describe how they have impacted his life in the latter part of the sentence. By doing this, Gehrig could get his points across in a very concise, yet impactful way that allowed his audience to trust his word and his ability as a orator.

Next, in Mark Twain's speech to Ms. Tewksbury's School for Girls, Twain used humor to express his message throughout the speech. For example, this humor is used when Mark Twain states that the girls " don't smoke - that is,

don't smoke to excess," " don't drink... to excess." and " don't marry... to excess." Like Lou Gehrig's Farewell speech, Twain is using repetition to convey his message, however, Twain uses humor to back up the repetition in his speech. The repetitive advice to not do something in excess creates trust amidst the listeners so that the audience feels like they can relate to Mark Twain. This repetition also assists the message being conveyed in Twain's speech that the girls should act at an acceptable level.

Mark Twain uses humor in his anecdote of a lost dog he found on the street. " I picked up the canine and sold him to a man for three dollars. Afterward the owner of the dog came along and I got three dollars from him for telling him where he could find the dog. So I went back and gave the three dollars to the man whom I sold it to, and I have lived honestly ever since." This demonstrates humor, because Twain made the three dollars by selling a lost dog and then helping the owner retrieve the dog. Once again, Twain makes the audience connect with him personally. Anecdote also plays a great role in conveying Twain's message, which is to be honest. Although humor was profitable in forming a personal connection, it also undermined the validity of Twain's message as well. His humorous nature did not give Twain an ambiance of superiority, which is generally essential when forming a speech, because it makes the speaker seem wiser.

Thirdly, the " I have a dream" speech by Martin Luther King was recognized as one of the best speeches ever given. It put the civil rights movement into the hearts and minds of Americans and beyond. Like Mark Twain's speech, Martin Luther King personally connected to his enormous audience in the anecdote of the " dream" he had. There are countless instances of

symbolism that occur throughout this speech and he is attempting to really connect with the audience and demonstrate an appeal of emotion and logic. He states that America has given all these opportunities and chances yet King believes all of those opportunities are empty, they are just words. In response, King states to his audience that he refuses “ to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt”, and he uses anaphora specifying that he refuses to believe “ there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation”.

Everywhere we turn to in the speech, there is a demonstration of some sort of call to action, telling the audience to rise up and demonstrate their freedom. Martin Luther King tells the audience that it is time to make “ real the promise of democracy” and “ it is time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice”. This statement is teeming with emotional appeal, telling the audience that the time is over to stay in the shadows of segregation, and Dr. King creates this emotional appeal with a very repetitive statement to stand up and represent the African-Americans and the idea of racial equality. Martin Luther King, like Gehrig and Twain, also utilizes repetition in his oration to convey his message of freedom.

Each repetition builds on the one before and is reinforced by Martin Luther King’s ever increasing passion. For example, “ We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as...We cannot be satisfied...” As the speech closes, you notice the pace of Martin Luther King’s repetition increases, helping to build to a crescendo. “ Let freedom ring from Stone

Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.”

Lastly, in Sojourner Truth’s “ Ain’t I a Woman?” speech, Truth was able to utilize a copious amount of personal narratives to convey her message. She speaks on the inequalities that women and blacks faced at that time in America. Truth stated that “ nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain’t I a woman?” She also declared that she had “ borne thirteen children, and had seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain’t I a woman?” Sojourner’s use of anecdotes, like Martin Luther King and Mark Twain, gave the audience a personal connection to her, increasing trust in her message for both civil and women’s rights.

Also like Martin Luther and Twain, the repetition of the rhetorical question, “ and ain’t I a woman?,” makes the audience consider that she is a woman regardless of her race. However, one issue with the speech, is the use of slang in the diction. For instance, the word “ ain’t,” is used countless times through her speech. This decreases the level of sophistication in the speech, which in turn decreases the audience’s willingness to believe in the message.

All of these influential and vivid speeches each shared a common goal to convey their messages. Although none of them were perfect, they had a plethora of successes in their goal, because of their masterful manipulation of language through rhetorical devices and literary techniques. Each of these oration also teach us an essential lesson, that a great speech is an incredibly

powerful tool. As we have learned throughout history, speeches can build empires, rule nations, and inspire populations. They can also crumble governments, erode authority, and humiliate leaders. Therefore, it is absolutely vital for people to have the ability to communicate effectively. In a world of increasing inquiry and competition, the ability to communicate may be the most important skill to contain.