SPEECHES - THE SECRETS

Almost always, the main purpose of a speech is to persuade, influence or encourage the listeners to agree with the speaker’s views, ideas and opinions.

Whilst many great orators certainly have their own 'performing' style, it is also true that they use a variety of devices.

Many of these devices are also used in pieces of persuasive writing, too.

CONTENT

Often, a good speech will describe or refer to content and subject matter that is deliberately provocative and emotive. For example: children, family, the elderly, animals, gruesome details, are often used (and are successful in) provoking the emotions of listeners.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

In addition to a 'general' provocative and emotive subject matter, a great speech will probably allude to a specific well-known event or a certain famous (or infamous) individual in order to show examples of good / bad practice.

THE RULE OF THREE

This is when information is provided in a list of three things. Phrases or even sentences can conform to the rule of three. That said, the powerful and vibrant punch of single words, words and words should not be ignored.

USE OF CONTRAST / JUXTAPOSITION

Great speeches often compare and contrast one event / person / thing with another to add impact and emphasis to their views. In particular, they will describe and detail what is happening (usually bad) with what should be happening (good / better). When two opposing ideas, views and opinions are placed close to each other the effect can be startling and even more shocking.

USE OF TIMESCALE / HISTORY

The past, the present and the future often give speeches an excellent structure. In fact, this pattern is commonly used to evoke emotions and stir up feelings (from the past / yesterday), hopes (for the present / today) and dreams (for the future / tomorrow).

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REPETITION

Speakers often use repetition, repetition, repetition. In fact, this is probably one of the best ways of making sure that your message gets through. This is because repetition gives speech a certain fluency and rhythm. (Ever wondered why you can still remember the nursery rhymes of your childhood?) You can repeat key words or phrases or, indeed, both. Repeating key phrases gives your speech a great parallel structure.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Use of rhetoric, especially rhetorical questions, adds impact and drama to a speech. It gives the effect of a dialogue when in fact, they are just talking at you - both asking and answering the questions themselves! The tone of the questions can vary, according to the part of the speech.

LANGUAGE (DICTION)

Speechmakers are precise in their use of language and the vocabulary is often powerful, dramatic and highly emotive. You can be sure that every single word in a speech has been carefully selected.

USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

I, you, he, she, it, we, you + they

me, you, him, her, it, us, you + them

The first person - 'I' (or 'me'): What better way to get an audience to listen to your ideas? Talk about yourself, your opinions and your experience.

The second person - 'you': Make a direct and personal address to the listener (or listeners) to get them involved in what you're saying.

The first person plural - 'we' (or 'us'): Using this tiny word makes the listener feel included and involved. It gives them a strong sense of belonging, being part of something.

The third person plural - 'they' (or 'them'): These personal pronouns can be effective, particularly if drawn into contrast with first person plural. For example, it's easy to give your speech a spitting and bitter 'them' and 'us' tone.

POSITIVE VOCABULARY

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Orators use positive, pleasant words to get the audience on their side when presenting their ideas, values and opinions.

NEGATIVE VOCABULARY

In contrast, they use negative vocabulary to describe the 'enemy' or opponent. Using positive and negative words in close proximity (see Contrast / Juxtaposition) serve to highlight and improve the effectiveness of their argument.

EXAGGERATION (Gross generalisations / sweeping statements and assertions)

Speechmakers try to impress or persuade by using exaggeration. They will overstate a viewpoint, statement or idea, usually by use of carefully selected adjectives.

UNDERSTATEMENT (Gross generalisations / simplifying the issue)

Just as effective is their use of understatement, particularly if used alongside an example of exaggeration.

QUOTATIONS

Speechmakers sometimes include quotations from other sources in their speeches. For example, quotes can be sourced from other well-known speeches, the Bible, literary texts, TV, movies, proverbs, clichés, etc. By using quotations in a speech it is hoped that a link will be forged between the speaker and listener; it gives the speech an element of familiarity and a sense of shared experiences.

LITERARY / SOUND DEVICES

Speeches are normally only meant to be heard once, so the speaker normally tries to make the main ideas, keywords and phrases memorable using sound effects and literary devices.

- **Alliteration**: Repeating the initial consonant of a group of words for aural effect. Alliteration makes the speech memorable (by creating links) and also adds atmosphere.
- **Assonance**: Repetition of vowel sounds. (See alliteration for effect.)
- **Onomatopoeia**: Where the words used sound like the thing or concept being described. Using this device can bring a speech to life.
- **Rhyme**: Words that rhyme or sound similar are effective as they are often pleasant to the ear. Rhyming (or part-rhyming) words act as signals; the listener can almost predict a part of the speech.
FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

In order to add interest, impact and drama to a speech, skilled orators use figurative language. They use language to create 'word pictures' and the listener can visualise or imagine figures, images and comparisons.

• **Metaphor:** Describing two unrelated things using direct comparison. Sometimes the metaphor can be drawn out and becomes an **Extended Metaphor**.

• **Simile:** Describing two unrelated things or ideas using the words 'as' or 'like'.

• **Personification:** Giving human qualities to non-human or inanimate objects and things.

Whilst the many devices and strategies have been listed as separate entities, they are in fact part of a whole, being inextricably linked. Together, they will combine to give the speech its overall tone.

TONE

The way that the speech has been compiled, the way the above devices have (have not?) been used, will give the speech its **tone**. The tone is reflected in what the speaker says about a person or thing; it shows his / her attitude and feelings. The overall manner of expression, the spirit or character of the speech, the feelings being expressed by the speaker add up to tone. In a good speech, you should be able to identify the general, overriding tone but the **tone** of a successful speech will vary, ensuring that the variety of tones evokes a variety of responses from the listeners.

(angry, joyful, inspiring, sorrowful, mocking, sympathetic, measured, proud, serious, humorous, critical, remorseful, provocative, gentle, philosophical, bitter, uplifting, threatening, emotive, resentful, satirical, balanced, patriotic, aggressive, etc, etc, etc.)