

Speaking to the Occasion

Overview

Description

After viewing, listening to, and studying commencement speeches by notable figures, students will write and present their own graduation speeches. Speaking effectively in formal and informal settings is a critical skill for the 21st century that will benefit students in diverse situations such as interviews, college classrooms, and the workplace.

The entire class will first listen to at least two commencement speeches to extrapolate their thematic, structural, and stylistic features and will discuss how these elements function in their rhetorical situations. Before composing their own speeches, students will work independently to locate and analyze a commencement speech, doing the research necessary to understand the interrelationship of message, speaker, audience, and occasion. Students will continue to work independently to identify thematic and stylistic patterns employed in the speech, and then consider how these and other resources of language might be used in their own speeches.

Final Product: Each student will write and deliver a high school commencement address that contains qualities typical of graduation speeches.

Subject

English IV

Task Level

Grade 12

Objectives

Students will:

- Read and listen to two or more commencement speeches and analyze them to discern how the speakers develop an engaging message, use language resourcefully, and deliver a speech effectively for a specific audience on a specific occasion.
- Discuss how audience members often belong to different demographics (age groups, relationship to occasion) that may influence how they react to a text.
- Use the Internet to research famous commencement speeches.
- Collaboratively discuss ideas, themes, or trends present in commencement speeches, and prioritize those they find most critical in constructing an effective speech that retains the audience's interest.

- Write a five-minute commencement speech.
- Participate in the review and revision process with peers and instructor.
- Rehearse speech in front of peers and receive feedback.
- Conference with the instructor to refine the speech and prepare for its delivery.
- Formally present the speech to the class and any observers the instructor may have invited. The instructor may also provide ways for the audience to provide feedback.

Preparation

- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages.
- Ensure student access to the Internet.
- Look at Internet resources to draw out student knowledge about communication and presentation skills.
- Prepare search procedures for locating and investigating past commencement speeches, both in written and video format.
- Prepare a list of useful websites containing transcripts of speeches or links to videos of motivating or entertaining commencement speeches.

Possible sites include:

- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/05/17/ten-best-commencement-speeches_204427.html (This links to several famous commencement addresses; among them: John F. Kennedy's speech at American University, Toni Morrison's speech at Wellesley, Jon Stewart's speech at William and Mary, Oprah Winfrey's speech at Howard University, and Bono's speech at the University of Pennsylvania.)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcYv5x6gZTA> (This is a YouTube link to Randy Pausch's commencement address at Carnegie Mellon.)
- Modify and duplicate the student handout, *What to Note When Examining Commencement Speeches*.
- Prepare a review of language elements (e.g., theme, tone, detail, figurative language, and other rhetorical/literary devices, such as alliteration and anaphora). Be selective and include only those students are likely to encounter. Helpful websites include the following:
 - <http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>
 - <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/50-rhetorical-devices-for-rational-writing/>
 - <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>
- Prepare instructional notes on common commencement topics or themes (gratitude to parents, instructors, institution; value of knowledge; praise of student accomplishments; challenges students might face in college classrooms and

workplaces; the impact of current events on listeners; expectations for graduates) and characteristics (second person pronouns to address graduates; strategic questions; humor; anecdotes; inspirational quotations). Use these to prompt student analysis during class discussion so that the class can compile its own list.

- Provide a rubric for speeches to guide students' evaluation of their work. You may wish to use or modify the *Speech Evaluation Form* handout.

Prior Knowledge

- Students need to have prior knowledge in writing, reading, listening, and presentation skills.
- Students should be familiar with characteristics of effective speeches (e.g., opening hooks, memorable conclusions, transitions to link topics, humorous or inspirational anecdotes) and characteristics of ineffective speeches (e.g., use of tired clichés and platitudes; generalities with no specifics).
- Students should be familiar with characteristics of effective and ineffective speaking styles (e.g., posture, body language, eye contact, voice, enunciation, pacing).
- Students should have a working understanding of rhetorical situation, including a complex sense of audience.
- Students should have prior understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading.
- Students should be comfortable using word processing software.
- Students should have effective search strategies for Internet research.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Alliteration
- Anaphora
- Anecdote
- Audience
- Body language, posture, eye contact, gesture
- Cliché, Platitude
- Enunciation
- Hook
- Opening
- Pacing
- Topic focus
- Transition
- Voice

Time Frame

This assignment could take as little as a week of intense work or up to two weeks. At least one day should be spent reading, listening to, watching, and discussing speeches to discern their characteristics and how they address specific rhetorical

situations. One day should be spent discussing how to locate speeches and research the background of the speaker, audience, context, etc., so that students can then do their own searches in or out of class. Outside of class, each student should analyze the speech he or she has chosen and, working in groups, discuss the qualities he or she discovered. The evening following their group work, students should compose a first draft of their individual address. One class day should be devoted to peer reviews of students' speeches; on this same or another day, each student will conference with the instructor. Outside of class, students revise their drafts and practice their presentations. On the final days of the unit, students deliver their addresses and receive instructor and peer feedback.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Review the characteristics of effective delivery.
- Review methods of organizing speeches and review uses of rhetorical/literary elements in speeches.
- Note that these same methods of organization and rhetorical/literary elements are used in essays and other forms.
- Discern themes and features of commencement speeches and connect them in specific ways to speaker, audience, and occasion.
- Discuss how audience members often belong to different demographics (e.g., age groups) and often have different reasons for attending (e.g., to graduate, to officiate, to watch a son or daughter) that may influence how they react to a text.

Procedure

1. Locate two or more commencement addresses for class discussion.
2. Download the text form of video or audio presentations so that students can refer to the written version of the speech while listening.
3. Select appropriate points to stop, pause, and discuss particular characteristics that will be studied later in the lesson.
4. Prepare a list of commonly used rhetorical devices that writers use to enhance their commencement addresses.

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about Internet resources that are useful in finding commencement addresses that engage them.
- Access those sites and gather information on a wide assortment of speeches and speakers.
- Discuss literary elements and rhetorical devices that contribute to a speech's effectiveness.
- Discuss how audience members often belong to different demographics (age groups, relationship to occasion) that may influence how they react to a text.

Procedure

1. Create a list of websites that house commencement speeches in written, audio, or video form for students to use as a starting point when researching speeches.
2. Discuss what makes speeches humorous, inspirational, conventional, unconventional, controversial, etc.
3. Review list of commonly used rhetorical devices that writers use to enhance their commencement addresses.
4. Review need to see audience as complex.

Drawing Conclusions**Learning Objectives**

Students will:

- Compose and deliver an effective commencement speech appropriate to the occasion, which offers anecdotes, addresses the future, and suggests how audience should take action.
- Produce drafts that create tone and style appropriate to topic, audience, and task.

Procedure

1. Gather materials (e.g., highlighters, sticky notes, and scratch paper) to help students give concrete advice to writers to use in the revision process.
2. Create a rubric appropriate for the task of revision; it may include space for an analysis of the speech for organization, the relevance or purpose of the student-created commencement address, and the clarity of its message.
3. Set aside time to conference with students on their speech, focusing on whether the organization, tone, style, and content are appropriate to a commencement address.
4. Allow time for students to practice delivering their speeches in groups to obtain feedback from peers, perhaps using the *Speech Evaluation Form* handout.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Provide questions to guide students' organizational and stylistic analyses of a sample written speech, possibly with passages underlined or highlighted to focus attention on specific attributes of an effective commencement address.
- Have students work in small groups to analyze an additional speech.
- Provide rubrics that alert students to the assessment criteria for content, style, organization, and presentation.
- Provide specific, guided tutoring to students in need of greater direction and structure for the completion of the assignment.
- Review the writing process, focusing on those aspects with which individuals are struggling (prewriting/invention, revision, editing).
- Conference more than once with students on their individual speeches.

The following factors may be considered when assessing a student's performance on this assignment. These assessment factors should be made clear to all students at the beginning of the lesson:

- Speech includes an introduction, body, and conclusion, with an organization that supports the logical progression of an idea or main point.
- Speech acknowledges occasion and audience.
- Speech is situated in an historical moment, but challenges listeners to contemplate both the present and the future.
- Literary and rhetorical devices are used resourcefully (e.g., to appeal to the senses, create images, suggest mood).
- Tone is suitable to occasion.
- Anecdotes, stories, and/or humor enliven the message and connect with the audience.
- Delivery is well-paced.
- Delivery complements message (e.g., words are clear, tone seems natural).

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
A.1. Engage in scholarly inquiry and dialogue.	✓	✓	✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.	✓	✓	✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
A.3. Identify the intended purpose and audience of the text.	✓	✓	✓
B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.			✓
B.3. Compose and revise drafts.			✓
C.5. Synthesize and organize information effectively.			✓
C.6. Design and present an effective product.			✓
E.1. Use technology to gather information.	✓	✓	

TCCRS English/Language Arts Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Writing</i>			
A.1. Determine effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience.			✓
A.2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.			✓
A.3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.			✓

A.4. Recognize the importance of revision as the key to effective writing. Each draft should refine key ideas and organize them more logically and fluidly, use language more precisely and effectively, and draw the reader to the author's purpose.			✓
<i>II. Reading</i>			
A.9. Identify and analyze the audience, purpose, and message of an informational or persuasive text.	✓	✓	
A.10. Identify and analyze how an author's use of language appeals to the senses, creates imagery, and suggests mood.	✓	✓	
A.11. Identify, analyze, and evaluate similarities and differences in how multiple texts present information, argue a position, or relate a theme.	✓		
<i>III. Speaking</i>			
A.2. Adjust presentation (delivery, vocabulary, length) to particular audiences and purposes.			✓
B.2. Participate actively and effectively in group discussions.	✓	✓	
<i>IV. Listening</i>			
A.1. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of a public presentation.	✓	✓	

TEKS Standards Addressed

<i>Speaking to the Occasion - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
110.34.b.1. Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.1.A. Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, the arts) derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes. 110.34.b.1.B. Analyze textual context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings. 110.34.b.1.E. Use general and specialized dictionaries, thesauri, histories of language, books of quotations, and other related references (printed or electronic), as needed.
110.34.b.6. Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Literary Nonfiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the effect of ambiguity, contradiction, subtlety, paradox, irony, sarcasm, and overstatement in literary essays, speeches, and other forms of literary nonfiction.

<i>Speaking to the Occasion - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
110.34.b.7. Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Sensory Language. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze how the author's patterns of imagery, literary allusions, and conceits reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.
110.34.b.8. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author's meaning or purpose.
110.34.b.9. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.9.A. Summarize a text in a manner that captures the author's viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion. 110.34.b.9.C. Make and defend subtle inferences and complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns. 110.34.b.9.D. Synthesize ideas and make logical connections (e.g., thematic links, author analysis) among multiple texts representing similar or different genres and technical sources and support those findings with textual evidence.
110.34.b.10 Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Persuasive Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about persuasive text and provide evidence from text to support their analysis. Students are expected to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.10.A. Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships (e.g., implication, necessity, sufficiency) among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text. 110.34.b.10.B. Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language.
110.34.b.13. Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 110.34.b.13.A. Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea. 110.34.b.13.B. Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices to convey meaning. 110.34.b.13.C. Revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement, rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases. 110.34.b.13.D. Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling. 110.34.b.13.E. Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

<i>Speaking to the Occasion - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
<p>110.34.b.16. Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay (e.g., evaluative essays, proposals) to the appropriate audience that includes:</p> <p>110.34.b.16.A. A clear thesis or position based on logical reasons with various forms of support (e.g., hard evidence, reason, common sense, cultural assumptions).</p> <p>110.34.b.16.B. Accurate and honest representation of divergent views (i.e., in the author's own words and not out of context).</p> <p>110.34.b.16.C. An organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context.</p> <p>110.34.b.16.D. Information on the complete range of relevant perspectives.</p> <p>110.34.b.16.F. Language attentively crafted to move a disinterested or opposed audience, using specific rhetorical devices to back up assertions (e.g., appeals to logic, emotions, ethical beliefs).</p> <p>110.34.b.16.G. An awareness and anticipation of audience response that is reflected in different levels of formality, style, and tone.</p>
<p>110.34.b.17. Oral and Written Conventions/Conventions. Students understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:</p> <p>110.34.b.17.A. Use and understand the function of different types of clauses and phrases (e.g., adjectival, noun, adverbial clauses and phrases).</p> <p>110.34.b.17.B. Use a variety of correctly structured sentences (e.g., compound, complex, compound-complex).</p>
<p>110.34.b.18. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.</p>
<p>110.34.b.19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.</p>
<p>110.34.b.24. Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:</p> <p>110.34.b.24.A. Listen responsively to a speaker by framing inquiries that reflect an understanding of the content and by identifying the positions taken and the evidence in support of those positions.</p> <p>110.34.b.24.B. Assess the persuasiveness of a presentation based on content, diction, rhetorical strategies, and delivery.</p>
<p>110.34.b.25. Listening and Speaking/Speaking. Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to formulate sound arguments by using elements of classical speeches (e.g., introduction, first and second transitions, body, and conclusion), the art of persuasion, rhetorical devices, eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.</p>
<p>110.34.b.26. Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals, asking relevant and insightful questions, tolerating a range of positions and ambiguity in decision-making, and evaluating the work of the group based on agreed-upon criteria.</p>

Speaking to the Occasion

Introduction

Preparing and delivering oral presentations is part of life in the 21st century. Effective communication is always appropriate to the occasion and to the audience; it is not generic. This assignment focuses on one type of oral presentation: the commencement speech. Your class will listen to at least two commencement addresses to identify their features and discuss how they respond to a specific rhetorical situation (speaker, audience, purpose, occasion, genre). Following that, you will locate a commencement speech you'd like to analyze on your own, doing the research necessary to understand the interrelationship of message, speaker, audience, and occasion. You will identify the message of the speech and the stylistic patterns and other rhetorical devices the speaker employs and then consider how they might be used in your speech. Finally, you will plan, draft, workshop, revise, and deliver your own five-minute high school graduation speech. Your message should be appropriate to the occasion, offer anecdotes, stories, or vignettes that address the past and/or future, perhaps note future trends or problems that the graduates will face, and advise graduates how to define and/or ensure success in life after graduation.

The Rhetorical Problem

Most people, including public and private leaders, fear speaking in public. The best way to meet that fear is to be prepared for the challenge by drafting and practicing a speech suitable for the occasion. *Success takes hard work.*

What if the speaker isn't sure what is suitable for the situation? This problem can be overcome with strategic research and analysis. By finding and studying effective speeches delivered in specific situations, we begin to understand the defining features and characteristics of what is called for in a given situation, in your case an effective commencement address.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Read, watch, and listen to several commencement addresses.
2. Collaboratively analyze the organization, message, and presentation skills of the speaker to figure out what factors make the speech effective or ineffective. The handout *What to Note When Examining Commencement Speeches* lists some of the things to look for.

Investigating

1. Access Internet sites that link to commencement speeches by figures of note and locate a speech you find effective. Conduct any research necessary to get a solid sense of the speaker, audience members, and so on.
2. Analyze the speech's message, noting its major and minor themes and how they are organized into a coherent whole. Note, too, how they are supported or illustrated. Do these themes appeal to the audience? Do all members of the audience respond in the same way? Do parts of the speech seem geared toward specific subsections of the audience (e.g., graduates, parents, teachers, administrators)? How does the speech manage to appeal to the graduates themselves, who have different school experiences, different personalities, and so on? Be sure to note what you find effective/ineffective.
3. Look more closely at the language the speaker has chosen, noting the use and effect of rhetorical devices (including figurative language and use of anecdotes), length and variety of sentences, pronoun use, word choice, level of formality, etc. If the speaker told stories or provided examples, how do they relate to the theme, and why do you think the speaker did so? Did the speaker talk about the past and/or the future, and if so, why? Did the speaker use humor or maintain a serious tone and to what effect? How might you adapt some of the speaker's strategies in your own draft?
4. Talk with other students about common features of a variety of commencement speeches. Can you figure out why the speaker has used them? Were they effective or ineffective?

Drawing Conclusions

1. Write a commencement speech that meets the requirements of the speech situation but that also addresses an issue of serious concern (e.g., a significant challenge of the future and how to deal with it). Review the criteria listed on the *Speech Evaluation Form* handout.
2. Give your speech to one or more classmates for critical review, and using the guidelines provided by your instructor or the *Evaluation Form for a Brief Commencement Speech*, review a classmate's speech. Use the feedback you receive to plan your revisions. Following that, get your instructor's feedback. After carefully reviewing the feedback, revise your speech.
3. Finally, deliver your speech to the class and any visitors. As you listen to the speeches of your classmates, take careful note of which features of their texts and delivery are effective and which are ineffective, and consider how what you've surmised could prove useful to you in the future in crafting and delivering oral presentations and in conveying messages to an array of audiences. Study any feedback you receive.

What to Note When Examining Speeches

Student evaluator:

Speaker, including relationship to school/institution/occasion:

Occasion, including place and date:

Length of speech in minutes:

Delivery:

Is the volume adequate?

Is the pacing appropriate (speaker doesn't rush or run out of time)?

Does the speaker use emphasis and expression effectively?

Is the speaker's tone practiced but natural?

Do the speaker's posture and body language convey interest? Do they distract from the content?

Does the speaker make adequate eye contact with the audience?

Content/Message:

What is the message or main theme(s)?

Does the speaker use other topics to support the main theme?

Is the content appropriate for the audience and occasion?

Does the speaker refer to the audience and occasion?

Does the speaker use anecdotes, examples, quotations, and allusions effectively?

Does the speaker refer to the past and/or future effectively?

Does the content move beyond mere repetition of tired clichés to engage the audience?

Structure:

Does the speech have an opening, a middle, a closing? Do these serve a particular function?

Is the speech organized in ways that help listeners to follow (e.g., use of transitions)?

Language:

Is the style and level of formality appropriate for the audience and occasion?

Do the speaker's words clearly express the speaker's meaning?

Is the speaker's word choice appropriate and effective?

Does the speaker use pronouns effectively and inclusively?

Note the speaker's sentence length and patterns.

Other:

How does the audience seem to react to the speaker? (if known)

Speech Evaluation Form

Student evaluator:

Speaker, including relationship to school/institution/occasion:

Occasion, including place and date:

Length of speech in minutes:

Delivery:

Content/Message:

Structure:

Language:

Overall assessment of speech and suggestions for speaker: