

How to improve your evaluations

Introduction

My purpose is to inform you as to how you can improve your evaluations of speeches. Evaluators of speeches face the problem: "What constructively can I say?" Because we have all heard some excellent speeches, there really is a problem of finding something actually to say about good speeches.

What I am going to do is suggest ways in which you can think about what you are listening to in a speech and thus open up the critique in ways that will become constructive to the speaker.

Genre analysis

The term *genre*, which is French, is used in English and means *type*. Every speech that is delivered belongs to a genre. Here are some genres that we meet in speeches: the comic speech, the report, the welcome, the motivational speech, the introduction, the seminar, and so on.

Here I shall reference speeches by Anna Laszlo and Barnabas Szilagyi. It is not necessary to have heard these speeches to understanding the following. Anna and Barnabas have given me permission to use both their two speeches, and before I go on I would like to say how fantastic both people are as speakers.

Anna's speech is broadly in the category of comic speech. But within types there are types, and Anna's humorous speech is about our obsessions or concerns with vampires. It is specifically a *spoof* – that is, she is pretending that she is giving you a speech to inform in the manner of a news broadcast, but actually she is giving a satirical commentary on something we get obsessed about – namely, vampires. I found that I was very entertained when I got to the last part, but there is something that I could say critically about this speech, which it is that it is a mixed genre. In other words, the audience would be confused in this speech because they would not quite know whether they were listening to a satire or a speech to inform.

If you identify the type of speech you will open up the possibility of a constructive criticism.

Content and form

Let us consider the topic of *content and form*. Every speech has a type, and we all know that there are speeches that are "excellent" because we have witnessed them. So if a speaker masters the genre he/she will hit the bull's eye. To master the genre you must focus entirely on that genre. To do this means one must consider *content* and *form*: *what you are saying* and *how you are saying it*. The point is in a truly professional and outstanding speech the form must match the content in every way.

The second speech by Barnabas was a story, but it is the kind of story that we haven't heard for a long time; it is a fairy tale. It is closely related to an allegory. This makes it difficult for an audience that is not used to listening to fairy tales and allegories to comprehend and "read" his speech. This is problematic. Fairytales belong to the genre of allegory where there are symbols that we need to interpret. If you look into the structure of Barnabas's speech one can identify ways in which he could have informed his audience that they are going to listen to a fairytale. So form did not match content perfectly in Barnabas's speech. Had the two matched the audience would have known that they had listened to a fairytale and that it was up to them how to interpret the symbols.

Analysis

When you listen to a speech you can *analyse your own reactions*. For example, if the speech is supposed to be a comic speech, are you laughing? If it is supposed to be a motivational speech, have you decided to go out and change your life? If the answer to those questions is "no", then by close analysis of such reactions, you will be able to find a constructive critical point that will benefit the person who gave the speech.

Tone

There is also the question of *tone*. Tone concerns the relationship between you and your audience. You can think constructively about the person's response to the audience and how they are dealing with the audience. As an example: it is a possible *error of tone* if you give a speech in praise of God to an audience of atheists.

Develop your own theory

The critic helps the creator and vice-versa. There is an intimate relationship between the two. As an evaluator you have to be working in the background on your critical "apparatus". Develop a theory! I have given you some excerpts from the critical theory that I am developing, but there are other constructive ways about how we can develop critique and go forward. We all can learn from each other.

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Appendix: Genres

The following genres may be found in the advanced manuals.

Genre	Title of project	from Advanced manual
Comic	Speaking after dinner	The Entertaining Speaker
	Make them laugh	The Entertaining Speaker
	The humorous speech	Humorously Speaking
Report	The speech to inform	Speaking to Inform
	The technical speech	Speeches by Management
	Interpreting poetry	Interpretive Reading
Welcome	Goodwill speech	Public Relations
	The keynote address	The Professional Speaker
	Mastering the toast	Special Occasion Speeches
Motivational speech	Crisis management speech	Public Relations
	Manage and motivate	Speeches by Management
	The motivational speech	The Professional Speaker
	The coach	Interpersonal Communication
Seminar	The seminar solution	The Discussion Leader
	The persuasive leader	Persuasive Speaking
	The press conference	Communicating on Television
Introduction	Introduce the speaker	Specialty Speeches
Sales pitch	Sell a product	Specialty Speeches
	Effective salesperson	Persuasive Speeches
Brief	The briefing	Speeches by Management
	The technical briefing	Technical presentations
	The keynote address	The Professional Speaker
Debate	Confrontation	Speeches by Management
	Addressing the opposition	The Persuasive Speaker
	The successful negotiator	Interpersonal Communication
	The sales training	The Professional Speaker
Training	The proposal	Technical presentation
Proposal	The talk show	Communicating on Television
Conversation	The folk tale	Storytelling
Rendition	Read a story	Interpretive Reading
Eulogy	Speaking in praise	Special Occasion Speeches
Acceptance	Accepting an award	Special Occasion Speeches
Narrative	The touching story	Storytelling
	Bringing history to life	Storytelling

There are genres not practised in the advanced manuals, such as Apology. The genres are also relevant to the competent communicator series, though that series focuses on certain basic skills – such as body language, verbal language. Towards the end specific genres are practised – e.g. the motivational speech in the assignment on persuasion.

ADVANCED COMMUNICATION SERIES

The Entertaining Speaker
Speaking to Inform
Public Relations
The Discussion Leader
Specialty Speeches
Speeches by Management
The Professional Speaker
Technical Presentations
Persuasive Speaking
Communication on Television
Storytelling
Interpretative Reading
Interpersonal Communication
Special Occasion Speeches
Humorously Speaking