

General aspects of political rhetoric

The purpose of most political speeches is persuasion rather than information. There is always a (hidden, underlying) message involved, often related to certain attitudes and values of the speaker. A political statement intends to affect the listeners by making use of diverse structural and rhetorical devices. In order to understand and to be able to evaluate a political speech, one should consider the following aspects:

first (general) impression:

contents and structure:

circumstances of the speech / political context:

- topic, subject matter, general tone, issues and purpose of the speech
- salient and striking topics, important aspects
- organization of the text, arrangement of parts (e. g. introduction, main part or body, conclusion)
- time and place/medium (e.g. TV, radio, face-to-face, Internet)
- position of the speaker (president, leader of a political party, leader of a protest movement, etc.)
- audience (mass audience, a limited group of people)
- occasion (election campaign, protest demonstration, political debate, informal gathering)
- genre and type (presidential address to the nation, sermon, speech at a demonstration, campus speech, testimony)

formal and stylistic devices:

a) language

- keywords and phrases
- word groups/clusters related to a certain topic
- different registers for different addressees (e. g. sophisticated language, use of dialect, etc.)
- choice of words (colloquialisms, slang expressions, poetic expressions)

b) grammar

- sentence structure/syntax (use of main-/subclauses)
- use of grammatical tenses (indirect references to history, future, etc.)

c) rhetoric

- use of rhetorical questions and answers
- use of contrast and oppositions
- use of key symbols, slogans, stereotypes
- abstractions and generalizations
- use of grammatical persons (I, us, we - you, they: patterns of identification and solidarity or vice versa)
- metaphors, personifications
- allusions and references to history (American Dream, important political/historical issues, good/bad times, tradition, future, etc.); quotations
- repetitions (alliterations, anaphora); parallelisms
- comparisons, numbers, factual information



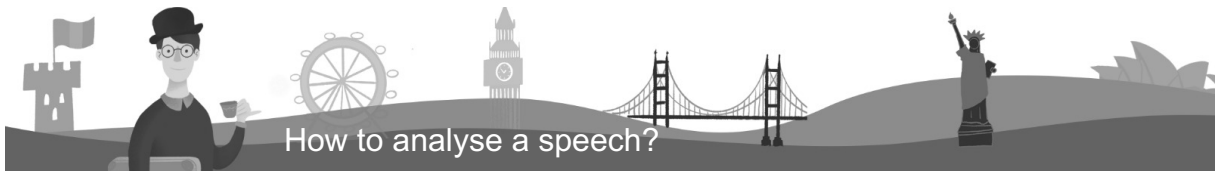
d) manner of speaking/voice

evaluation:

- irony, exaggerations, simplifications
 - imperatives, emotionally-loaded words
 - concentration on essential points vs. wordy
 - insertions
 - volume, tempo, stress, intonation, abrupt changes, pauses, rhythm
- Comment on the personal integrity of the speaker, the general political circumstances, the impact on the listeners.
 - Compare the speech/speaker to other political speeches/speakers. Was he/she convincing?

Glossary of rhetorical / stylistic devices

	Task	Time
1.	Add more examples by your own	
alliteration the repetition of a sound, usually a consonant, at the beginning of neighbouring words	-	"Somewhere at this very moment a child is being born in America. Let it be our cause to give that child a happy home , a healthy family , and a hopeful future ." Bill Clinton, Democratic National Convention Acceptance Address, 1992
allusion indirect reference to a famous event, person or piece of literature	-	
anaphora successive sentences starting with the <u>same</u> word	-	"We owe them remembrance, and we owe them more. We owe them , and their children, and our own..." George W. Bush, <i>Our country is strong</i> , 11.09.2002
antithesis contrast; opposing words, phrases, views, characters, etc.	-	
choice of words the decision to use a particular word based on such aspects as style, register, connotation, etc.	-	
enumeration a list of three or more people, objects or ideas	-	"Our public interest depends on private character , on civic duty and family bonds and basic fairness , on uncounted, unhonored acts of decency which give direction to our freedom." George W. Bush, 1 st Inaugural Address, 2001
euphemism using polite expressions for sth. unpleasant	-	"he's been right here since he passed away (= died) last night", Stan Ridgway, <i>Camouflage</i> , 1986
exaggeration /hyperbole making sth./sb. sound better, more exciting, dangerous, etc. than in reality	-	"The chamber is celebrating an important milestone this week: your 70th anniversary. I remember the day you started ." Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce, 1982
image a word intended to appeal to the reader's imagination and to bring a new perception to an object (-> figurative language, e. g. metaphors, similes)	-	
Including 'we' encloses the listener (I + you = we)	-	"We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline." Martin Luther King, <i>I Have a Dream</i> , 1963
irony saying the opposite of what you mean	-	



inversion

the syntactic reversal of the normal order of the words and phrases in a sentence

- "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 1961

(leit) motif

a theme, expression or object which recurs throughout a text and which refers to a certain person, situation or atmosphere

manner of speaking

a style that is typical of a particular person, e.g. politician or worker, etc.

metaphor

poetic comparison without using *like* or *as* (e. g. an ocean of love)

- "And if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the **jungle of suspicion**," John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 1961

paradox

seeming impossible at first glance but recognized as true on second thought

parallelism repeating similar or identical words/phrases in neighbouring lines/sentences/paragraphs

- "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall **pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe** to assure the survival and the success of liberty." John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 1961

personification presenting ideas/objects/animals as persons (e.g. a smiling moon)

- "We are not this story's author, who fills time and eternity with his purpose." George W. Bush, 1st Inaugural Address, 2001

pun

a play on words

reference

a connection to sth. else (-> allusion)

register/level of

speech

the words, style and grammar used, e.g. formal/informal English, colloquialisms, slang, non-standard English, etc.; such aspects are typically adjusted according to the addressees

repetition

deliberately using a word/phrase more than once

- "**out of step, out of** arguments and just about **out of time** ." Kofi Annan, Washington Post, 8.11.2006

rhetorical question

question to which the answer is obvious or to which no answer is possible/expected

- "Can anyone look at our reduced standing in the world today and say, '**Let's have four more years of this?**'" Ronald Reagan, 1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address

simile

comparison using like or as

- "we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down **like** waters," Martin Luther King, / Have a Dream, 1963

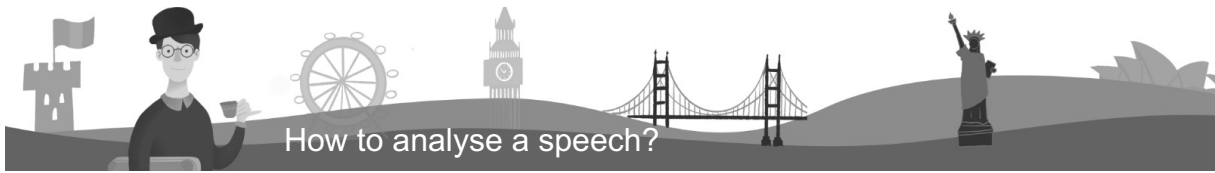
Writing a speech analysis

Introduction:

- Formulate a connecting sentence at the beginning in which you refer to a relevant aspect from your comprehension. Briefly state that the speaker for example uses a specific line of argumentation to underline his ideas.

Example: As I have pointed out in the first part of my composition, XY aims at persuading the listener of his critical view of the USA. In order to emphasize his position, he uses several persuasive techniques which will be explained in the following.

- Give a concise (kurzgefasst) outline of the structure of the text, referring to the speaker's train of thought and/or line of argument and the general message of the text.
- Do not repeat the introductory part from your first assignment (w-questions).



Main Part:

- Most elements in a speech have at least one of these four functions:
 1. To establish contact with the audience.
 2. To place emphasis on certain ideas.
 3. To present ideas understandably or memorably (illustration, memory aid).
 4. To convey a certain image of the speaker (self-presentation).
- Use **three-step-method** for your analysis:

Step 1: Spot/name the passage / quote	Step 2: Use the correct technical term	Step 3: Explain the function
Obama starts off by...	... alluding to the independence gained by the former colonies,...	... a step which included self-determination .
He uses...	the personal pronoun "we"...	... to stress the team spirit and all the effort taken together.
The idea of describing the living conditions for children in the future...	...alludes to the structure of MLK "I have a dream" speech...	... leading the listener to... (to be continued...)

- Do not just follow the chronological order of the text but also focus on relevant aspects, stylistic devices, characters.

Conclusion:

- End your text by referring to your introduction and formulating a concluding sentence in which you for example refer to the message.
- Do not evaluate the text. Stay factual and concise.

Criteria	😊	☹️