
Rhetoric Essentials: Craft Speeches that Ignite, Inspire and Incite Your Audience to Applause...and Laughter

Ragan Communications Speechwriters Conference (2017)
Dr. Sam Lawrence, Professor of Mass Communication & Consultant

Well Designed Contrasts

[2009 Inaugural Speech 15:09-15:51]

- 1 *Obama:* To the Muslim world (0.5) we seek a new way forward
2 (0.6)
3 based on mutual interest and mutual respect
4 (1.1)
5 To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict
6 (0.2)
7 Or blame their society's ills on the West
8 Know that your people will judge you on
9 A→ what you can build
10 (0.3)
11 B→ not what you destroy
12 (0.3)
13 *Audience:* (Cheers/Applause)
14 *Obama:* To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit
15 and the silencing of dissent
16 (0.5)
17 Know that you are on the wrong side of history
18 A→ but that we will extend a hand
19 B→ if you are willing to unclench your fist
20 (0.3)
21 *Audience:* (Cheers/applause)

A Poorly Designed Contrast

[Atkinson, 1984: British Labor Party Conference; simplified]

- 1 *Shore:* A→ . . . it's one thing to sell to sitting tenants
2 (0.7)
3 B→ and it's quite another (0.2) to keep houses
4 empty (0.4) while they're HAWKED around
5 (0.2) to find some purchaser (0.2) who
6 could just as well buy (0.7) in the open
7 market (0.2) like any other (0.2) owner
8 occupier does.
9 (1.0)
10 *Audience:* (weak applause)

Types of Contrasts (Atkinson, 2005)

(a) Contradictions: 'Not this but that'

'[A] but not [B]'

Thatcher: A→ You turn if you want to.
(laughter and applause, 13.3 seconds)
B→ The lady's not for turning.
(laughter and applause, 9 seconds)

'Not [A] but [B]'

King: I have a dream (3.0) that my four little children (1.3)
will one day live in a nation where they will
A→ not be judged by the color of their skin
B→ but by the content of their character

(b) Comparisons: 'More this than that'

[Tucson, Arizona Memorial; 1-12-2011]
Obama: And I believe that for all our imperfections
we are full of decency and goodness
(1.1)
A→ and that the forces that divide us
are not as strong
B→ as those that unite us
Audience: (applause)

[2005 State of the Union Address]
Bush: but we have to move ahead with courage and honesty
A→ because our children's retirement security
is more important than
B→ partisan politics
Audience: (applause)

(c) Opposites: 'Black or white'

[1992 Democratic National Convention Acceptance Speech]
Clinton: A→ He has raised taxes on the people driving pickup trucks
B→ and lowered taxes on the people riding in limousines
Audience: (applause)

[British Labor Party: Disabled: Alf Morris: ST]

Morris: Governments will argue (0.8) that resources are not available (0.4) to help disabled people. (1.3)

A→ The fact is that too much is spent on the munitions of war (0.6)

B→ and too little is spent (0.2) on the munitions of peace. [Applause (9.2 seconds)]

Audience:

(d) Phrase Reversals

[1961 Inaugural Speech]

Kennedy: And so my fellow Americans (0.5)

A→ Ask not (0.5) what your country can do for you

B→ ask what you can do for your country

Audience: (applause)

[Address to Congress; 2-28-2017]

Trump: My budget will also increase funding for our veterans

A→ Our veterans have delivered for this nation

B→ And now we must deliver for them (applause, Republicans and Democrats)

Puzzle-Solutions

[Liberals: Leader's Address: ST]

1 *Steel:* Margaret Thatcher has portrayed herself (0.5) as the
 2 nation's nurse (0.5) administering (0.2) the
 3 nasty but necessary medicine to us in the belief
 4 that whatever short term pain we may suffer
 5 in the long run it's going to do us good.
 6 (0.7)
 7 And I'm surprised that as a qualified chemist (0.2)
 8 P→ she seems to have forgotten (.) the warning on
 9 every bottle,
 10 (0.2)
 11 S→ Caution (.) it is dangerous to exceed
 12 [the stated dose.
 13 *Audience:* [Laughter. [. . .
 14 *Audience:* [Applause (13.0 seconds)]

[George W. Bush: Address to the Nation, 9-20-01, 1:50:10-1:50:51]

Bush: By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions
by abandoning every value except the will to power:
they follow in the path of fascism (.) Nazism and
totalitarianism
P→ And they will follow that path all the way to where it ends
S→ in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies
Audience: (applause)

Three-Part Lists

[William J. Clinton; State of the Union 1-25-1994]

Clinton: And those who commit repeated violent crimes should
be told
(0.2)
when you commit a third violent crime
1→ you will be put away
2→ and put away for good,
3→ three strikes and you are [(.) out
Audience: (applause, 28.5 seconds)

(a) Three identical words

[January 1997 House of Commons; Prime Minister John Major]

Blair: Isn't it extraordinary (0.2) that the Prime Minister of our
country can't even urge his party to support his own position
Audience: Yeah
Blair: Yeah
Blair: Weak weak weak
Audience: (Cheers)

(b) Three different words

[Address to the Nation (9-20-01)]

Bush: Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda
(1.1)
but it does not end there
(1.6)
It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been
1→ found
(0.3)
2→ stopped
(0.2)
3→ and defeated
Audience (applause)

(c) Three phrases

[George W. Bush: State of the Union, 1-28-03]

Bush: In each case (0.3) the ambitions of Hitlerism militarism and
communism were defeated
 1→ by the will of free peoples
 2→ by the strength of great alliances
 3→ and by the might of the United States of America
Audience: (applause)

(d) Three sentences

[Address to Congress; 2-28-2017]

Trump: We are one people with one destiny
 1→ We all bleed the same blood
 2→ We all salute (0.2) the same great American flag
 (0.7)
 3→ And we all (.) are made (.) by the same God
 (applause)

Combinations**(a) Puzzle-Solution [Contrast]**

[2012 Democratic National Convention]

W

↓

1 *Clinton:* Since nineteen sixty-one (1.8) for fifty two years now
 2 (0.2)
 3 A→ the Republicans have held the White House twenty
 4 eight years
 5 (0.3)
 6 B→ the Democrats twenty-four
 7 (1.1)
 8 In those fifty-two years (0.2) our private economy has
 9 W→ produced (.) sixty-six million (0.3) private sector jobs
 10 (0.6)
 11 P→ So what's the job score
 12 (1.0)
 13 S→ A→ Republicans (.) twenty four million
 14 (.)
 15 B→ Democrats forty TWO=
 16 *Audience:* =(Cheers, applause)

(b) List + Contrast

[Democratic National Convention: 1992]

Cuomo: It's a terrible tragedy
(0.8)
Not only for our children but for a:ll of America
(1.3)

1→	A→	They're not my children perhaps	
2→	A→	Perhaps they're not your children either	
		(0.5)	
3→	B→	But Jessie is right they are <u>OUR</u> children	

Audience: xxx [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX...]

Cuomo: and we should love them

(c) Complex Position-Taking

[Democratic National Convention: 1992]

Cuomo: In no time at all
In no time at all

A→	1→	We have gone from the greatest <u>seller</u> nation] ←Set Up
	2→	the greatest <u>lender</u> nation	
	3→	the greatest <u>creditor</u> nation	
B→	1→	to today the world's <u>largest</u> <u>buyer</u>] ←Position-Taking
	2→	the world's largest <u>borrower</u>	
	3→	and the world's <u>largest</u> debtor nation	

Audience: That is Republican supply side
Applause (18.0 seconds)

References

- Atkinson, M. (1984). *Our masters' voices: The language and body language of politics*. London: Methuen.
- Atkinson, M. (2005). *Lend me your ears: All you need to know about making speeches and presentations*. London: Vermillion.
- Heritage, J., & Greatbatch, D. (1986). Generating applause: A study of rhetoric and response at party political conferences. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92, 110-157.
- Lawrence, S. G. (2015). Engaging audiences through rhetorical devices. *Communication Currents*, 10(5), 1-2. doi:10.1080/17404622.2015.1058965
- Lawrence, S. G. (2015). Waking up audiences: Lessons in rhetorical devices. *Communication Teacher*, 29(4), 212-218. doi:10.1080/17404622.2015.1058965