

“How to Study and Critique a Speech”

Studying other speakers is a critical skill, one of the essential skills for a public speaker. The ability to analyze a speech will accelerate the growth of any speaker.

The Most Important Thing to Analyze:

The Speech Objectives

Knowing the speaker’s objective is critical to analyzing the speech, and should certainly influence how you study it.

- What is the speaker’s goal? Is it to **inform, persuade**, or to **entertain**?
- What is the primary message being delivered?
- Why is **this person** delivering **this speech**? Are they the right person?
- **Was the objective achieved?**

The Audience and Context for the Speech

A speaker will need to use different techniques to connect with an audience of 1500 than they would with an audience of 15. Similarly, different techniques will be applied when communicating with teenagers as opposed to communicating

with corporate leaders.

- **Where** and **when** is the speech being delivered?
- What are the **key demographic features of the audience**?
Technical? Students? Elderly? Athletes? Business leaders?
- How large is the audience?
- In addition to the live audience, is there an **external target audience**? (e.g. on the Internet or mass media)

Speech Content and Structure

The content of the speech should be selected and organized to achieve the primary speech objective. Focus is important — extraneous information can weaken an otherwise effective argument.

Before the Speech

- Were there **other speakers before this one**? Were their messages similar, opposed, or unrelated?
- How was the speaker **introduced**? Was it appropriate?
- Did the introduction establish why the audience should listen to **this speaker with this topic at this time**?
- What body language was demonstrated by the speaker as they approached the speaking area? Body language at this moment will often indicate their **level of confidence**.

The Speech Opening

Due to the **primacy effect**, words, body language, and visuals in the speech opening are all critical to speaking success.

- Was a hook used effectively to draw the audience into the speech? Or did the speaker open with a dry “*It’s great to be here today.*”
- Did the speech open with a **story**? A **joke**? A startling **statistic**? A **controversial statement**? A **powerful visual**?
- Did the speech opening clearly establish the intent of the presentation?
- **Was the opening memorable?**

The Speech Body

- Was the presentation **focused**? i.e. Did all arguments, stories, anecdotes relate back to the primary objective?
- Were examples or statistics provided to **support the arguments**?
- Were **metaphors and symbolism** used to improve understanding?
- Was the speech **organized logically**? Was it easy to follow?
- Did the speaker **bridge** smoothly from one part of the presentation to the next?

The Speech Conclusion

Like the opening, the words, body language, and visuals in the speech conclusion are all critical to speaking success. This is due to the **recency effect**.

- Was the conclusion **concise**?
- Was the conclusion **memorable**?
- If appropriate, was there a **call-to-action**?

Delivery Skills and Techniques

Delivery skills are like a gigantic toolbox — the best speakers know precisely when to use every tool and for what purpose.

Enthusiasm and Connection to the Audience

- Was the speaker **enthusiastic**? How can you tell?
- Was there **audience interaction**? Was it effective?
- Was the message *you-* and *we-focused*, or was it *I-* and *me-focused*?

Humor

- Was humor used?
- Was it **safe and appropriate** given the audience?
- Were **appropriate pauses** used before and after the punch lines, phrases, or words?
- Was it **relevant to the speech**?

Visual Aids

- Were they designed effectively?
- Did they **complement speech arguments**?
- Was the use of visual aids **timed well** with the speaker's words?
- Did they **add energy** to the presentation or remove it?
- Were they **simple** and **easy to understand**?
- Were they **easy to see**? e.g. large enough

- Would an **additional visual aid** help to convey the message?

Use of Stage Area

- Did the speaker make appropriate use of the speaking area?

Physical - Gestures and Eye Contact

- Did the speaker's **posture** display confidence and poise?
- Were gestures **natural, timely, and complementary**?
- Were gestures **easy to see**?
- Does the speaker have any **distracting mannerisms**?
- Was **eye contact** effective in connecting the speaker to the whole audience?

Vocal Variety

- Was the speaker **easy to hear**?
- Were **loud and soft** variations used appropriately?
- Was the **pace** varied? Was it slow enough overall to be understandable?
- Were **pauses** used to aid understandability, heighten excitement, or provide drama?

Language

- Was the language **appropriate** for the audience?
- Did the speaker **articulate** clearly?
- Were **sentences short** and easy to understand?
- Was **technical jargon** or unnecessarily complex language used?

- What **rhetorical devices** were used? e.g. repetition, alliteration, the rule of three, etc.

Intangibles

Sometimes, a technically sound speech can still miss the mark. Likewise, technical deficiencies can sometimes be overcome to produce a must-see presentation. The intangibles are impossible to list, but here are a few questions to consider:

- How did the speech make you **feel**?
- Were you **convinced**?
- Would you want to listen to this speaker again?
- Were there any **original ideas** or techniques?