

# Oratory as Cinema – Developing Your Character

If George Lucas had competed in forensics, he would've loved Original Oratory. More than any other event, competitors have the opportunity to stand before a blank easel and fill it with vivid and dynamic rhetoric. In writing your oratory, it can be helpful to draw some specific parallels between the structure of films and the structure of your speech.

## **Your Character Should be Likeable**

In the case of your oratory, you are your main character. Viewing yourself as the main character of the oratory will aid you in framing and presenting your advocacy. The message of your oratory should be applicable to your audience. Subsequently, implied within your analysis will always be a mandate that the audience should acknowledge your advocacy and react to it.

What prevents this element of your rhetoric from becoming overly preachy or elitist is the embracing of yourself as the main character. In other words, the enlightenment that arises from your advocacy must also affect you so that you don't convey a feeling that you are somehow immune from the problem. Your path to self discovery must drive the speech; your audience, like a film audience, is along for the ride. They view the advocacy not because you've mandated that they do but rather through the lens of experiencing it as you have experienced it. It's the distinction between forcing someone to a destination instead of guiding them. It's important to note that this doesn't mean the oratory is "all about you" or should be highly personal and confessional. Simply, it suggests that in a very subtle way the audience must believe that you are taking this journey along with them. If your speech is a pirate's plank, you're not prodding them forward with a stick. You're right there with them, ready to jump.

To fully understand this concept it may help to consider orators who fail to do this. Being overly analytical or academic in your rhetoric is a prime example of creating an emotional detachment from the audience. It is important to acknowledge and confront the inherent limitations found in the event. Rounds often occur early in the morning and can go beyond an hour in length. In general, people often struggle to maintain focus over the course of a ten minute oratory; analysis that's overly complicated or intricate only exacerbates this challenge. The temptation for many orators is to continue to force more content and entertainment into the speech, as though they were packing a suitcase for a vacation. The result is that specific parts aren't given the

room to breathe within the oratory; they are underdeveloped and struggle to stand out because there simply is too much content or too many jokes.

You should also consider the learning curve with potential content. If it took you twenty minutes to truly comprehend something then it is highly unlikely that you'll be able to articulate it to a judge in a 30 second or minute time period. Attempting to explain abstract philosophy or advanced scientific theories are examples of content that may be more appropriate for forums that allow for a more extensive dialogue.

The notion of allowing your audience to connect with your main character can even relate to basic word choice. Repeatedly using terms like "you", "this country", and "these people" convey the image of an orator stepping on that proverbial soapbox. Making the simple adjustment to terms like "we" or "our society" creates a subtle, yet effective distinction.

### **Connect With Your Audience**

Making your character more likeable can also occur through delivery. While typically understated, there is a very real value associated with the act of simply smiling throughout the course of the speech. Orators should also seek to avoid "Machine Gun" eye contact. Instead of simply browsing past faces in a room, engage your audience with purposeful, attentive eye contact that allows you to connect with a specific person before you move on to another audience member. Finally, strive for "vocal variety" – your delivery should vary depending on the place within the speech and the purpose of the words you are delivering. While speaking dramatically can be impactful, staying at a high and dramatic level throughout an entire 10 minute oratory can result in a separation from your audience. Seek that variety by adopting a conversational style that allows you to speak with your audience instead of speaking at them.

The most visible opportunity to utilize delivery for character development occurs in the introduction and conclusion. In the previous article we discussed the value of introductions that center on a narrative where the speaker's experience results in a defining moment or epiphany. It is here where our rhetoric most overtly moves from "This is what you should do" to "Come see what I found." Additionally, the use of a narrative construction in the introduction and conclusion allows you to inject personality and authenticity into your advocacy. While reciting quotations or analyzing data, the opportunity to connect with your audience on an intimate level is marginalized. However, the creative arena established in an introduction allows you the room to reveal character traits and quirks. While judges and observers are likely to forget the analytical details of a speech within a few hours, they frequently associate a

speaker with whatever idea or story point that's created in the introduction and are able to recall that connection over a much longer period of time.

Softening your rhetoric is critical to making your speech engaging and inviting. In doing so, an orator establishes a rapport which encourages the audience to trust the speaker and subsequently embrace the advocacy of the speech. In essence, the audience roots for the orator just as they might with a lead character in a film. Before a judge can evaluate your performance in relation to others, they have to first remember who you were in the round. By being conscious of your own character development, you will improve your ability to leave a more meaningful and lasting impression with the judge.