



# CRISIS OF RHETORIC

RENEWING  
POLITICAL  
SPEECH AND  
SPEECHWRITING

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**Robust public debate and the freedom to make arguments and counterarguments are essential for democracy. But debates need to be productive and arguments need to be good ones. Political discussion must be more than sectarian assertions and insults traded like blows in a wrestling match. Yet, political debate and discussion cannot be reduced to the technocratic recitation of facts and inevitabilities. Political speeches and arguments must be interesting enough for people to engage with, should give them reasons they can respond to and be motivated by, and must affirm our capacity to create the collective future we choose together.**

Our project, "The Crisis of Rhetoric: Renewing Political Speech and Speechwriting," brought scholars of Ancient History, Classics, History, Linguistics, Media Studies, Philosophy and Politics together with politicians, speechwriters and political journalists. At six workshops, involving 120 people, we shared knowledge of the challenges and difficulties faced by political speakers and speechwriters in the UK today. We also considered how ancient and modern ideas about rhetoric could contribute to the quality of political speech and argument today.

This booklet presents our findings to politicians, journalists, speechwriters and the general public. It also includes recommendations on how to make rhetoric compelling while working in the service of our democracy. We hope that these ideas help speechmakers and speechwriters, in the words of the great Roman rhetoric teacher Quintilian: *docere, delectare, et movere* – to prove, to please and to persuade.

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## Further Reading:

Crisis of Rhetoric Project Website:  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk/cor](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/cor)  
Network for Oratory and Politics:  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk/nop](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/nop)

“A public’s essential characteristic is its shared activity of exchanging opinion.”

RHETORIC THEORIST, GERARD HAUSER: G. A. HAUSER & T. W. BENSON (1999): VERNACULAR VOICES: THE RHETORIC OF PUBLICS AND PUBLIC SPHERES, COLUMBIA, P. 64.

# Rhetoric, politics and democracy

**Politics is about the complexities of public administration, the delicacy of international negotiations and the demands of unexpected events. But there are moments when speech is also part of the action – when the right words can direct events, move minds and effect change.**

Politics needs people who can speak to, and in, such moments; people able to find the right language, voice and argument, exemplifying their ideals and embodying their sentiment. Although modern media have changed the channels through which these messages are communicated, politicians today still must use the same rhetorical appeals, devices and strategies as their ancient counterparts.

How can a people decide on who should rule or what policies to implement without hearing about them first? When we see good arguments, on different sides of a question and about something we should do or not do, we are also seeing different aspects of our community. In choosing which one will guide us we are deciding who we will be in the future.

Rhetoric is not only about beautifully expressed sentiments. It is the art of giving people **reasons** to think or do something. It is also about **equality**. You do not have to give reasons to someone who has no choice but to follow your orders. When we try to persuade someone we acknowledge that we must win their consent by means of arguments that address them directly, and that speak to their knowledge, values and experiences.

When we argue we admit that things are arguable – that there may be more than one answer to a problem. The Romans advocated arguing *in utramque partem* – on both sides of a question – an idea at the heart of the British Parliament: the government of the day presents its answers; then the Opposition gets to put another side.

If rhetoric is no good then a public cannot properly share opinions and get to know itself. People will feel told what to do rather than invited to think. And Parliaments will not be able to debate. If rhetoric is in crisis then so too is democracy.

## Key Concept: Rhetorical Citizenship

The idea of citizenship suggests both one’s legal status in a country and also a range of rights and duties that come with it. The idea of **Rhetorical Citizenship** is that some of those rights and duties are about language: the right to speak and be heard by others; the obligation to listen, to find out and try to understand what competing claims other citizens are making. There is also – perhaps most importantly – the right to be given reasons and to have those who hold power explain and justify themselves. There must be places and times for the presentation and exchange of ideas and citizens should be empowered to listen, judge and reply.

“One of the proud results of our free constitution has been the development of Parliamentary oratory, an honour and ornament to our history, a source of public enlightenment, and an effective instrument of popular government.”

T. ERSKINE MAY (1861, ORIG. 1844) A TREATISE ON THE LAW, PRIVILEGES, PROCEEDINGS AND USAGE OF PARLIAMENT, LONDON, P. 480.



## FURTHER READING:

United Kingdom Political Studies Association, Specialist Group ‘Rhetoric, Discourse and Politics’: [www.psa.ac.uk/specialist-groups/rhetoric-discourse-and-politics](http://www.psa.ac.uk/specialist-groups/rhetoric-discourse-and-politics)

Kock, C. and L. Villadsen (2012) *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*, Penn State University Press.

Martin, J. (2013) *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge.

Toye, R. (2013) *Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford UP.

# A crisis of rhetorical culture?

**It is easy, but wrong, to imagine a golden age when things were perfect, before a Fall into the present. There never was a time when political debate was always eloquent, honest and wise or audiences wholly attentive and free of cynicism.**

But it is also a mistake to think that things never change and that nothing could be better. British Political Rhetoric – where it happens, who is involved, what it sounds or feels like – has changed greatly over time. And it is changing again now.

A crisis is not a collapse. It is a turning point, a change in the condition of things, which might go one way or the other. **Rhetorical culture** is made up of the places where political speech or argument happens. It includes the stages we make for it and the technologies which broadcast it; our values concerning what makes for a good, fair or appropriate argument; and also who we think can or should speak about politics, and what we expect them to look or sound like. That culture is at a point of decisive change.

## FURTHER READING:

Finlayson, A. (2015) 'Proving, Pleasing and Persuading? Rhetoric in Contemporary British Politics' *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 85, Issue 4, pp. 428-436.

Martin, J., J. Atkins, A. Finlayson, N. Turnbull (eds) (2014) *Rhetoric in British Politics and Society*, London: Palgrave.

## Symptoms of crisis?

### TRUST

Good rhetoric gives audiences good reasons to trust or listen to a speaker. But when it comes to politicians' performance of this role, something is not working. A 2017 poll found that just 19% of us trust ministers to tell the truth.<sup>1</sup> A 2018 poll showed that only 11% trust politicians to tell the truth 'a great deal or a fair amount'.<sup>2</sup>

### FEAR AND LOATHING

Sometimes politicians seem afraid of their own words: fearful of hostages to fortune, and of their words being turned against them. That has left an empty rhetorical space into which have stepped speakers claiming to say the unsayable – people who convert public mistrust and boredom into contempt for politicians and hostility to politics.

### SLOGANS ARE NOT ARGUMENTS

People rarely see or hear a long-form political argument. They see only clips replayed on broadcast media: soundbites and slogans, claims without justification, propositions with no supporting argument. As one recent study puts it: "...many citizens in the 1940s and 1950s...heard [politicians] give long radio speeches. They saw them handle rowdy political meetings. By contrast, many citizens in the early twenty-first century... see the photo opportunities, hear the sound bites, and note the gaffes".<sup>3</sup>

### NEW STAGES

Where we encounter political ideas and argument is changing. The UK held televised debates during the General Election campaigns in 2010 and 2015 and during the 2016 referendum. But there is no consensus on their format or over who takes part. In the 2017 General Election campaign, the Prime Minister did not attend. According to research by the Hansard Society in 2018, only 15% of over-55s said they had watched politically-related videos. However, 43% of 18-34s had.<sup>4</sup> YouTube is a big stage for political rhetoric and for new kinds of rhetorician. People are becoming used to finding political arguments online and through internet forums.

<sup>1</sup> Skinner & Clemence, Ipsos MORI Veracity Index 2017, p. 2: [www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/politicians-remain-least-trusted-profession-britain](http://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/politicians-remain-least-trusted-profession-britain).

<sup>2</sup> YouGov Trust Tracker 2018: [d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/kvmnzrlyp/YG%20trackers%20-%20Trust.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/kvmnzrlyp/YG%20trackers%20-%20Trust.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> N. Clarke, W. Jennings, J. Moss & G. Stoker (2018) *The Good Politician: Folk Theories, Political Interaction, and the Rise of Anti-Politics*, Cambridge, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Hansard Society, *Audit of Political Engagement 16* (2019 report), p. 4: [www.hansardsociety.org.uk/projects/research/audit-of-political-engagement..](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/projects/research/audit-of-political-engagement..)

“[proofs] not only come from logical demonstration but from speech that reveals character.”

ARISTOTLE, RHETORIC 1.8.(1366A)6

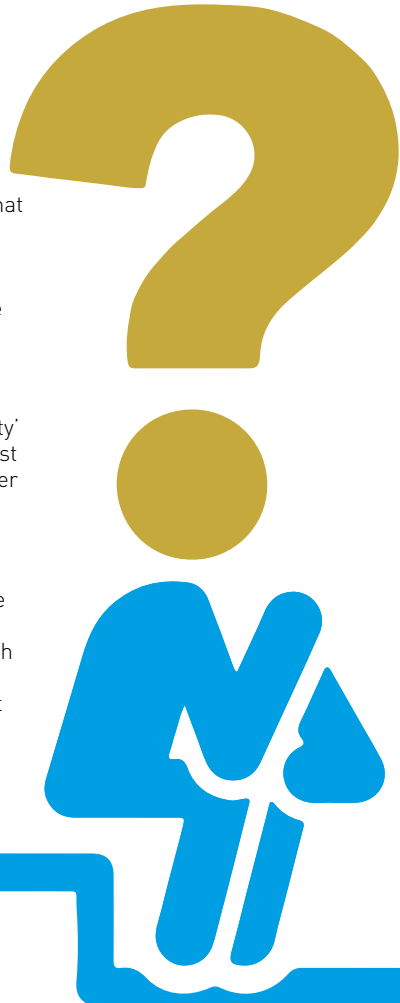
# Ethos: arguing about character

**In rhetoric, one way to support an argument is to appeal to ethos. That is, in the first instance, the character of the speaker: what makes them credible or likeable or admirable and so on.**

But ethos is not only about this. It is also an argument about the sort of character that is demanded by a situation and the issues being decided upon. Finally, ethos involves claims about the ethical character of the community – who we will be when we have made and implemented the decision. This is why politicians' character is so often the subject of debate.

Today ethos is often reduced to 'authenticity' or 'brand image'. Worried by public mistrust of politicians, speakers stop using character to support an argument and instead try to prove their character, for example by showing how caring or 'in-touch' they are.

They may also try to show how they are 'the same' as we, the people. That is very hard to do in complex and diverse societies which have few agreed reference points, common narratives or shared archetypes. The result is that political argument becomes nothing but an argument about character and identity: goodies vs baddies; them vs us; distant elites vs the real people.



“A speech which is out of keeping with the speaker is just as bad as one which is out of keeping with the subject to which it ought to have been adapted.”

QUINTILIAN, THE ORATOR'S EDUCATION 3.8.51

“So let the orator... be, as Cato defines him, 'a good man skilled in speaking' but—and Cato put this first, and it is intrinsically more significant and important—let him at all events be 'a good man'.”

QUINTILIAN, THE ORATOR'S EDUCATION 12.1.1

## TO MAKE ETHOS WORK BETTER, SPEECHWRITERS AND SPEAKERS SHOULD THINK ABOUT:

- 1) the style of language appropriate to the particular time and topic. Sometimes 'ordinariness' is needed. But that will feel inapt and inauthentic when thoughtfulness and leadership are expected.
- 2) the character they are playing or writing. When people speak in public – at a wedding, a prizegiving, a training event – they play a part in a collective occasion; they have to be not only themselves but also who the audience need them to be.
- 3) the part the audience is playing. Political decisions are not only about what government does to or for people. They also concern things we will do together, for ourselves and each other. To be convinced, people need to see themselves, their own character, in the argument: who they are now and who they might become.
- 4) being prepared sometimes to be bold and to take the risk of speaking openly about what they think and feel.

“All those hours in hotel rooms working at speeches, drafting, re-drafting, polishing, changing every word and all you're doing is covering up for what's really gone wrong. What you know in your heart. What really happened... You once had the words. Now you don't... What can you say? You can't say anything. Not publicly...”

GEORGE JONES IN DAVID HARE'S 1993 PLAY *THE ABSENCE OF WAR*, ACT II, SCENE 9

## FURTHER READING:

Blom, H. van der [2016] *Oratory and Political Career in the Late Roman Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP.  
Finlayson, A. [2015] No ethos: the rhetoric of 2015, Open Democracy, July; [www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/no-ethos-rhetoric-of-2015/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/no-ethos-rhetoric-of-2015/)

“...persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile.”

ARISTOTLE, RHETORIC 1.2.5



# Argument and emotions

**Another way to support an argument is to appeal to pathos. That means arousing emotions in an audience. That may sound like a bad thing, but emotions are one of the ways in which we 'know' a thing: we respond with emotions to situations, propositions and people and that response tells us something about them.**

We can feel angry about the lack of funding for schools, hopeful about a potential cancer cure, commitment to our community. Every speech has an emotional tone, it cannot be avoided, and so speechmakers and speechwriters should think carefully about what they and their audiences need it to be.

Importantly for politics, emotions motivate people to action. Speeches cannot just persuade the audience of the 'academic' validity of a claim. They must also encourage some kind of action. Pathos goes wrong when speeches pacify audiences or, worse, make them bored and when people are so inflamed that their action loses precision and becomes merely a reaction.

“And I stand here today grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents' dreams live on in my two precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.”

BARACK OBAMA, DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION SPEECH 2004

## AVOIDING RESENTMENT

Speeches can arouse both positive and negative emotions: love and hatred, hope and fear, compassion and cruelty. When political speech swings toward the more negative emotions, it can freeze action as people become consumed by resentments rather than open to common action.

## UTILISING PATHOS

To make pathos work well, speechwriters and speakers should think about using it to:

- 1) support an argument, not the ethos of the speaker.
- 2) motivate the audience to positive action, doing things because they believe in them and not just because they hate others' beliefs more.

## CREATING IMPACT

A powerful way to rouse emotion is through examples, illustrations and anecdotes. These can show the importance of addressing an issue, by personifying it and inviting compassion. But such examples should be used to prove a proposition and not to sustain ethos. There is a great difference between saying: 'I met a homeless person who would be helped in these ways by this proposed policy' and saying: 'I met a homeless person' in a way which implies 'look at how caring I am'. Too often politicians sound like they are doing the latter.

- 3) engage their listeners in an exchange of views – creating a dialogue between speaker and audience – instead of silencing them. Great orators speak with, not to, their audience.

“...by inviting them to supply the missing piece of an argument, enthymeme fosters a bond of intimacy between speaker – or writer – and audience. An audience that is actively involved in the creation of a shared message – especially one that reflects their beliefs and prejudices – is much more likely to feel the rightness of what is being argued than one that isn’t.”

MARTIN SHOVEL, SPEECHWRITER AND TRAINER, THE GUARDIAN, 9 APRIL 2015.

# Logos: being reasonable

**Good rhetoric always has a rational argument at the core, one that is logical and based on the facts. But a political speech is not a formal essay or a scientific paper; instead it is action and an interaction with an audience. Like ethos and pathos, logical arguments must connect with them.**

## Key concept: the enthymeme

Aristotle says that enthymemes are the ‘substance’ of rhetorical persuasion, its most effective means. They are ‘quasi-logical’ forms of argument which connect a particular claim to a general proposition; one likely already to be accepted by an audience. When we say ‘look at that sky, it is going to rain’ we do not spell out all the steps in our reasoning. Instead, we rely on our audience to know that black clouds signify rain and to do that part of the reasoning for themselves. Enthymemes apply common general understanding to particular political cases and in doing so involve audiences in reasoning something out. In a debate between two sides, audiences get to choose what part of their common knowledge, beliefs or values should be brought to bear on an issue or problem.

## Bad Reasons

Used well enthymemes engage people in political reasoning. But they can be used badly. It is tempting to win favour by adapting conclusions to suit people’s existing beliefs. We can tell people what we think they want to hear, pandering to them and affirming their prejudices. That solves nothing. People do not all share one fixed opinion. Instead, we all think lots of things about the world, society and the people in it. Good rhetoric is ‘deliberative’: it reflects on our stock of common opinions, creates a common view, reasons from our beliefs, adapts them if necessary and invites active ‘rhetorical citizenship’.

## SPEAKERS AND SPEECHWRITERS NEED TO:

- 1) always remember that political speeches are arguments, not ‘presentations’ or ‘advertising’.
- 2) have a good sense not only of what people think (according to opinion polls) but of how we think: the general ideas, outlooks and values that people share and that lie behind the polls and focus groups.
- 3) consider ways of developing arguments over time, across speeches and not just using them for single occasions; it can take time to persuade people of something and politicians need to make time to do it. Great politicians and great political movements change the common beliefs and prejudices of a community – that is how political history is made.

“An orator... can plan a rhetorical or dialectical argument while sitting at a desk [but cannot] really complete it... The missing materials of rhetorical arguments are the premises which the audience brings with it and supplies at the proper moment provided the orator is skilful... the successful building of arguments depends on cooperative interaction between the practitioner and his hearers.”

RHETORICAL THEORIST LLOYD BITZER: L. F. BITZER (1959) ‘ARISTOTLE’S ENTHYME REVISITED’, QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SPEECH 45.4, 399-408.



“... *eloqui* means to bring out and communicate to an audience the thoughts you have formed in your mind. Without this, everything that has gone before is useless, like a sword that is put up and will not come out of its scabbard ...this is the accomplishment that no one can achieve without art ...this is what makes one orator better than another, and one style of speaking preferable to another.”

QUINTILIAN, THE ORATOR'S EDUCATION 8.PR.15-16

“From research based on videotapes of more than 500 political speeches, we know that the contrast has lost none of its force, and is responsible for prompting a large proportion of the applause enjoyed by politicians. Lines that strike such an immediate chord with an audience stand a better chance of surviving beyond the moment of delivery than those that are listened to in silence.”

MAX ATKINSON (2004): LEND ME YOUR EARS, LONDON, P. 182

# Style and eloquence

**Political speeches can be beautiful. They can harness ideas and arguments to specific words, phrases and sounds. Choosing the right style is what separates the mere speaker from the true orator.**

A key concept here is *decorum*, which simply means appropriateness: the style should fit the situation. One reason people can dislike political speech is because speakers use standard clichés, boilerplate, not adapted to or suitable for the particular occasion.

There are some devices which experience shows to work well. Some of the most commonly used are tricolon – threes: three words, three phrases, three ideas. Contrasts are also effective in generating audience reactions: for and against, left and right, good and bad.

It is good for speeches to be beautiful. But politics is not showbusiness. Speeches cannot be concerned solely or primarily with entertaining or pleasing the crowd. If they are truly to convince, then the style and the eloquence must not override but work with the appeals to ethos, pathos and logos.

## Metaphors

Metaphors create powerful images in the minds of an audience. Our language of election ‘campaigns’ and ‘battle buses’ represents politics as warfare; describing an election result as a ‘landslide’ invites people to think of it as a huge natural event; ‘left’ and ‘right’ make public opinion seem two-dimensional.

Metaphors are powerful precisely because they connect with and combine ‘frames’ of thinking. Characteristics from one set of things (such as natural events) are applied to another set of things (election results). For that reason metaphors are not simply stylistic. They can help shape the way we think about things. Consider the trope of *paradiastole*: this is when we redescribe something so that what was a virtue becomes seen as a vice (or the other way around). For example, we might describe something as generous or profligate, as thrifty or mean.



“Who then is the man who gives people a thrill? Whom do they stare at in amazement when he speaks? Who is interrupted by applause? Who is thought to be so to say a God among men? It is those whose speeches are clear, explicit and full, perspicuous in matter and in language, and who in the actual delivery achieve a sort of rhythm and cadence—that is, those whose style is what I call artistic.”

CICERO, DE ORATORE 3.53

## Anecdotes and Examples

Anecdotes and examples are also a kind of oratorical ornament. They present a seemingly representative case to illustrate a more general proposition. They work because often we can more easily identify with a single case than with an abstract concept or phenomenon. But the audience need to think and feel that the case is indeed representative and that it seems genuine in relation to the speaker and themselves.

## FURTHER READING:

The Forest of Rhetoric:  
[rhetoric.byu.edu](http://rhetoric.byu.edu)

Charteris-Black, J. (2005) *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*, London: Palgrave.



“Now that every word is taken down and that the speaker, particularly the prominent or Front Bench speaker, knows that he is addressing, not a private club, but a gathering that may embrace the whole nation... he must walk delicately and measure his paces; he cannot frisk and frolic in the flowery meads of rhetoric; he dare not “let himself go”.”

LORD CURZON, THE REDE LECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, 6 NOVEMBER 1913.

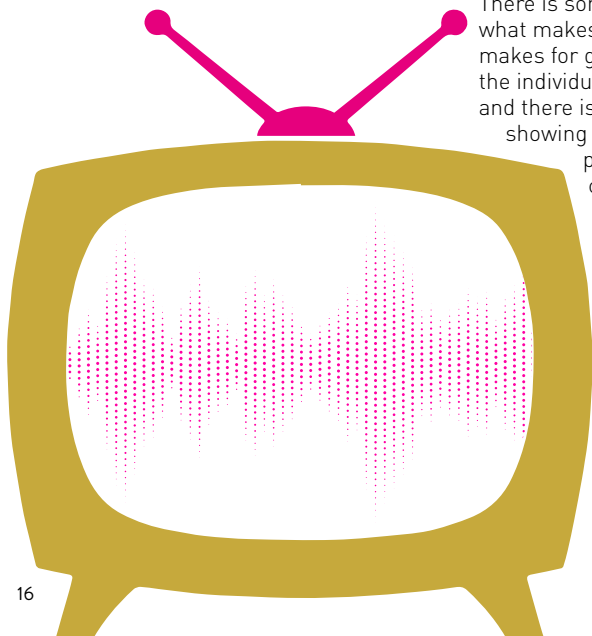
# Rhetoric and the media

**Today, if people know of a political speech at all it will be from second-hand reporting. This has profoundly affected rhetorical culture.**

Media can amplify speeches (making sure they get heard by more people) but they can also be a ‘filter’, communicating only some of what is said.

Today, speeches are often written with this in mind. Unity of argument is sacrificed to the inclusion of ‘key messages’ meant for extraction and circulation. Awareness that speeches will be reported on – words taken out of context and released into a hostile environment – can make speakers cautious when what is needed is clarity and boldness.

There is sometimes a tension between what makes for good rhetoric and what makes for good television. TV amplifies the individual personality of speakers and there is strong research evidence showing that television has made political talk more informal and conversational as well as more personalised.



“While few of us speak poetry in the day to day, all of us ... speak prose. We are all persuaders of a sort... Rhetorical criticism is criticism of social life itself... by having lived, talked, and listened for years, all of us have done the homework necessary to do criticism.”

RODERICK HART & SUZANNE DAUGHTON (1990) MODERN RHETORICAL CRITICISM, LONDON, P. 26.

## LEADERS' DEBATES

Research consistently shows that televised election debates reach people who might otherwise be uninformed about the campaign, and that they are a highly-rated source of information. This confirms work in political theory which argues that spectacle can be an important part of democratic culture in which politics must be seen and not always hidden. Audiences are not passive. They reflect, judge and respond; they are in a kind of dialogue with what they see. Debates are a chance to exercise ‘rhetorical citizenship’. But research also shows that subsequent reporting on the debates focuses more on who ‘won’ than on what was said – on the ‘process’ rather than substance. It further shows that men and women are treated unequally; the debates were often portrayed as a ‘masculine’ combat against which women politicians were measured and judged negatively.

## FURTHER READING:

Finlayson, A. (2019): ‘Rethinking Political Communication’, *The Political Quarterly* 90, 77-91.  
Harmer, E., H. Savigny, and O. Ward, (2017) ‘Are you tough enough?’ Performing gender in the UK leadership debates 2015’, *Media, Culture & Society*, 39, 7, pp. 960-975.  
Sam Leith, ‘The Art of Persuasion’, regular column in the *Financial Times*.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**More Debates:** televising political debates more often, outside of campaigns, will help make them an expectation and lessen politicians’ anxiety about the risks of taking part. More debate also gives people the time and opportunity to refine their idea of what debates are for and how to assess them.

**Actual Debates:** The debate format on British television usually centres on questions and answers about all sorts of things. There is scope for debates on both sides of a single question (*in utramque partem*). These could focus on particular issues and topics, with participants drawn not only from political parties but from other public agencies, campaign and research groups.

**YouTube:** Many people watch speeches of all kinds on internet platforms such as YouTube. Millions watch TedTalks, university lectures and all sorts of political speech. The internet is helping the rise of new kinds of ‘oratorical entrepreneurs’. Politicians and political campaign groups need to think about how to use such platforms and how to counter assertive and sectarian kinds of rhetoric with explanatory and persuasive political speech.

**Rhetorical Criticism:** Film, theatre and art criticism are common on broadcast and print media. What about rhetorical criticism? As well as political reporting and critique, a healthy polity needs a strong culture of rhetorical analysis and criticism: informed and insightful public reflection on how political speech is changing and adapting, improving or regressing.

# Celebrating and supporting speechwriters

**Because rhetoric is so important for politics, speechwriters are some of the most important people in a political culture. They are not just editors of the words of others, or like decorators giving a text a good 'finish'. Speechwriters do so much more.**

**Using speechwriters well:** Today, speechwriters are a fundamental part of any political office, a campaign team or an activist group. Practicing an ancient art and a key political skill, they do a very special job, quite distinct from general public relations or news management. In our workshops, we heard of many instances where speeches were amended at the last-minute so that a press-friendly announcement (unrelated to the topic of the speech) could be included. That might seem like a good idea. But it breaks the flow of carefully prepared argument and that will leave audiences unimpressed. Ensuring that an audience feels respected, that a speaker was talking with them in mind, can have long-term benefits.

For politicians and speechwriters to work well together, they should get to know each other. That will help the speechwriter better represent their speaker's character and give clear voice to the arguments they most believe in. Writers should be involved before the final stages of a speech. They

can do much more than just make things 'pretty' at the end. Their job is to make arguments clear and memorable, so that rhetorical citizens will fairly judge them.

**Training:** Today, rhetoric is a scholarly discipline but with variations in the institutions of rhetoric: universities in the USA and some European countries have departments of rhetoric, while UK universities have no such clearly defined academic community. Rhetoricians spread out over many disciplines such as History, English, Modern Languages, Linguistics, Classics, Politics, Philosophy and Media Studies. Consequently, there is little tradition of formal training in speechwriting. This is a void in our political culture.

UK Speechwriter training is mainly 'on the job' and informal. There are some university courses in Speechwriting and many speech coaches offering their services, but no standard training. This means that others have an unclear sense of the profession and of what the speechwriter needs in order to perform their important role. However, there is a burgeoning sense of a speechwriting community thanks to the work of the UK-based European Speechwriter Network.



## TO BETTER SUPPORT SPEECHWRITERS AND ENCOURAGE BETTER POLITICAL SPEECH, WE RECOMMEND:

- 1) learning from the highly sophisticated Classical rhetorical system about, for example, the appeals of ethos, logos and pathos and how to craft arguments suited to the situation, the speaker and the audience(s).
- 2) enhancing training in speechwriting.
- 3) boosting bottom-up initiatives for rhetorical education in schools to develop speaking and analytical skills in tomorrow's politicians, speechwriters and rhetorical citizens.

## FURTHER READING:

European Speechwriters Network:  
[www.europeanspeechwriters.org](http://www.europeanspeechwriters.org)  
Kjeldsen, J.E., A. Kiewe, M. Lund, J. Barnholdt Hansen (2019)  
*Speechwriting in Theory and Practice*, London: Palgrave.  
Resources on Rhetoric from the International Society for the History of Rhetoric: [ishr-web.org/aws/ISHR/pt/sp/resources](http://ishr-web.org/aws/ISHR/pt/sp/resources)

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