

The Crisis of Rhetoric: Renewing Political Speech and Speechwriting

Workshop 4: Reasons and Reasoning

Notes for Speakers

Goals of the Workshop:

The workshop has two main goals. The first is to share different disciplinary perspectives on how to think about, study and evaluate reasons and reasoning in rhetorical contexts, developing an enriched interdisciplinary perspective. The second is to think about the present day and how to diagnose the condition of rhetorical reasoning in modern democracies.

Timing and delivery: The schedule allots 75 minutes for each session. The goal is to stimulate deep collective discussion and so we suggest that you prepare to speak for 15-20 minutes so that there is plenty of time for questions, responses and exchanges. There is no need to prepare a PowerPoint presentation or a handout, unless you find it necessary. Most of our speakers have simply spoken from notes (or without notes) and this has stimulated discussion well.

Content:

Concepts: Of particular interest for this workshop is the way in which our different disciplines or approaches conceive of the nature of reasoning (*logos*) in rhetoric. What are the key concepts in your field for thinking about reason in rhetoric? How do you think about the scope or limits of reason in public, political and rhetorical situations? How do you understand or analyse the relationship of rational appeals to those rooted in character, emotion and figurative expression?

Practices: We are, perhaps, at ease with thinking about, say, 'ethos' as a rhetorical practice or performance. Can we, should we, think of rational arguments in the same way? In what ways are rational arguments communicated or shared between political actors or between them and publics? What are the 'theatres' of rational argument and how are people brought together and encouraged to think of themselves as taking part in rational discourse or deliberation? How has this changed over time?

Politics: All of this is of especial interest because it concerns politics – the exercise and distribution of power in a polis, the organization of collective affairs, and the formation and implementation of policy. Rhetoric involves forms of reasoning suited to the fraught, confusing and uncertain contexts of public life. Do politicians rely on certain kinds of logical and factual argument? Are they restricted in this?

Crisis: Is there a crisis of reason or rationality on contemporary politics? Is contemporary rhetorical reasoning sufficiently responsive to facts? Are arguments from emotion and values becoming more prominent, in ways which override rationality? How can 'good' reasons be better promoted to publics?

We invite speakers to reflect on these questions in a general way, as you see fit, while also affording specific insight into ways into studying and assessing the 'crisis' of political speech. If there are examples from your work then we'd certainly like to hear about them and discuss them with you.