



Key term

Rhetoric is the art of effective communication, involving appeals to the audience and persuasive devices.

Unit 4.2 Rhetoric

People who speak in public know how important it is to sound convincing. They want to move their listeners; they want to 'take them places', so to speak. How speakers achieve this effect on their audience is the study of **rhetoric**. Imagine persuasive speech is a car. A good driver will know what kind of fuel makes it go and how the engine works. In the same way, a good speaker has mastered the mechanics of rhetoric. In this unit you will be looking first at the ways a speaker appeals to the audience and then at nine rhetorical devices. The appeal is like the fuel and the rhetorical devices like the mechanics of a good, persuasive speech. You will study Barack Obama's victory speech from the 2008 presidential election as an example of rhetorical language.

Appeal

Text 4.2, like all speeches, contains three essential ingredients: ethos, pathos and logos. These are the terms used by the ancient Greeks to describe the different ways a speech appeals to an audience. These three qualities are the fuel of persuasive speeches. (As you read Text 4.2, do not worry about the numbers next to some of the passages for now – they will become clear when you study the next section on rhetorical devices.)

Ethos

Ethos refers to the trustworthiness of the speaker or writer. When speakers stand before an audience, they must ask themselves an important question: *What gives me the right to stand before you?* To answer it, they must establish credit with the audience and feel confident of their right to deliver the speech to that audience. In the case of Obama's victory speech, you will see that ethos runs through the opening lines and is at the heart of his message.

Pathos

Pathos is that part of a speech that appeals to our emotions. The word may remind you of other words, such as *pathetic*, *sympathetic* or *empathy*. Whenever speakers make you feel patriotic, afraid, joyful or guilty, they are appealing to your sense of emotion. There is no doubt that the audience of Obama's speech, as they stood listening to it in cold Chicago, felt a sense of elation run through their bodies. Obama included emotional language to evoke an emotional response.

Logos

Logos is the part of a speech that appeals to our sense of logic and all good speeches do this. Logical speech usually takes the form of an argument with several premises and a conclusion (in TOK you will learn to refer to such arguments as syllogisms). You may find examples of reasoning in a speech that carries a degree of validity and certainty.

Text 4.2 'This is your victory', Barack Obama, November 2008

Barack Obama was the first African American to become president of the USA. His victory speech, written with his speechwriter Jon Favreau, was delivered in his home city of Chicago in November 2008.

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy,¹ tonight is your answer.²

It's the answer³ told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen, by people who waited three hours and four

hours, many for the first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different, that their voices could be that difference.

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled. Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states.⁴ We are, and always will be, the United States of America.

It's the answer that led those who've been told for so long by so many to be cynical and fearful and doubtful about what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.⁵

It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this date in this election at this defining moment change has come to America.

I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn't start with much money or many endorsements. Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington. It began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston. It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give \$5 and \$10 and \$20⁶ to the cause. It drew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's apathy who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep.

It drew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat⁷ to knock on doors of perfect strangers, and from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized and proved that more than two centuries later a government of the people, by the people, and for the people⁸ has not perished from the Earth. This is your victory.⁹

The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term, but America – I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you – we as a people will get there.

There will be setbacks and false starts. There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy I make as president, and we know that government can't solve every problem. But I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree.

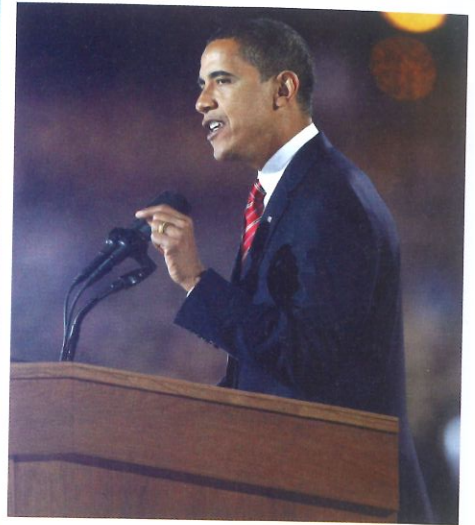


Figure 4.8 President Obama making his victory speech in Grant Park, Chicago, 2008.

Activity 4.2

In Chapter 3, you studied a sample written task in the form of a speech by Michael Moore (pages 84–86).

- 1 Read the student's speech in Chapter 3 again and look for examples of ethos, pathos and logos, the three qualities of appeal, in that speech.
- 2 Now study Text 4.2, President Obama's victory speech, and look for examples of the three qualities in this speech.
- 3 Compare and contrast the speech the student wrote as a written task with Obama's speech.

	Sample written task: a speech by Michael Moore	Text 4.2: Barack Obama's victory speech
Ethos		
Pathos		
Logos		

Nine rhetorical devices

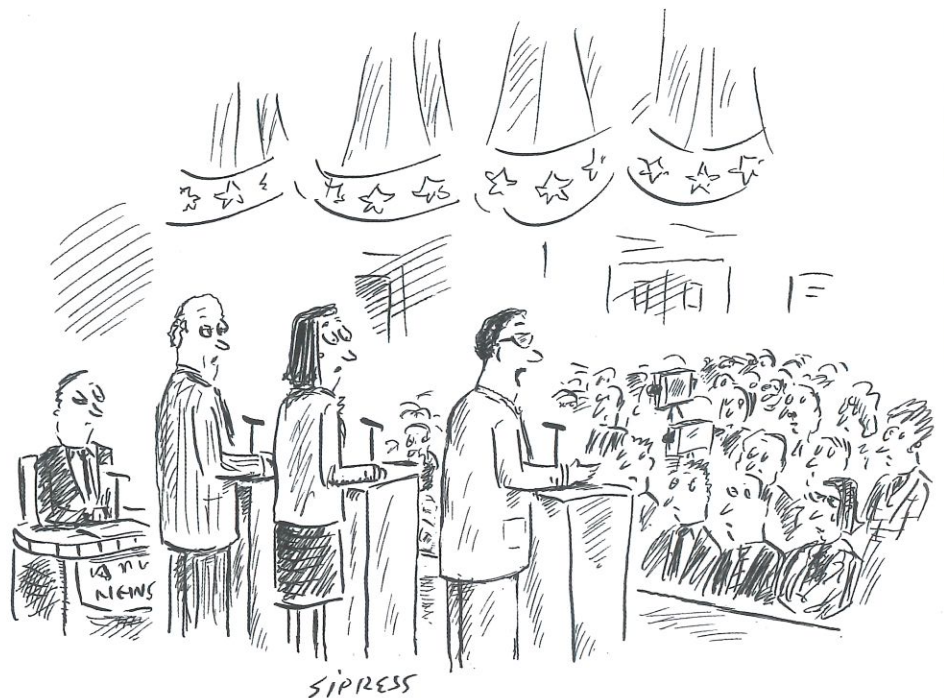
Rhetorical devices are the nuts and bolts of speech; the parts that make a speech work. Separately, each part of a speech is meaningless, but once put together they create a powerful effect on the listener. As you read President Obama's speech again, look at the examples of the nine rhetorical devices (these are labelled 1–9 in Text 4.2). However, this list isn't exhaustive, and these nine devices here represent just some of the many rhetorical devices used by speechwriters.

1 Parallelism

Parallelism is a stylistic device that you often hear in speeches but also one that is very useful for writing. Writing structures that are grammatically parallel helps your reader or listener understand your points better because they flow more smoothly. In the first sentence of Text 4.2, Obama uses three clauses, making the sentence very long, but the clauses are easy to follow because they all have the same structure: *If there is anyone out there* (1) *who still doubts ...* (2) *who still wonders ...* (3) *who still questions ...* Obama's speeches are famous for their use of parallelisms, and there is more than one example in this victory speech.

2 Hypophora

A common technique is to start a speech with a hypophora, in which the speaker first asks a question and then answers it. In Obama's speech, the word *answer* is used regularly as an obvious signpost of the speaker's intention to give his audience answers. Note that here the questions were embedded in the first sentence and not asked as direct questions.



"Let me be vague."

Figure 4.9 Which rhetorical device is the speaker deliberately ignoring in this cartoon?

3 Repetition

Notice that the opening words of the second, third and fourth paragraphs are the same: *It's the answer*. Repetition, when used properly, can be very effective in creating a sense of structure and power. You may have been warned not to sound too repetitive in your written work. In speech writing, however, repeating small phrases can ingrain an idea in the minds of your audience.

4 Antithesis

Obama is famous for having said *There are no red states or blue states, there are only the United States of America*. This is an example of antithesis, a technique often used by speechwriters. In order to tell people what you believe in, it is useful and effective to tell them what you do *not* believe in.

5 Figurative speech

People like to think in metaphors. The image of bending the *arc of history* up towards hope is powerful. Figurative speech tends to work best when set off by concrete images, such as found here a few lines on from the *arc of history with the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston*. (See Chapter 4, page 95)

6 Tricolon and polysyndeton

A tricolon is a sort of list of three, or a sentence in which there are three parts or clauses. The cumulative effect of three has a powerful effect on an audience. Here, the *backyards*, *living rooms* and *front porches* build up a strong picture of 'plain folks', and the three amounts of money underline the big achievement of modest donations by ordinary Americans. (Note too the parallelism of *the backyards*, *the living rooms* and *the front porches*.)

Furthermore, there is a peculiar kind of tricolon present in the *backyards* example. Obama uses the word *and* in between each and every item listed whereas usually in a list it is only necessary to use *and* before the last item. This technique is known as polysyndeton and is used to stress the importance of every item. We see it also in the example of *\$5 and \$10 and \$20*. Can you see why he uses *and* twice?

7 Juxtaposition

When two things of opposite nature are mentioned together, readers and listeners tend to notice. Obama talks about 'the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on doors of perfect strangers'. The juxtaposition of 'bitter cold' and 'scorching heat' stresses the extreme conditions in which people campaigned for Obama, convincing the audience of their dedication.

8 Allusion

The words *government of the people, by the people, and for the people* are lifted from the famous Gettysburg Address delivered by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 (hence the *more than two centuries later* reference), and most Americans in the audience would know them. Allusion is when your speech echoes another speech or famous phrase. By using allusion, you not only associate yourself with the ideas of the original text but also create a bond with the audience by evoking shared knowledge.

9 Varied sentence length

Varying the length of your sentences is always a good way to strengthen any writing style, be it for speech writing or essays. In this paragraph of the speech, notice how long the first sentence is compared to the second sentence: *It drew strength from the not-so-young ... has not perished from the Earth. This is your victory.*

tip

Notice that for each of the nine rhetorical devices, there is an explanation of the effects of the device on its audience. For example, repetition, it is stated, ingrains an idea in the minds of an audience. As you begin to analyse various types of texts, be careful to go beyond the process of identifying and labelling the stylistic devices. In all forms of assessment, you need to explain the effects of stylistic devices on their readers.

tip

As we discuss the characteristics of a good speech, notice where the spoken word and written word are different and where they are similar. Parallelism, hypophora and epithet are good in both speeches and essays. Repetition and polysyndeton are not recommended in essay writing. Be aware also that a public speech is very different from a conversation with a friend and make sure your writing does not sound too colloquial or informal.