

**How to Write a Perfect**

**Political Speech & Deliver**

**It Brilliantly**

**By Edward Shaw**

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“Every effective political speech is — *first and foremost* — an

effective ***theatrical event***, a ***performance***, a one-character

***play*** in which the candidate is the only player.”

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**1. The Art of Persuasion**

EVERY ELECTION for public office is a contest between two (or more) candi­dates to persuade the required plurality of voters that (**1**) his/her platform, policies, and principals more accurately reflect the electorate’s feelings than the other candi­dates’ do; and (**2**) that he/she is more truthful, more reliable, more honest, or more qualified than all the other candidates are. In other words:

MAXIM #1

Political Success = Successful *Persuasion!*

It might seem too obvious to mention, but it’s important to realize that there are in fact only ***two*** means of communication through which one person can persuade another person of *anything*, and these are: (**1**) speaking and (2) writing — in other words, through the effective use of language. And as between the two, speaking is by far the more effective when it comes persuasion. That’s why the lion’s share of political campaigning involves giving speeches.

As you’ll see from the table on the next page, speaking has a host of important advantages over writing when it comes to bending others to your cause or persuad­ing someone to vote for you. So the candidate who can craft and deliver the most powerful, persuasive speeches has the overwhelming advantage over his/her less-eloquent competitor(s). Fancy brochures, colorful door hangers, or handsome website pages have never, to my knowledge, won an election.

**Speaking *vs* Writing**

**Speaking Writing**

Supported by vocal inflection and

pacing dynamics Yes No

Supported by body movement and

facial expression Yes No

Effectively communicates emotion

and passion Yes No

Allows for immediate audience inter-

action/feedback Yes No

Can be “modulated to the crowd” Yes No

Can be “taken back” easily or erased No Yes**\***

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**\*** Especially with respect to content posted on the Internet.

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Now I hasten to add that the most effective speech in the world won’t persuade a voter who (for whatever reason) simply doesn’t want to hear what you have to say. And conversely, even a terrible speaker (e.g., Donald Trump) can win the day if the platforms, policies, and programs he/she puts forward are so fundamentally consonant with the majority’s wishes that the voters are willing to overlook his/her verbal ineloquence. Such exceptions notwithstanding, however, it’s been my ex-perience over more than four decades of immersion in political campaigning at all levels of government that . . .

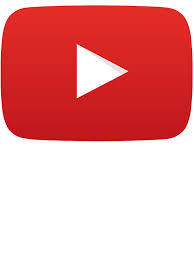
MAXIM #2

*Great Speeches Win Elections!*

Not always, of course. Not in every election. Not in every possible political cli­mate. But certainly in the *overwhelming* percentage of electoral contests held around the globe, the candidate who proves the more powerful and persuasive ***speaker*** is the one who usually wins the day.

***The Elements of Persuasion***

Take a look at the video presentation below; it’s a compendium of brief clips from some famous historical speeches. As you watch, jot down the words you would use to capture the basic nature or quality of these excerpts — the one basic characteristic (adjective) they all have in common:



Here are some of the adjectives you might have thought of — or at least *should* have thought of —as you watched:

• EMOTIONAL

• FORCEFUL

• HISTRIONIC

• MOVING

• POWERFUL

• DRAMATIC

• THRILLING

But there’s one adjective that more perfectly than all the rest characterizes the sing-ular nature of the language you hear in all of these speeches, and that word is: ***THE-ATRICAL***. If you’re a candidate for office, then you must understand and accept — indeed you must ***embrace*** — this fundamental truth:

Every effective political speech is — *first and foremost* — an effective ***theatrical event***, a ***performance***, a one-character

***play*** in which the candidate is the only player.

From your own experience, and from the video clips you just watched, it should be pretty clear that “theatrical” speech is a very different animal than everyday speech. In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, for example, Marc Antony, doesn’t call his fellow citizens together by saying, “*Hey, guys, c’mon over; I wanna talk to you*.” Instead, he utters the much more theatrical (and obviously more memorable) line, “*Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears*.”

Winston Churchill — a consummate political speaker if ever there was one — didn’t merely say, of Britain’s resolve during WWII, “*We’ll defend ourselves every way we can and wherever the enemy attacks*.” Instead, he said: “*We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender*!”

The point is that theatrical speech is intended specifically to move people, to excite them or incite them. In its rhythms and rhymes, its use of words, and the gestural embellishments with which it’s typically accompanied, theatrical speech is an art form in and of itself. It must be practiced and perfected to achieve that singular goal of moving an audience. (Adolf Hitler, one of history’s most theatric and bombastic public speakers, employed an acting coach!) Ex-New York State Governor Mario Cuomo got it exactly wright when he said, “We campaign in poe-try but govern in prose.”

And so, if you wish to become a truly effective political speechmaker, you must be willing wholeheartedly to adopt the role of actor, acting in a play of your own devising. You must be willing to foreswear your “true” persona (e.g, John Q. Smith, family man, lawyer, etc.), and take on the persona of John Q. Smith (etc.) running for office. These are two different people. And one of the things many candidates find most difficult to accept is the fact that — to be an effective political speechmaker — you’ve got to in effect “pretend” to be someone else.

But please bear in mind that Peter O’Toole, for example, was ***not*** Lawrence of Arabia; he was a damned fine Irish actor who was ***also*** not Henry II or Mr. Chips.

Likewise, when you’re standing up at a podium to give a political speech, it’s not *you* standing there, any more than it was Peter O’Toole riding camels through the Sahara. Instead, *it’s a person playing a man onstage who’s starring in a show about a man who’s running for public office and who just happens to have the same name as yours.* Got it?

But if, in the end, you’re unwilling to accept the fact that . . .

MAXIM #3

*Politics is Theatre!*

. . . then you might as well save your time and stop reading right now. Because the rest of this white paper deals specifically with all the various aspects of theatrical speechmaking, from crafting a perfect political speech to presenting it brilliantly; but I’ll address these two topics in reverse order.

**2. The Art of Theatrical Speechmaking**

THE KEY TO all effective speechmaking, including political speechmaking, is ***modulation***. Modulation has a number of technical definitions — for example, in music, electronics, and grammar; but at its simplest, a modulation is a “change” from one level, state, or condition to another. In theatrical speechmaking, a number of elements can be modulated to give the speech its maximum persuasive impact. As I address these elements, I’ll indicate (where possible) how the modulation at issue might be marked in your printed script.

**[MORE TO COME]**

**EDWARD SHAW** *(President & Editorial Director of* The Script-crafters*)* is a long-time political-campaign consultant and speechwriter, as well as a trainer, teacher, and motivational speaker who for more than 40 years has operated his own training company in Michigan. He’s the author of three books and many professional articles and white papers in the training field, including his ground-breaking handbook on adult learning, *The Six Pillars of Reality-Based Training*.

In the political arena, Ed served (for more than a year) as senior con-tributing speechwriter for Detroit Mayor, Jerome P. Cavanagh, and he also wrote for mayoral candidate, Mel Ravitz, for Michigan Senator Phil Hart, and for Executive Director James Fitzpatrick of the Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County. At the Michigan Cancer Foundation (now the Karmanos Cancer Institute), he wrote all the speeches for the institution’s President and Executive Vice President; and he’s written a wide variety of speeches, PowerPoint talks, and video scripts for C-level executives at Chrysler, Ford, GM, and Detroit Edi-son, among others — for many of whom he also served as public speak-ing and presentation coach.

Ed’s 40 years’ experience as a trainer, speaker, playwright, and pre-sentations coach can be of enormous benefit to anyone who must give a political speech and deliver that speech with power and impact.

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