

Talk 1: Significant Object

Choose an object from your room that has special meaning to you and bring it to class and tell us the story behind it. It could be a piece of clothing, stuffed animal, piece of jewelry, book, picture, poster, CD or anything that you can easily carry to class.

The GOAL of this speech is to give us a better understanding of who you are and what you value. The speech ultimately is NOT about the object – but about YOU as revealed through the object. If we don't know something meaningful about you at the end of the speech, then the speech did not succeed.

A key element of this speech, and every speech you give in this class, is the story you tell. There are no rules for telling a good story, but certain features are very common: concrete, vivid images that allow the listener to visualize what you are saying; specific details about time, place, people and conditions; some narrative tension. Humor is always good, but not silliness. A little drama is always good, but not histrionics.

The speech must be at least 4 minutes long but no longer than 5 minutes. When you rehearse, shoot for 4:30 -- that would be ideal. You will be timed. Use whatever kind of notes you want (an outline, a full text or something in between), but REHEARSE THE SPEECH OFTEN ENOUGH that you can relate to the audience as much as possible with gestures and eye contact and are not stuck reading too much.

Give special attention and planning to how you will USE and DISPLAY the object. Where will you put it? Will you hold it the whole time or pick it up at some point? Can it be seen from a distance or will you have to describe it? You are NOT allowed to pass it around before, during or after the speech.

Talk 2—Honorary Degree

Members of Student Senate have nominated the following to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters at the coming Commencement Ceremony: Edward Snowden, Martha Stewart, and The Incredible Hulk (the fictional character). Write a four to five-minute talk arguing FOR or AGAINST honoring one of these figures, drawing on your knowledge of the history of the college and the career of the figure in question. Your audience is [Student Senate](#).

The GOAL of this speech is to effectively praise or blame the subject in question and motivate your audience to want to honor or not honor them in this way. An encomium is a speech of praise, and “vituperation” or “invective” occur in a speech of blame. The classical topics (standard argument types) of [encomium](#) and [vituperation](#) are a good place to start in the invention phase. You can adapt these as needed and add more. Another possible organizing principle is by virtues and vices. (Menander Rhetor, for example, discussing how to praise a Roman emperor, says there are four virtues: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom.¹ Aristotle names the main vices as injustice, cowardice, lack of control, stinginess, little-mindedness, and illiberality [*Rhetoric* I.9].)

¹ “Always divide the actions of those you are going to praise into the virtues (there are four virtues: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom) and see to what virtues the actions belong and whether some of them, whether in war or in peace, are common to a single virtue: e.g. wisdom, for it belongs to wisdom both to command armies

This speech will involve some research, and the skillful deployment of telling detail. Too much detail, and it will be hard to follow; too little, and the argument will be unconvincing. Aim for a combination of well-known facts and information the audience might not be familiar with. Make sure to deploy these facts carefully to reinforce your argument. Avoid a bare list or summary of career, which would be dull. Use ornament and specific, vivid language in a way that engages the emotions of the audience. (Demosthenes, Cicero, and Sallust provide good stylistic models for effective praise and blame.) In addition to research on the figure him or herself, consult some of the information about past honorary degree recipients and the history of the college collected on the course Moodle site.

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Talk 3: Dickinson Stories [not used due to virus]

Think of an aspect of the culture of Dickinson you would like to change or keep the same—a welcome tradition you would like to spread or revive, or something you would like to improve, or eliminate entirely. Make the case using at least three true stories. These could be taken from the *Dickinsonian* archives, or from other printed sources regarding the history of the college (see Moodle). Feel free to talk to students, faculty, or staff (in person, rather than by email) who might be well-informed on the issue you are discussing and use stories they tell you.

The GOAL of this speech is to tell stories effectively in a persuasive context, either to spark action, communicate identity, transmit values, foster collaboration, share knowledge, or lead people into the future (see Stephen Denning, “Telling Tales,” *HBR* pp. 71–78).

There are no rules for telling a good story, but certain features are very common: concrete, vivid images that allow the listener to visualize what you are saying; specific details about time, place, people and conditions; some narrative tension. Humor is always good, but not silliness. A little drama is always good, but not histrionics.

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Talk 3: Presidential Message about the Covid-19 Pandemic

Write and deliver a four to five-minute message to be delivered on television to the American people regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. The content is up to you, but in style it should imitate the speeches of John F. Kennedy that we have studied, the Inaugural speech, the televised message on civil rights, and the speech at the Berlin wall. In addition to re-reading those speeches, make sure to re-read the analysis of the Inaugural by Burnham Carter, Jr.

and to legislate well and dispose and arrange the affairs of subjects to advantage.” (Menander Rhetor, *On Epideictic Speeches* II.373, trans. D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson)

Talk 4

Choose ONE of the following topics to discuss in your 4th talk. Make it clear within the first minute which topic you have chosen. The talk should last 5-6 minutes.

Email me and let me know which of the topics you have chosen by **May 1**. The talk itself will be delivered by Zoom on May 8.

TOPIC 1: CHANCE: We all try as best we can to plan our lives, to have control over what we want to do or be. But inevitably, some random, unexpected thing happens that significantly and permanently changes the course of our lives. We meet somebody we might easily not have met. We oversleep, miss a ride, walk into the wrong room. We find something, see something, lose something. In this speech, you are asked to describe something life-changing that happened "just by chance" -- and to reflect on the role that "chance" plays in who we are, what we think, how we act and where we are headed.

TOPIC 2: ACCEPTANCE: No one knows who put it in the form with which we are familiar today, but the so-called Serenity Prayer is widely known and admired. It goes:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference."

In this speech, you are asked to focus on the phrase "to accept the things I cannot change," and to discuss a situation or circumstance in your life that you tried very hard to change, but ultimately realized that you could not change, and so eventually accepted. You should reflect on the wisdom/necessity of "giving up" in some instances, and how we can ever know when that point has been reached.

TOPIC 3: DO-OVER: We have all said something or done something, or didn't say something or do something, that we wish we could go back and do over. In this speech, you are asked to give an example of such a moment in your life. You should reflect on the wisdom/value/necessity of remembering or worrying over such moments -- should we just let them go, try to do something about them, something else?

TOPIC 4: LAST LECTURE: If this were your last time to address a group of students, what would you say to them? This topic is based on a talk Professor Randy Pausch delivered at Carnegie Mellon while he was battling terminal pancreatic cancer. His talk entitled "The Last Lecture: Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" included stories of his childhood, lessons that he had learned, and advice on how to live life to the fullest. Retiring professors from Harvard University Law School do something similar, and some examples are linked on our Moodle page. In that spirit, give a last lecture to your fellow students at Dickinson.