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What are the elements of rhetoric?

If we wish to persuade then what things do we need to consider?

Quintillian's codification of the elements of rhetoric in the first century CE spoke of five canons: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. They have served as a basis for analyzing rhetoric and for teaching rhetoric ever since the classical period.

- Invention concerns the process of discovering *what* to say. In particular it is about the understanding of argument and the recognition of the common categories of thought and patterns of reasoning.

- Arrangement is about how best to order the elements of the speech. One might begin by establishing one's personal credentials to argue on the topic, then move on to consider the reasons why the position one is advocating are compelling and finish with a rousing emotional appeal to action. Monroe's motivated sequence is a classic example of an approach to arrangement.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monroe's_motivated_sequence

- Style is about how best to deliver the meat of what one wishes to say in order to persuade. It is what is often considered today to be the whole of rhetoric – i.e. “mere style”.

- Memory is about two things. First, it is about ways to memorize one's material. Second, it is about memorizing the information needed to supply the building blocks of one's argument. This is not just about memorizing relevant facts but also about memorizing relevant patterns of argument.

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- The Greek word for delivery is “hypokrisis” – “acting”. It is about how best to deliver the argument. It differs from style by being more about the pragmatics of delivery – projection, breathing and so forth.

Although the classical cannon is a useful reference point it emphasizes the abstract concepts that underlie rhetoric. I think that we can conveniently divide up the elements of rhetoric in a different way – one which puts the focus on what needs to be considered in each particular instance of rhetoric – consider these three categories:

First, **the environment** – under this we need to consider, for example, the nature of the tribunal, the nature of the target audience, the nature of the advocate, the nature of the opposing advocate and the prevailing prejudices.

Second, **the topic** – what is the position that is being argued for? Is it a rational position or an emotional position? Is it one for which considerable evidence or authority exists? Is it complicated or straightforward?

In the third category are the things that **connect the first two** categories. Under this topic we need to consider how the first two categories inter-relate and how we can use our understanding to make our position the more persuasive. This is largely a question of technique.

Some examples will make the relevance of these three categories clearer:

- a) I have to persuade a judge of the High Court of England and Wales that my patent is valid and infringed. The tribunal is formal and experienced. It will give me due time to develop my arguments. The judge is intelligent and humorless, my opponent is bellicose and simplistic and I am senatorial but prone to over-flowery presentation. The nature of the judge and the dry, technical subject matter dictates an approach that is somber, heavily fact based and which preferably

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allows my opponent to become over-excited and thereby alienate the judge. I must avoid being over flowery if possible.

- b) I have to persuade a mob not to lynch a man that they believe is a rapist. The tribunal is informal and inexperienced. It is unlikely to be interested in complicated arguments or overly regardful for high principle. I am unlikely to be given the time to develop my arguments. I have no opponent but the will of the mob itself. I am senatorial but prone to over-flowery presentation. Here the nature of the tribunal dictates against a somber, fact based approach. Far from allowing my opponent to become over-excited I must calm its passions. I need to play down my senatorial stance since this may alienate the mob and similarly my over-flowery approach may serve to make my arguments seem only wordy.

Many of the considerations that arise in these three categories are common-sense and obvious once stated. It is only necessary to identify them and bring them out in order to have them in mind the next time one debates.

By Benet Brandreth 2006