

Understanding Public Speaking

Sample Speeches for Analysis

Week 8, November 8, 2023

The Moon Landing Speech

Speaker: Neil Alden Armstrong

Introductory Notes *Stepping onto the Moon on 21 July 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong delivered one of the most remembered one-line speeches of all time.*

That's one small step for [a] man; one giant leap for mankind.

Never Was So Much Owed by So Many to So Few

Speaker: Winston Churchill

Introductory Notes *To the House of Commons on 20 August 1940, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered this war-time speech, referring to the ongoing efforts of the Royal Air Force crews who were at the time fighting the Battle of Britain, the pivotal air battle against the German Luftwaffe, with Britain expecting an invasion.*

The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

Apology

Speaker: Socrates

Introductory Notes *In the first democratic court of mankind on a spring morning in 399 BC, the 70-year-old philosopher Socrates delivered this speech in his own defence, but more importantly as Plato depicted, to explain the meaning of life in his eyes.*

Not much time will be gained, Athenians, in return for the evil name which you will get for killing Socrates. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. For I am old, and not far from death. You think that I was convicted through deficiency of words - I mean, that if I had thought fit to leave nothing undone, nothing unsaid, I might have gained an acquittal. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to address you, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, are unworthy of me. But I don't regret my defence. I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live.

MOOCs and the Future of Education

Speaker: Qiyu Chen

Introductory Notes *The speech below was made in 2015 in response to the following argument: The coming of the MOOCs has led to many predictions about the future of education, especially the higher education. One prediction is: in future, all students will have equal access to the best education through online courses given by the best professors. Most of the universities will close down and the majority of the professors will become teaching assistants, or lose their jobs. However, it will be a blessing for students because they will all enjoy the same opportunity to study for world-class degrees.*

The Nemesis of all revolutions is ignoring the value of existing systems. The predictors of MOOCs here also fell into this profound, however common, error. Today I will not repeat the incalculable service of MOOCs to humans. Nor will I echo your possible doubt about the prediction in the video. My mission here today is to bring to you three episodes of an interview that I conducted last night, specially for this speech. Here comes a sophomore of history:

“Universities closed down? Just think about the course Chinese Antiques. We touched the smooth surface of the jade and knocked to hear the sound of the bronze bell, trying to discover the secrets of our history. At the last session, the professor, that amiable old man, read *The Last Lesson* written by Daudet to us. ‘Orders have come from Berlin. This is your last lesson in French.’ I felt a tremble in his voice. I understood, at that moment, we cannot let our culture fall apart. Could MOOCs capture those moments of enlightenment that I picked up on the spot?”

Probably not. With this thought on my mind, I interviewed a professor, who teaches Wine Appreciation. Here he comes:

“Universities closed down and courses offered online? For wines, it doesn’t work, unless tastes can be virtualized. The point is you cannot control the tasting experiences. Guess what are in this large box that I am always carrying to my class? Sometimes the soil from the northwest Italy, sometimes the grapes from central Spain, but every time a wine from somewhere in the world and the stories behind.”

Well, even if tastes could be virtualized, I still prefer to savor the stories of wines on the spot. But these are just courses of humanities, so I went to a professor of computer science.

“I value the role of MOOCs in education, but being the main character in a MOOC course, facing a cold camera in an empty room, I do miss the inquiring eyes and the expressive faces of my students. Courses of science and technology are not that ‘human’, but I still need humans there who I can relate to on the spot, so that I will know where my next step should be.”

Yes, we all want to know where our next step should be. But we also need to know where we are and what options we have. MOOCs are coming, to shape a better future of higher education, but not to close universities and fire professors.

Ladies and gentlemen, as a speaker on the stage, I enjoy meeting your inquiring eyes and expressive faces. As the audience sitting there, I guess you also enjoy my *Truman Show*, be it passionate or desperate, confident or inhibited. I think that helps to explain why the final speech of UChallenge is always on the spot in this hall, although we have the virtual platform of UNIPUS. With the future of education, I believe MOOCs will have a significant role to play. We can learn the general principles of any study through MOOCs, but as John Henry Newman put it, “the detail, the colour, the tone, the air, the life which makes it live in us, you must catch all these from those in whom it lives already”, by consulting the living man and listening to his living voice.