

Style

Art of Rhetoric [III. i, ii, vii]

We have therefore next to speak of style, for it is not sufficient to know what one ought to say, but one must also know how to say it, and this largely contributes to making the speech appear of a certain character.

In regard to style, one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity. This is shown by the fact that the speech, if it does not make the meaning clear, will not perform its proper function. Propriety of style will be obtained by the expression of emotion and character, and by proportion to the subject matter.

Style is proportionate to the subject matter when neither weighty matters are treated offhand, nor trifling matters with dignity, and no embellishment is attached to an ordinary word; otherwise there is an appearance of comedy. The poetic style maybe is not mean, but it is not appropriate to prose. Of nouns and verbs, it is the proper ones that make style perspicuous. All the others which have been spoken of in the *Poetics* elevate and make it ornate, for departure from the ordinary makes it appear more dignified. In this respect men feel the same in regard to style as in regard to foreigners and fellow-citizens. Wherefore we should give our language a "foreign air", for men admire what is remote, and that which excites admiration is pleasant. In poetry many things conduce to this and there it is appropriate, for the subjects and persons spoken of are more out of the common. But in prose such methods are appropriate in much fewer instances, for the subject is less elevated. Wherefore those who practise this artifice must conceal it and avoid the appearance of speaking artificially instead of naturally, for that which is natural persuades, but the artificial does not. Men become suspicious of one whom they think to be laying a trap for them, as they are of mixed wines.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *Select a speech that once impressed you and analyze if the speaker employed any rhetorical device to "make the meaning clear" in an appropriate way.*
2. *With the next speech you are to make, have you figured out "what to say" and "how to say it"? For instance, what metaphor you are going to use when describing the specialness of your major? Would you use different metaphors when addressing different audiences?*

Style expresses emotion, when a man speaks with anger of wanton outrage; with indignation and reserve, even in mentioning them, of things foul or impious; with admiration of things praiseworthy; with lowliness of things pitiable; and so in all other cases. Appropriate style also makes the fact appear credible; for the mind of the hearer is imposed upon under the impression that the speaker is speaking the truth, because, in such circumstances, his feelings are the same, so that he thinks (even if it is not the case as the speaker puts it) that things are as he represents them; and the hearer always sympathizes with one who speaks emotionally, even though he really says nothing. This is why speakers often confound their hearers by mere noise.

Character also may be expressed by the proof from signs, because to each class and habit there is an appropriate style. I mean class in reference to age—child, man, or old man; to sex—man or woman; to country—Lacedaemonian or Thessalian. I call habits those moral states which form a man's character in life; for not all habits do this. If then anyone uses the language appropriate to each habit, he will represent the character; for the uneducated man will not say the same things in the same way as the educated. But the hearers also are impressed in a certain way by a device employed *ad nauseam* by writers of speeches: "Who does not know?" "Everybody knows"; for the hearer agrees, because he is ashamed to appear not to share what is a matter of common knowledge.

The opportune or inopportune use of these devices applies to all kinds of Rhetoric. But whenever one has gone too far, the remedy may be found in the common piece of advice—that he should rebuke himself in advance; then the excess seems true, since the orator is obviously aware of what he is doing. Further, one ought not to make use of all kinds of correspondence together; for in this manner the hearer is deceived. I mean, for instance, if the language is harsh, the voice, features, and all things connected should not be equally harsh; otherwise what each really is becomes evident. But if you do this in one instance and not in another, the art escapes notice, although the result is the same. If mild sentiments are harshly expressed or harsh sentiments mildly, the speech lacks persuasiveness.