

Commencement Speeches (with speaker descriptions)

All of these speeches were given at graduations, and many of them follow a specific set of expectations. However, while commencement speeches tend to follow a specific pattern, it's essential consider the context for each speech:

- (1) who invited the speaker and what's the speaker's relationship to the place they are speaking (if any),
- (2) when was this given and what important events might have influenced the author's message, and
- (3) who are the people in the audience and why might this message be important for them?

- **Ahmed Zewail** (Egyptian-born American chemist, Nobel Prize winner in 1999) [Caltech Commencement](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ahmedzewailcaltechcommencement.htm) (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ahmedzewailcaltechcommencement.htm>)
- **Angela Merkel** (German politician and scientist) [Harvard Commencement](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/angelamerkelharvardcommencementenglish.htm) (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/angelamerkelharvardcommencementenglish.htm>)
- **Arthur C. Brooks** (American social scientist, professor at Harvard) ["More Love, Less Contempt"](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/arthur-c-brooks/more-love-less-contempt/) (<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/arthur-c-brooks/more-love-less-contempt/>)
- **Alexandr Solzhenitsyn** (Russian writer, Nobel Prize winner in 1970) ["A World Split Apart"](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/alexandersolzhenitsynharvard.htm) (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/alexandersolzhenitsynharvard.htm>)
- **Atul Gawande** (American surgeon, writer, and public health researcher) ["Curiosity and What Equality Really Means"](https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/curiosity-and-the-prisoner) (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/curiosity-and-the-prisoner>)
- **Barack Obama** (44th U.S. President) ["Your Place in History"](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobamaknoxcollege.htm) (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobamaknoxcollege.htm>)
- **Billy Collins** (U.S. Poet Laureate 2001-2003) ["Slowing Down"](https://byui.instructure.com/courses/291522/files/127484970?wrap=1) (<https://byui.instructure.com/courses/291522/files/127484970?wrap=1>) ↓
(https://byui.instructure.com/courses/291522/files/127484970/download?download_frd=1)
- **Bono** (Irish rockstar, lead singer of U2) [2001 Harvard Commencement Address](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/bonoharvardcommencement.htm) (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/bonoharvardcommencement.htm>)
- **Brene Brown** (American CEO and leading researcher on shame, vulnerability, and leadership) [2020 UT Commencement Address](https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/brene-brown-commencement-speech-transcript-for-ut) (<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/brene-brown-commencement-speech-transcript-for-ut>)
- **Chadwick Boseman** (American actor, best known for his lead role in *Black Panther*) [2018 Howard University Commencement Speech](#)

<https://byui.instructure.com/courses/291522/files/127484914?wrap=1> ↓

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- **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** (Nigerian writer and activist) [Williams Commencement Speech](https://commencement.williams.edu/commencement-2017/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-commencement-address-2017/)
<https://commencement.williams.edu/commencement-2017/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-commencement-address-2017/>
- **Colin Powell** (American politician, secretary of state, diplomat, and United States Army officer) [High Point University Commencement](https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/colin-powell-high-point-university-commencement-2014-speech-transcript) <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/colin-powell-high-point-university-commencement-2014-speech-transcript>
- **David McCullough, Jr.** (A U.S. high-school English teacher, author, and father of four children. He is the son of the well-known historian and author David McCullough.) ["You Are Not Special"](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/davidmcculloughwellesleyhighschoolcommencement.htm)
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/davidmcculloughwellesleyhighschoolcommencement.htm>
- **David Foster Wallace** (award-winning American writer, former professor of creative writing) ["This Is Water"](https://fs.blog/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/) <https://fs.blog/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/> (note: there are some swear words in this one)
- **Desmond Tutu** (South African Anglican bishop and peace activist) [William & Mary College Commencement](https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2006/desmond-tutus-commencement-remarks.php) <https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2006/desmond-tutus-commencement-remarks.php>
- **Elie Wiesel** (Romanian-born American writer, Nobel laureate, and Holocaust survivor) [Memory and Ethics](https://source.wustl.edu/2011/05/elie-wiesels-2011-commencement-address-at-washington-university-in-st-louis/) <https://source.wustl.edu/2011/05/elie-wiesels-2011-commencement-address-at-washington-university-in-st-louis/>
- **Fred Rogers** (American TV host, Presbyterian minister) [Commencement Speech at Dartmouth 2002](https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/fred-rogers-mr-rogers-commencement-speech-transcript-2002-at-dartmouth-college) <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/fred-rogers-mr-rogers-commencement-speech-transcript-2002-at-dartmouth-college>
- **Gayatri Patnaik** (Indian-born American editor, Associate Director & Editorial Director of Beacon Press) [On Finding Meaning and Creating a 'World' House](https://www.goshen.edu/news/2019/04/28/commencement-speech-2019-full-text-on-finding-meaning-creating-a-world-house-by-gayatri-patnaik-90/)
<https://www.goshen.edu/news/2019/04/28/commencement-speech-2019-full-text-on-finding-meaning-creating-a-world-house-by-gayatri-patnaik-90/>
- **George W. Bush** (43rd U.S. President) [2005 Calvin College Commencement](https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushcalvincollege.htm)
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushcalvincollege.htm>
- **Hillary Rodham Clinton** (American politician, diplomat, and former lawyer) [Wellesley College 1969 Commencement](https://www.wellesley.edu/events/commencement/archives/1969commencement/studentspeech)
<https://www.wellesley.edu/events/commencement/archives/1969commencement/studentspeech>
- **His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama** [Tulane University Commencement](https://commencement.tulane.edu/node/2447)
<https://commencement.tulane.edu/node/2447>
- **Hugh B. Brown** (American attorney, and former apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) [God is the Gardener](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown/god-gardener/) <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown/god-gardener/>
- **Ivanka Trump** (American businesswoman and the first daughter of Donald Trump) [WSU Tech Commencement 2020](https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/ivanka-trump-commencement-) <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/ivanka-trump-commencement->

[speech-transcript-for-class-of-2020\)](#)

- **James Mattis** (four-star general, former U.S. secretary of defense) [US Military Academy Commencement](#)
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jamesmattiswestpointacademycommencement.htm>)
- **John F. Kennedy** (35th U.S. President) [American University Commencement](#)
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkamericanuniversityaddress.html>)
- **John McCain** (American politician, statesman, and United States Navy officer) [Liberty University Commencement](#)
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/johnmccainlibertycommencement.htm>)
- **J.K. Rowling** (author of the *Harry Potter* series) "[The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination](#)" (<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2008/06/text-of-j-k-rowling-speech/>)
- **Lori Robinson** (first female Air Force general in the U.S., former commander for NORAD) [UNH Commencement Speech](#) (<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/general-lori-robinson-unh-commencement-speech-transcript>)
- **Kamala Harris** (first female American vice president) [U.S. Naval Academy Commencement 2021](#) (<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/kamala-harris-u-s-naval-academy-commencement-speech-transcript-may-28>)
- **Michelle Obama** (American attorney and former first lady of the U.S.) [2015 Tuskegee University Commencement](#)
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/michelleobamatuskegeecommencement.htm>)
- **Ruth Bader Ginsberg** (former U.S. Supreme Court Justice) [Lewis & Clark Law School Commencement](#) (<https://law.lclark.edu/live/news/44348-justice-ruth-bader-ginsburgs-1992-commencement>)
- **Teresa Pike Tomlinson** (American attorney and politician) [Sweet Briar College Commencement](#)
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/teresapiketomlinsonsweetbriarcommencement.htm>)
- **Tom Brokaw** (American journalist, news anchor, and author) [Emory University Commencement Address](#)
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/tombrokawemorycommencement.htm>)
- **Thomas J. Hanks** (American actor, director, and producer) "[The Power of Four](#)"
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/tomhanksvassar.htm>)
- **Toni Morrison** (American novelist, Nobel Prize winner 1993) [2004 Wellesley Commencement Address](#) (<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/toni-morrison-2004-wellesley-commencement-address-speech-transcript>)
- **Ursula K. LeGuin** (American science fiction/fantasy writer) "[A Left-Handed Commencement Address](#)"
(<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ursulakleguinlefthandedcommencementspeech.htm>)