

PERSUASIVE PROSE [SPEECH] MODEL ANALYSIS

MODEL QUESTION

The Gettysburg Address (1863) – Abraham Lincoln

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate – we can not hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these [honoured] dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Study the content of this speech carefully and then write an essay in which you critically analyse the speech as a persuasive text. Your discussion should be supported by drawing relevant evidence from the speech.

MODEL ANSWER

The purpose of this essay serves to provide you with a model answer for how you might approach a question such as the above when analysing a speech or speech excerpt. If you have a question about or comment on this model analysis, please post it in the 'Speech Model Analysis – Discussion' topic in the 'Study Unit' 3 forum under 'Discussions' on this site [***Note:** *I am briefly introducing the model analysis here, but—as I am writing this analysis in an 'explanation' style—this is not an example of how you should write your essay introduction. Please refer to Tutorial Letter 301 and/or the 'Essay Writing Guidelines' discussion topic that I posted in the 'Study Unit 1' for full guidance on and examples of how your essay introduction should read*].

The Gettysburg Address falls under the broad genre of non-fiction prose and is persuasive prose in the form of a speech. In order to further expand on the 'what' of the text you might note that, despite the setting of the speech, it is at its core a political speech. You might also note, in considering structure (which is almost similar to how one would write an academic essay) and content (of which you could quote various examples), that the speech was likely presented at a formal event.

With the 'what' having been established, who is, or was, the Gettysburg Address aimed at? That is, who formed the target audience of the speech? While for an assignment question you could look up who the Address was presented to in order to inform your determination of the 'who' in the speech, you would not be able to do so in an examination, thus you need to be able to draw certain inferences by merely looking at the text itself. You can, given that the speech was presented by the then-President of the United States of America, assume that, while perhaps presented to a select congregation, the speech was nonetheless given with the intention of eventually reaching a wider audience (that is, at the very least, the American public). The last sentence of the speech reinforces such a determination, in that the message seems to make a final promise to the nation as a whole. The language and the style of the speech is formal, though we must keep in mind that, since the speech was given in the late 1800s, the use of archaic language such as "[f]our score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth" might well have been colloquial at that time. To that point, the Gettysburg Address while formal is nonetheless quite simple and understandable, and should have been easily understood by any reasonably educated American at the time.

The 'how' and 'why' of the speech go hand-in-hand and can thus be analysed as such. The linguistic devices utilised impact on the message of the speech and aid in establishing a relationship between Lincoln and his audience. The language use in the Address perfectly communicates and reinforces the overall message of the speech. How so? The opening paragraph is positive, setting the tone of the speech to be hopeful. Yet, the subject matter of the speech is perceptibly grave and sober. Then again, the speech is concluded in a positive way, thereby enveloping the severity and gravity of the Address in inspiration and hope. Positive and constructive words and phrases include "all men are created equal", "nobly" and "birth of freedom". Words and phrases that acknowledge the solemnity of the occasion include "war", "battle-field" and "final resting place". Without the former set of words and phrases the Address would have been somewhat desolate and an arguably poor political speech. In turn, without the latter set of words and phrases, the speech might have been too light-hearted and not suitable to the fact that part of the purpose of the speech is to pay reverence to those who had fought and died in the civil war.

Further to the discussion of linguistic devices employed in the Address, Lincoln draws on historical reference to reinforce the ultimately inspirational message of his speech. He notes how their forefathers "had brought forth on this continent, a new nation", carefully pointing to their collective history as a nation, a fact which may have resonated with his audience and may have

been intended to ultimately inspire unification amongst a country divided. Furthermore, the pronouns 'we' and 'us' are repeated throughout the speech, essentially reaffirming the integrated history of the nation. [**Note:** *Remarking on the significance of the pronouns "we", "us" and "our" is important whenever you analyse a speech, especially if that speech is political or you have some reason to suspect that it might be propagandist in nature*].

Were you able to identify any other linguistic devices in the text? If so, remember that merely listing the devices in a given speech does not suffice; you also have to make significant comment on the effect of these devices and explore how they create the message of the speech.

Building on the 'how' of the speech, one can then consider the 'why' of it. That is, why was this speech written and presented? What does it hope to achieve? What is its purpose? As you probably know, the purpose of a speech could be to persuade the audience to act, to inform them or to serve as a celebration of something. As per our exploration of Lincoln's acknowledgement of death and sacrifice, and given the fact that the speech explicitly refers to the dedication and consecration of (hallowed) ground, we can, as noted above, determine the purpose of the speech to be to commemorate those who had fought and died on the battle-field. In addition, a second and ultimate purpose of the speech, as noted and discussed above, may have been to inspire the audience. You could also argue that the speech attempted to persuade the greater American audience to unify as their forefathers once had, however you would require a certain degree of background knowledge about the speech and circumstances in which it was given in order to do so.

Lastly, in analysing a non-fiction prose text, you can and should if possible consider the 'where' and 'when' of the text. If given a 'where', such as for Nelson's Mandela's Inaugural Speech as per Activity 6 (page 29) in the Study Guide, studying such can aid you in exploring and concluding on the 'how' and 'why' of the speech. If a speech is published in a newspaper, gazette or other publication, such information may also aid you in determining who the target audience may be. The 'when', likewise, may in aid in placing the speech in context. For example, knowing that the Gettysburg Address was given at a cemetery in Gettysburg in 1863 just before the end of the American Civil War would have greatly informed your analysis of the text. However, since you were not provided with this information for the purposes of this analysis and would not be expected to know the afore-mentioned historical facts off the top of your head, you would not have been required to substantively comment on the 'where' and 'when' of the text. With that said, from the content of the speech, you *might* have noted that the speech perhaps took place in Gettysburg during the Civil War.

In conclusion, the 'who', 'what', 'how' and 'why' elements of the Gettysburg Address effectively combine to deliver the inspirational and commemorative message of the speech to the target audience and to ultimately achieve the identified purpose of the Address. While this analysis is not exhaustive or conclusive (you might have taken a somewhat different approach or have

noted certain additional elements), it should give you a general idea what to look at and for when analysing a political speech. Note the importance of briefly stating what the text is about (the **what** aspect of analysis), identifying the persuasive purpose of the text (the **why** aspect of analysis), speculating on the possible target audience of the text (the **who** aspect of analysis), and exploring the linguistic strategies utilised and how these features further the persuasive purpose of the text (the **how** aspect of analysis). The latter aspect, i.e. how the author or speaker sets about achieving the persuasive purpose of the text, the linguistic strategies he employs towards this end, leaves scope for exploration depending on the features of the text that you are able to identify. Again, if you have a question about or comment on this model analysis, please post it in the 'Speech Model Analysis – Discussion' topic in the 'Study Unit' 3 forum.
