ORGANIZING AN IMPROMPTU SPEECH USING UNIFIED ANALYSIS
by Robert C. Carroll

For too long, impromptu speaking has been dominated by speeches that address just about everything imaginable, with the exception of the topic assigned to the speaker. In my previous article, "Organization an Extemporaneous Speech using Unified Analysis", I argued that Unified Analysis (UA) is "the one best organizational pattern" for the body of an extemporaneous speech. Unified Analysis itself is based on the influential article, "Extemporaneous Speaking: Unifying the Analysis," by David Ross. This organizational pattern unifies all the analysis offered by the speaker around answering the question, hence its name. This organizational structure can also be successfully applied to impromptu speaking and in this article I will do so by reviewing the types of impromptu topics, the purpose of the event and the most common method of organization, and then, applying UA to each of these types of topics.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to review the three basic types of impromptu topics. These are: (1), **famous people/places/events** - historic or contemporary figures and locations and events; (2), **words** - conceptual (abstract) and operational (objects and things); and (3), **quotations/phrases/proverbs**.

In impromptu speaking, with each of the three types of topics, Unified Analysis (or UA) can be carefully applied, especially if the purpose and strategy of the event is kept in mind. The purpose of the event is for a speaker to present a clearly structured defense of a thesis he or she has extrapolated from the topic. The strategy for justifying this abstraction becomes more clear when we examine each of type of topic in depth and apply Unified Analysis to it. The speaker develops arguments which justify his or her extrapolation and explain why it is the best. In the process, the impromptu speaker uses examples to support his or her arguments in the same way an extemporaneous speaker uses evidence to support his or her rationale. Thus, examples and evidence exist only to explain and support good argumentation, not replace it. Hence, the Cardinal Rule of Impromptu Speaking has evolved: *Examples Are Used Only To Illustrate An Argument, Never To Substitute For One.*

The most common method of organizing impromptu speeches has been termed either argument-by-example, or example-based impromptu, or list-pattern speaking. Whatever name it assumes, this is the pattern:

Topic: Topic
Thesis: Comment on the topic
I. First Main Point - Historical Example
II. Second Main Point - Political Example
III. Third Main Point - Literary Example
IV. Personal Reference

The major problem with this organizational pattern and analytic strategy is that the examples are used in the speech to substitute for arguments. That is not the purpose of an example; an example is used to help clarify or illustrate an argument that the speaker is try to make - it assists in making the argument, but it is not the argument itself. By using this pattern/strategy, all a speaker does is spend most of the speech *relating* examples to the topic and not *analyzing* the topic; any reasonably intelligent speaker can "stock" examples and relate these examples to almost any topic, while it takes the exceptionally intelligent speaker to argue a thesis using logic and support/illustrate this logic using cases/examples.

Famous Persons/Places/Events

The first type of impromptu topic is the famous person or place or (current) event. Though I disagree with many when I argue that these topics make for poor impromptu speeches because they are too limiting, the fact remains that they are used and a speaker must be prepared for them. In argument-by-example, an abstraction is drawn from the person or place and this abstraction becomes the thesis for the speech, while examples are used to describe this thesis. In essence, these examples serve as arguments. This is not a bad approach, but it is limiting. Besides, the abstraction, if too limited, can become a word, and the speaker has thus changed the topic for the speech. Take the example of "Jerry Garcia", the deceased vocalist/songwriter/guitarist of the band *The Grateful Dead*, an acceptable topic because he is immediately recognized by most competitors and judges and was a newsworthy figure. If the speaker chooses

as the abstraction the thesis: "Jerry Garcia is a symbol of the achievement in everyone's lives" and then proceeds to speak on achievement for five minutes, then the topic might as well have been the word "achievement" and not the person "Jerry Garcia". The speaker has essentially substituted a new topic (a word for a name), or at the very least, has deviated substantially from the existing topic.

Unified Analysis solves this problem. In Unified Analysis: (1), several different reasons why this person/place/event is significant or important are offered; (2), these reasons become the main arguments in the speech; and (3), examples are used to support these arguments. Unlike the other two types of topics, Unified Analysis does not offer an abstraction for this topic. This is why I believe famous names and places/current events make poor impromptu topics; because a speaker cannot draw an abstraction from them. Unified Analysis uses examples to support arguments which support a central thesis; that the famous name or place is indeed significant (if it was not, it would not be the topic) and not as arguments themselves. Take the example of "Jerry Garcia" once again. The Unified Analysis approach would be: "Jerry Garcia was a significant figure in contemporary American society for two reasons: first he was an influential musician; and second, he lived a self-destructive lifestyle." These two reasons or influences or accomplishments are each examined in turn and examples are used to support them. The same approach is used with a famous place or object, such as "Mount Everest" or "Empire State Building", or a current event, such as "Near East peace" or "Contract with America".

Name: Jerry Garcia
Thesis: Jerry Garcia, the deceased vocalist/songwriter/guitarist for the band *The Grateful Dead*, was a significant figure in contemporary American society:
I. Because he was an influential musician.
II. Because he lived a self-destructive lifestyle.

Place: Mount Everest

Thesis: Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is a significant place in the world:

I. Because it is isolated from most of humankind

II. Because it is almost impossible to climb

Object: Empire State Building

Thesis: The Empire State Building, once the tallest building in the world, is a significant object:

I. Because it shows how the benchmark in human achievement is always moving up

II. Because it is a symbol of the city and the state it represents

Event: Near East peace

Thesis: Peace in the Near East, a region of absurd complexity is significant:

I. Because it overcomes deep ethnic hatred

II. Because it escapes ancient religious suspicions

Event: Contract with America

Thesis: The Contract with America, the document used to unite the Republican party in the House of Representatives, is significant:

I. Because it was successful in the campaign

II. Because it is determining the agenda for the federal government

Words

The second type of impromptu topic is the word. Unlike famous people or places, words, especially abstract words, make excellent topics because they allow a speaker a great deal of freedom and creativity. In example-based impromptu, a definition is given for the word and this definition becomes the thesis for the speech, with examples used to illustrate this definition. In essence, examples have taken the place of arguments. Once again, this is not a bad approach, but it does have a weakness: the definition might prove too confining to construct a valid speech. Take the examples of "liberty", an abstract term, and "eggbeater", an object/thing. There is only so much a speaker can do with creating a thesis out of a definition of these words: first, defining a conceptual word is difficult without using other abstractions - "freedom", "responsibility", and second, defining an operational word really narrows the topic - "an object

used to beat eggs". In both cases, it becomes extremely difficult to choose examples to substantiate the thesis.

In Unified Analysis, the speaker is allowed to be more creative: (1), **a definition is given for the word**; (2), **this definition becomes the thesis for the speech**; (3), **several different reasons justifying this definition are offered**; (4), **these reasons become the main arguments in the speech**; and (5), **examples are used to support these arguments**. Take the examples of "liberty" and "eggbeater" once again. The Unified Analysis approach with "liberty" would be: "liberty is a significant concept in human history for two reasons: first, it signifies freedom for individuals; and second, it signifies responsibility for one's own actions". The Unified Analysis with "eggbeater" would be: "an eggbeater is a symbol of mixing things together for two reasons:" These two arguments are each examined in turn and examples are used to support them.

Word: Liberty

Thesis: Liberty is the freedom from control and the right to act on your own:

I. Because it signifies freedom for individuals it implies people are not subject to absolute restrictions from the state.

II. Because it signifies responsibility for one's own actions it implies people may act in their own best interest.

Word: Equality

Thesis: Equality is the result of all people being the same under the law:

I. Because it is right treatment of all citizens.

II. Because it is demonstrated through due process.

Word: Eggbeater

Thesis: An Eggbeater is a symbol for mixing things together:

I. Because it is used to beat the individuality out of an ingredient.

II. Because it is used to blend separate ingredients into a new whole.

Word: Lamp

Thesis: A Lamp is a symbol for dispelling darkness:

I. Because it dispells the darkness of ignorance.

II. Because it dispells the darkness of apathy.

Quotations/Proverbs/Phrases

The third type of impromptu topic is the quotation (not quote), phrase or proverb. These, unlike words, make excellent topics for impromptu speaking. In list-pattern speaking, an interpretation is given for the quotation and this interpretation becomes the thesis for the speech, with examples used to illustrate this thesis. Once again, this is not a bad approach, but it does have its weaknesses. One, a great deal depends on the quality of the examples offered, and two, these examples are used in substitution for an actual argument. Take the example of the old Klingon proverb, "Revenge is a dish best served cold." If the speaker chooses as the thesis the interpretation, "This quotation means that revenge is best taken in a cold-blooded manner" and proceeds to offer examples supporting this thesis, then all the speaker is doing is offering descriptive analysis: describing how this interpretation of the quotation can be seen all sorts of mundane things. So, not only are examples used in place of an argument, but the analysis of the thesis never passes beyond simple, descriptive analysis. Before proceeding, one simple fact; quotation is a noun and quote is a verb. The topic is never a quote, always a quotation. The speaker, however, may quote the author.

In Unified Analysis: (1), an interpretation is given for the quotation; (2), this interpretation becomes the thesis for the speech; (3), several different reasons justifying this interpretation are offered; (4) these reasons become the main arguments in the speech; and (5), examples are used to support these arguments. Unified Analysis uses examples to support arguments which support a central thesis: that this interpretation of the quotation/phrase/proverb is the best. Take the example of Klingon philosophy once again. The Unified Analysis approach would be: "This quotation means that revenge is best achieved in a cold-blooded manner for two reasons: first, revenge is not taken in the heat of the moment, instead it planned; and second, revenge is not a crime of passion, it is a crime of retribution. These two arguments are each examined in turn and examples are used to support them. Now, the speaker is using explanative analysis to explain the interpretation of the quotation given as a topic.

Some students and coaches have taken Unified Analysis to mean that the speaker should state a position on the quo-

tation and then support this position using reason and relevant examples. Such a scenario involves the speaker "agreeing" or "disagreeing" with the quotation and defending this position. Such an application of Unified Analysis is incorrect: *the topic, in this case the quotation, does not exist for the speaker to "agree" or disagree" with it, it exists for the speaker to extrapolate a thesis for the speech from it* (such a speech would lack a thesis and therefore not be a speech). Some speakers circumvent this by extrapolating a thesis and then stating a position on the thesis, which is similar to a debater writing the resolution and choosing sides; *if the speaker extrapolates a thesis, he or she must defend that thesis, not a position on that thesis.*

Proverb: Revenge is a dish best served cold.
Thesis: Revenge is best achieved in a cold-blooded manner:
I. Because revenge is not taken in the heat of the moment - it is planned.
II. Because revenge is not a crime of passion - it is a crime of retribution.

Proverb: Only Nixon could go to China. (Ancient Vulcan Proverb)
Thesis: An adversary will broker the best possible deal.
I. Because those who support the adversary will trust him/her.
II. Because those who oppose the adversary will fear him/her.

Quotation: Rational men, who believe themselves quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. --John Maynard Keynes
Thesis: Paradigms completely control how we view the world:
I. Because we evaluate problems through paradigms.
II. Because we propose solutions consistent with paradigms.

Phrase: Rose colored glasses.
Thesis: Rose colored glasses allow us to view the best of all possible worlds:
I. Because they are worn by optimists.
II. Because they can be removed or broken by pessimists.

The whole idea behind using Unified Analysis to analyze impromptu topics is to achieve a deeper, richer, more complex and more sophisticated analysis. Rather than merely describing the topic and its applications, which argumentation-by-example does, it justifies an abstraction (the extrapolation of the thesis) from the topic and its importance by using logical, analytic and creative insight. The argumentation-by-example, or the old two-or-three-examples-and-a-personal-reference route, may be acceptable for novice speakers, but it is not what the event is about, nor what is should aspire to be.

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