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## Arrangement: Understanding the Ubiquity of Problem, Cause, Solution in the Persuasive Speech

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### Introduction

There is, in certain Christian circles, an old joke. In a Sunday morning Sunday School class the teacher asks the following question: “What has short fur, a long bushy tail, climbs trees, and collects nuts?” The students immediately answer: “Jesus!”

Of course, this answer is ridiculous. Immediately following the question the class may think “squirrel!” or perhaps – the creative ones, “chipmunk!” However, before they can convince themselves to speak up and correctly answer the question, they think of the context. This is church; the answer must be “Jesus!”

Now, this paper is about Individual Events Competition, more specifically, “Arrangement: Understanding the Ubiquity of Problem, Cause, Solution in the Persuasive Speech.”

Here is the link: The problem in both the theoretical Sunday School classroom and the real Forensics Tournament is a lack of creativity, or a lack of freedom to think creatively, based on the students’ surroundings and context.

This paper will examine the current state of the persuasive speech as practiced at competitive Individual Events tournaments before looking, historically, at how our predecessors in the rhetorical tradition - including Aristotle, Thomas Wilson, Cicero and Geoffrey of Vinsauf – viewed creativity. This creativity will be framed by the Canon of Arrangement. Finally, some suggestions will be made for alternatives to the current standard of Persuasive Speech giving - with the hope of spurring a meaningful conversation amongst the educators that will lead to a change in how our students approach this educational activity.

### Current Situation

It has been noted recently on the Individual Events List-Serv that at certain tournaments the only notable difference in the final round of platform speeches is the topic. Otherwise the introduction, body arrangement, and conclusion are identical. In persuasive speaking, in this author’s experience, the Problem, Cause, Solution pattern is ubiquitous. What, one may ask, is wrong with that? The formula, obviously, works when success is defined as winning.

One question to ask, is winning a tool that reinforces best practices in persuasive speech giving? Or is winning a tool that simply reinforces the norms that win. In a landmark article, which I hope we’ve all read – at least once – Daniel Cronn-Mills and Alfred Golden wrote about “The Unwritten Rules in Oral Interpretation.” They write, “A problem develops when the practices move beyond possibilities a student may decide to incorporate into a performance and become standardized expectations of coaches-competitors-judges”

(Cronn-Mills, 3). A problem has developed, based on my observations –in the persuasive platform speech. Our community has reached a point where the problem, cause, solution pattern, or the similar cause, effect, solution pattern, is a standardized expectation in delivering the persuasive speech.

Hopefully at this conference we can make progress that moves away from the narrow box of expectations and norms that holds us solely to the problem, cause, solution paradigm in persuasive speeches.

Aristotle, perhaps, could help us reach that point. He defines Rhetoric, as I teach all of my students, as “The art of discovering all available means of persuasion.” It would behoove us to link Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric to an appropriate definition of critical thinking as we address the ubiquitous question: What are we trying to teach?

This author suggests that a critical goal of forensics pedagogy and education is teaching our students critical thinking. For my team I define critical thinking in public speaking as being able to recognize the unique context of each communication situation and recognize and act on the situation in a way that best communicates with each given audience. Or, in my own parlance, I want my students to be able to walk into any situation and be able to communicate effectively and efficiently, regardless of context or audience. This, by its very definition, excludes canned speeches and rote, formulaic arrangement – i.e., using Problem, Cause, Solution for *every* persuasive speaking situation. By revisiting “discovering all available means of persuasion” one can see that Aristotle practically defined critical thinking in public speaking.

### Arrangement in History

Arrangement is defined by Bizzell and Herzberg as “ordering the parts of a discourse according to the rhetor’s audience and purpose” and is discussed in *Rhetoric*, Book III, Chapter 13. Aristotle summarizes arrangement:

A speech has two parts. You must state your case, and you must prove it. [...] Again, introduction, comparison of conflicting arguments, and recapitulation are only found in political speeches when there is a struggle between two policies. They may occur then; so may even accusation and defense, often enough; but they form no essential part of a political speech. Even forensic speeches do not always need epilogues; not, for instance, a short speech, nor one in which the facts are easy to remember, the effect of an epilogue being always a reduction in the apparent length. It follows, then, that the only necessary parts of a speech are the Statement and the Argument. These are the essential features of a speech; and it cannot in any case have

more than Introduction, Statement, Argument, and Epilogue.

In essence, he says there is no set formula. One can imagine Aristotle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a forensics educator talking about persuasive speaking, “The Problem, Cause, Solution pattern may occur then, but they form no essential part of a persuasive speech. Even persuasive speeches do not always need a cause section; not for instance, an obvious social ill, in which the cause is self-explanatory.

He also mentions in Chapter 5, “It is a general rule that a written composition should be easy to read and therefore easy to deliver.”

In sum, we have two very simple paradigms for arrangement 1.) It need only contain a Statement (which can be taken to mean a thesis) and an Argument. And 2.) It should be easy to understand.

From the beginning of our rhetorical tradition, then, each speech has been dependent on context. To Aristotle, beyond the Statement and Argument, anything else is superfluous and is to be added only when needed, whether it is a narrative or even a conclusion.

With a foundation understood now we move to the seminal work on Rhetoric in English, Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetorique*. Wilson refers to Arrangement ad “deuision,” or division. He writes eloquently on how to divide a sermon when persuasion is necessarily a part of it. That is, when your audience and you are at odds. He says:

Haue a deuision to be made, of, or aboue three partes at the moste, nor yet lesse then three neither, if neede so require. For if we haue three chiefe groundes, wherevpon to rest, applying all our arguments therevnto, we shall both haue matter enough to speake of, the hearers shall with ease vnderstande our meaning, and the whole Oration shall some bee at an ende. Notwithstanding, this lesson must not so curiously bee kept, as though it were sinne to make the deuision of fower, or fiue partes: but it was spoken for this end, that the deuision should be made of as fewe as may be possible, that men may the better carie it away, and the reporter with more ease, may remember what he hath to saie. (Bizzel, 507)

Interestingly, he echoes Aristotle, in summarizing that in terms of number of parts of a speech there should be no more than three, but the use of four or five main points should not be thought of us a sin. Generally, Wilson recommends not following a hard and fast rule, rather, using the minimum number of points to be clear. On clarity, in his own words, he says: “laie them out to be knowen: that the hearers may plainly see, what wee will say, and perceiue at a worde the substaunce of our meaning.”

Of course, after Aristotle, Wilson’s primary influence was Cicero, who we will address next. In *Rhetorica Ad Herenium*, Book III, which in Wilson’s day was attributed to Cicero, he evidently guided Wilson’s thinking on Arrangement:

But there is also another Arrangement, which, when we must depart from the order imposed by the rules of the art, is accommodated to circumstance in accordance with the speaker’s judgment; for example, if we should begin our speech with the Statement of Facts, or with some very strong argument, or the reading of some documents; or if straightway after the Introduction we should use the Proof and then the Statement of Facts; or if we should make some other change of this kind in the order. [...] It is often necessary to employ such changes and transpositions when the cause itself obliges us to modify with art the Arrangement prescribed by the rules of the art.

Without sounding like a broken record, which is difficult, Cicero here is saying the same thing. It is often necessary to change the typical speech structure to suit a particular topic or context, based on the “speaker’s judgment” or critical thinking analysis, of a given situation.

Finally, on creativity, and to answer the question asked above: if the current formula is winning, what is wrong with the status quo? By taking a closer look at Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s work *Poetria Nova*. Before analyzing his works, one may ask why reference poetry? As Bizzel and Herzberg write:

Calling treatises like Geoffrey’s “arts of poetry” is somewhat misleading, for these works usually also discuss prose that uses figures or rhythmic patterns. Poetry and Prose were not as sharply distinguished in the Middle Ages as they were today; both were intended to persuade, and the important distinction was whether the persuasion was to be undertaken orally or in writing.

Geoffrey does recognize, as does Cicero, that there is an acceptable pattern, generally, for arranging a speech. However, like Cicero, who recommends the speaker using their own judgment to make changes to the standard style, Geoffrey suggests using art. First, he delineates two forms of arrangement, alluding to the standard norm, and the artistic role in arrangement, “Arrangement’s road is forked: on the one hand, it may labor up the footpath of art; on the other, it may follow nature’s main street.” However, he prefers one to the other. “Skillful art so inverts the material that it does no pervert it; art transposes, in order that it may make the arrangement of the material better. More sophisticated than natural order is artistic order, and far preferable, however much permuted the arrangement be.”

Geoffrey trusted his students, evidently, enough to follow their own creativity down a path that he believed would make their poetry, their spoken persuasion, and their letter writing (as *Poetria Nova* addresses all of these) better than

following a standard form per Quintilian's recommendations. Can we, as forensics educators, trust our students to use their creativity in platform speeches? As Geoffrey says, "The mass of the subject matter, like a lump of wax, is at first resistant to handling; but if diligent application kindles the intellect, suddenly the material softens under this fire of the intellect and follows your hand wherever it leads, docile to anything." Can we let our students' intellect kindle the persuasive speech, rather than teaching rote formulaic – sometimes freed to as robotic – speech giving?

### Discussion

This paper has suggested, and here will delineate, clear goals for the persuasive speech in Individual Events competition. We as forensics educators should be teaching Rhetoric. That is, Aristotle's definition of Rhetoric, the art of discovering all available means of persuasion. By teaching the theory and praxis of Aristotle's definition of rhetoric we in turn teach critical thinking, as each student takes it upon themselves to discover the means of persuasion in each communication context they encounter. It is my hope that, as a community, our students will be able to encounter any communication context and succeed in effectiveness of communication. It is my fear that our student's focus on the Problem, Cause, Solution pattern for persuasive speaking is moving our students away from that goal.

Further, it is the opinion of this author that a lack of creativity and variety on the competitive forensics circuit in the persuasive speaking event is a barrier to reaching our community's pedagogical goals. Above a brief historical examination of the Canon of Arrangement found that, in each case, from Aristotle to Wilson, from Geoffrey of Vinsauf to Cicero, the final arrangement focused on three things: 1.) The arrangement should be simple enough for an audience to easily absorb it, 2.) The focus of arrangement should be on the arguments themselves, not a particular appropriate pattern of organization, and 3.) Most importantly, that each context requires the judgment – and when appropriate the artistic creativity of – the student/rhetor to arrange each speech in such a way that suits both the topic at hand, the context, and the audience being addressed.

One hypothesis, beyond the obvious, of why this author sees incongruity between our goals and the praxis of our students is that in order for, as Cicero says, for our students to use their "judgment" on what arrangement is ideal our contexts must be unique. However, on the forensics circuit each context is virtually the same. We have monotony, or one could say homogeneity, in our tournaments. Each round is performed in front of 5 other college students and between 1 and 3 adjudicators – who are most likely to be college professors with expertise in theatre, rhetoric, communication, et. Al. Thus, this author sees a catch 22 inherent in the system. What reason does a student have for changing their arrangement from the expected standard when the context and audience is perpetually the same? The problem, cause, solution pattern works most of the time for most of the judges – who most of the time are homogenous.

Beyond this catch-22 we must ask, what can we do to encourage creativity in Persuasive speaking, in platform speaking, and across the activity in all 11 or 12 events. What can we do to reach the ideal, as Thomas Wilson puts it, "For every matter hath a diuers beginning, neither al controuersies or matters of weight, should alwaies after one sort be rehearsed, nor like reasons vsed, nor one kinde of mouing affections, occupied before all men, in every matter."

### Solutions

This author is not so wise as to suggest a silver bullet for fixing the stagnation of creativity in the Canon of Arrangement in persuasive speaking. However, as a community of educators we could focus our teaching on how to develop and defend a thesis statement. By teaching this to novice competitors as a foundation for forensics competition and education the student will better be able to match an appropriate organizational pattern to their subject – rather than simply adapting their subject to an organizational pattern.

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