



POLI 4911: Politics and Rhetoric (Winter 2026)

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Introduction:

We are constantly bombarded with different kinds of rhetoric. Whether in advertising, fundraising appeals, sports commentary, or from armchair “experts” on YouTube, it is difficult to escape exaggerated descriptions and questionable claims leading to dubious conclusions of all kinds.

Nonetheless, we may associate rhetoric above all with the political realm. Political leaders and those vying for support are expected to pack their speeches with effective rhetoric. Indeed, some of the most famous political speeches of all time are chock full of phrases intended to rouse their target audiences. In this class, we will consider both famous (or infamous) and not as well-known uses of political rhetoric in order to determine and assess their meaning and efficacy. Rhetoric is a tool that can be used for good or bad purposes but might be considered a necessary element of democratic politics and effective political leadership. Therefore, we will also work at understanding the importance of rhetoric and what is involved in unlocking its power in the service of our most cherished purposes.

Required Text (other readings/viewing/listening links will be provided):

Bartlett, Robert C. trans. (2019) ***Aristotle's Art of Rhetoric*** University of Chicago Press

It may be purchased through the bookstore for \$28.50 or here (PDF or paper: approx. \$28.00; cloth: approx. \$60.00): <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/A/bo32427200.html>

Class Methods and Requirements:

While I will occasionally offer a short lecture to introduce some assigned texts or themes, most of our class meetings will consist of discussion of assigned readings/viewing/listening led by students. Each of you will have at least one opportunity to introduce questions for the whole class to consider based on one or more of the readings/viewing/listening. In addition, as the term progresses, you will be working toward an opportunity to present your own rhetorical skills in a short speech in one of the final classes.

Seminar Participation: 40%; each class meeting, you will be expected to participate in our group discussion of the texts and speeches under consideration.

Midterm Assignment (Speech Analysis): 20%; using the materials we read and discuss each class, offer your own analysis of one of three important speeches. More information will be offered and discussed in class.

Prepared Speech (presentation and text): 40%; you will have an opportunity to develop and present your own speech on a political topic of importance to you. More information will be offered and discussed in class.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Develop a sense of the importance of rhetoric and rhetorical analysis.
2. Expand your ability to identify important elements involved in crafting and presenting speeches.
3. Strengthen your ability to assess the motives, arguments, and language used in political speeches.
4. Display an ability to engage and persuade an audience.

Topics and Readings/Viewing/Listening

(I may be making additions/changes to this as we proceed and will offer sufficient notice)

January 6th: Introduction to the class and its requirements and to rhetoric and its political uses.

Discussion of resources and themes. No assigned reading.

January 13th: What is rhetoric and what is it for? Ancient and modern examples.

1. Aristotle ***Art of Rhetoric (AR)*** Book One, Chs. 1-9 (pp. 5-46 in Bartlett edition)
2. Thucydides ***History of the Peloponnesian War***: Pericles' "Funeral Oration" (430 BCE):
<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/education/thucydides.html>
3. Ronald Reagan "Space Shuttle Challenger Tragedy" Address (1986):
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganchallenger.htm>
4. Joe Biden: Address upon dropping out of the 2024 campaign for U.S. presidency (2024):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z96N57eV1EA&ab_channel=ABCNews

January 20th: Kinds of rhetoric

Aristotle ***AR***: Book One, Chs. 10-15 (pp. 46-71 in Bartlett edition)

Thucydides ***History of the Peloponnesian War***: Mytilenean debate (Cleon; Diodotus)
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/imperialism/readings/thucydides6.html>

Lou Gehrig: "Farewell Address"

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/moviespeechprideoftheyankees.html>

Philadelphia: opening statement at trial (Denzel Washington)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCz33bRYwP8&ab_channel=MelioraLegalCenter

January 27th: Passion, Character, and Argument

Aristotle ***AR***: Book Two, Chs. 1-17 (pp. 76-116 in Bartlett edition)

Shakespeare ***Henry V*** "St. Crispin's Day":

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/moviespeechhenryV.html>

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy: "Speech to U.S. Congress"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gjwlCe5T6M>

Harvard Commencement Address: Donovan Livingston
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGb8ZfZlIE&ab_channel=ABCNews

February 3rd: Elements of Persuasion

Aristotle **AR**: Book Two, Chs. 18-26 (pp. 116-153 in Bartlett edition)

Barack Obama: “Father’s Day Speech”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj1hCDjwG6M>

Armageddon: “President’s Speech”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zje91xTd6Lc>

Signs (miracles or coincidences?): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dDI7O48Or8>

*****February 10th**: Midterm assignment (no other readings/viewing; no class meeting)***

February 24th: Diction

Aristotle **AR**: Book Three, Chs. 1-12 (pp. 157-191 in Bartlett edition)

Martin Luther King (1967): “Your Life’s Blueprint”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmtOGXreTOU>

Scent of a Woman “Out of Order” speech:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILvXyVUHqwQ>

Winston Churchill (1941): “Address to Canadian Parliament (some chicken; some neck)”

<https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/some-chicken-some-neck.html>

March 3rd: Arranging the Parts of a Speech

Aristotle **AR**: Book Three, Chs. 13-19 (pp. 191-210 in Bartlett edition)

Martin Luther King (1963): “I Have a Dream”

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>
and selections with video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s>

Abraham Lincoln: “Lyceum Address” (1838)
<https://www.abrahmlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm>

March 10th: Particular Purposes

Abraham Lincoln: “Temperance Address” (1842)
<https://www.abrahmlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/temperance.htm>

Abraham Lincoln: “House Divided Speech” (1858)
<https://www.abrahmlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/house.htm>

Barbara Jordan (1976): “Keynote Address to the Democratic National Convention”
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarajordan1976dnc.html>

Agnes Macphail (1925; 1930): “On Women’s Equality”
<https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2017/10/27/agnes-macphail-on-womens-equality-1925-1930/>

March 17th: On the Cusp of War (student speeches as well)

Patton (1970): “General Patton addresses the 3rd army”
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/moviespeechpatton3rdarmyaddress.html>

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1941): “Pearl Harbour Address”
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrpearlharbor.htm>

Winston Churchill (1939): “A Hush Over Europe”
<https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/a-hush-over-europe.html>

Braveheart (1995): William Wallace speech
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/specialengagements/moviespeechbraveheart.html>

Winston Churchill (1940): “We Shall Fight on the Beaches...”
<https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/we-shall-fight-on-the-beaches.html>

March 24th: During and After War (student speeches as well)

Winston Churchill (1941): “Never Give In”

<https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/never-give-in-never-never-never.html> and audio:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk0jw_ss-Kg&ab_channel=WinstonChurchill-Topic

Abraham Lincoln (1963): “Gettysburg Address”

<https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

Abraham Lincoln (1965): “Second Inaugural Address”

<https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/inaug2.htm>

Frederick Douglass (1876): “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln”

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/oration-in-memory-of-abraham-lincoln/>

March 31st: Selected Canadian Speeches (student speeches as well)

Joseph Howe (1835): “On Freedom of the Press”

<https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2021/05/21/joseph-howe-on-press-freedom-1835/>

Louis Riel (1885): “Speech to the Jury”

<https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2019/11/16/louis-riel-speech-to-the-jury-1885/>

Joseph Gosnell (1998): “Nisga’a Treaty”

<https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2020/08/10/joseph-gosnell-1998-nisgaa-treaty/>

Stephen Harper (2008): “Residential Schools Apology”

<https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2021/02/05/stephen-harper-residential-schools-apology-2008/>

Academic Honesty:

Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. It should go without saying that cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead’s policies in this area. Although all these policies will be enforced in full, it is worth emphasizing the following:

PLAGIARISM INVOLVES PRESENTING ANOTHER'S (including AI) WORK, IDEAS, THEORIES, OR INTERPRETATION AS ONE'S OWN.

To avoid plagiarism, always:

- 1) Put quotation marks around any words taken from sources.
- 2) Paraphrase material completely; do not simply rearrange words from a source or change them using a thesaurus, etc.
- 3) Whether it is being quoted or paraphrased in your work, always give accurate and complete citations for all material that comes from another source.
- 4) Avoid borrowing entire arguments or ideas from another writer. Your arguments should be original to you.