# **Speaking to Convince:** Audience, Purpose, and the Modes of Rhetoric

Malala Yousafzai and Emma Watson have both delivered speeches that have gathered wide acclaim. They have had quite different lives. Yousafzai is this year’s winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, having stood up against the Taliban to fight for girls’ right to go to school. Watson is an actress who became famous for her role as Hermione in the Harry Potter films. The former almost died when the Taliban shot her on her way to school, the latter has become a celebrated actress more used to photo shoots than shots from a gun. Despite their differences, they share a conviction about the importance of girls’ and women’s rights and they both had a chance to speak to the United Nations about their concerns. Yousafzai spoke to the United Nations General Assembly on July 12, 2013 and Watson spoke at the United Nations Headquarters on September 20, 2014.

The speeches have received acclaim not just for the content of the speeches, but also for the structure and language. The speakers clearly knew their audience and tailored their speeches in a way that communicated with their immediate audience (the people in the room), but also to the wider audience who have watched the speeches on TV and online. Moreover, Yousafzai’s and Watson’s speeches gained wide acclaim because they made clever use of a wide range of rhetorical devices that communicated their message to their audience in an effective way.

## Audience and Purpose

“You’re preaching to the choir.” If someone tells you this, you may be doing something wrong. The phrase is a common American saying that describes a situation where you are trying to convince people who already agree with you. A preacher who tries to convert the choir members should probably try to find another audience. After all, it is very likely that they are in the choir because they already are persuaded about the preacher’s message. Similarly, when you speak to persuade someone about something you care about, you have to make sure that you take both the audience and your purpose into account.

***Audience: To whom are you talking?***

When trying to convince or persuade people, you have to take into consideration who the people in the audience are and their relationship to you. Things you should consider include:

* relationship to you (friend, foe, family?)
* age (older, younger, same?)
* gender (male, female, other?)
* educational level (low, middle, or high?)
* political views (same as yours or different?)
* and more!

***Purpose: What do you want to convince them about?***

We can divide the purpose of convincing speeches and texts into two main groups:

1. The purpose is to influence ideas and values.
   * Do you want the people in your audience to change their minds?
   * Do you want to create new values and beliefs?
   * Do you want to reinforce the beliefs of the people in the audience?
2. The purpose is to influence behavior.
   * Do something new.
   * Do something different.
   * Return to old practice.
   * Stop doing something.

## The Modes of Rhetoric

Depending on who the people in your audience are and what your purpose is, you need you adjust your rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of argumentation and discourse. It is not just about what you say, but how you say it. Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE) is by many believed to be the father of the art of rhetoric. Aristotle pointed out three modes of rhetoric: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos.

**Ethos**: Establish the credibility of the speaker

* Use personal experience
* Draw on professional authority
* Use educational background
* Create common ground with audience

**Pathos**: Create emotional connection with the audience

* Speak with conviction
* Vary the tone of your voice
* Use vivid language
* Tell a story
* Use analogies and metaphors
* Show pictures
* Use humor

**Logos**: Use structure and logical argumentation

* Start with a statement and support it
* Start with a question and answer it
* Use definitions (the nature of what you talk about)
* Cause and consequences
* Contrasts
* Repetition (e.g. parallel structure, rule of three)

## Task:

Choose either Emma Watson’s or Malala Yousafzai’s speech. Watch the speech and discuss how the young woman use ethos, pathos, and logos and how she targets her speech to the audience.

* How does she establish her credibility?
* How does she draw on emotions?
* How does she build the logic of her argument?

Make use of the transcript provided to refer to the speech.

**Watch Watson’s speech here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0Dg226G2Z8&feature=youtu.be>

**Watch Yousafzai’s speech here:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0Dg226G2Z8&feature=youtu.be>