

A* Essay exemplar analysing Obama's speech – bullet points and questions only

Introduction: 3-5 sentences

Who is the audience of Obama's speech, and what is its purpose? Therefore, in what context does he deliver this speech? How much control does Obama have when adjusting his spoken language?

- Aimed to persuade people to vote for him.
- Obama Initially an underdog
- Aimed to connect with audience while still remaining authoritative
- Controls figurative message through use of spoken language techniques

Analysis: 5 paragraphs, each at least 5 sentences

You need to pick out points thematically. That is, you need not progress chronologically through the speech (although it might be useful for some.) Also, you should avoid merely analysing a different technique in each paragraph. Yes, you must analyse different techniques particular to spoken language – this is always rooted in the context of the language, though. What I mean by 'rooted in the context' is that the technique must specifically be applied to what is being said. Therefore, repetition doesn't just emphasise what is being said – the repetition of 'yes we can' creates a positive anthem that sustains the examples of how negative situations have been overcome, for example.

1) Extract begins with how Obama takes the audience into his confidence (although this was not the beginning of the speech) – refers to personal pronoun "we know" and audience interaction.

- Obama infers how party are underdogs
- Why use militaristic language?
- eye contact (and pause) with audience on "we know"
- Who is the 'we' in this phrase?
- Wants to align audience with him

2) Continuing Obama's appeal to be highly personal with audience, he makes a reference to slavery (perhaps to pre-empt potential negative reactions to his colour?) – refers to figurative language and paralinguistic feature of hand gesture.

- Obama would be first black president
- hand gesture is most pronounced of speech during 'the darkest of nights'
- wants colour to be perceived as a positive thing
- how might a reference to slavery (something that embarrasses America) be normally perceived by a politician?
- What effect would it have on audience should he confidently handle a controversial issue?

3) *Gaining the audience's trust allows him to use the term 'false hope' to pre-empt criticisms against him – refers to abstract noun and use of pause.*

- Obama tries to gain audience's trust with term 'false hope.'
- Employs fantastical imagery – will audience automatically accept this imagery?
- Obama pauses after false hope.
- Is this pause implying that his message is too ambitious? Is it significant that he is suggesting this?
- Contrast connective resolves tension of pause
- Hopes people will side with him emotionally (having faith in him) against rational criticisms

4) *Links the bond between the audience and the workers of America to points of civil changes in America's past that were only positive with hindsight.*

- Obama gains trust by referring to points of civil change.
- Were these points of civil change always positive?
- Tone is emphatic and repetitive in giving examples
- Refers to 'workers who were organised' and ends on 'a king who took us the mountaintop(.)and pointed the way to the promised land.'
- Religious language and Martin Luther King reference
- Is Obama being deliberately abstract? How might the audience feel if they detect/infer his message?
- Is this a risky strategy?
- Audience have already applauded more tangible references earlier. Does this make them more receptive to abstract messages?

5) *Links this rebellion against opponents with the call to the manual workers of America evident in the final section – refers to increase in pace, continued audience interaction (to bond to one another) and implicit reference to patriotic song 'God Bless America'*

- Has gained trust without attacking his critics
- Controls intonation and speeds up delivery
- Refers to how manual workers are similar
- Techniques used are: repetitive use of pronouns; figurative language with a formal dialect
- His message is both personal, yet still authoritative
- Increased pace encourages audience to applaud at end of speech

Conclusion: 3-5 sentences

What particularly makes this speech successful in achieving its purpose? What distinctively, in terms of spoken language, makes it effective?

- Purpose was to draw audience into his confidence
- He persuades them to accept some radical messages
- The default choice would have been to vote against him
- Is America's past based on opposing the status quo?
- Obama's varied reactions to audience's chanting showed how he controls them.
- Being authoritative, yet personal, perhaps won him the vote.