Missing

# Memoria: Necessary Adjunct to Impromptu Speaking

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*In the contemporary arena of intercollegiate forensics, impromptu speaking is often used as a fifth event for pentathlon or as a place to enter novices for their maiden voyage. It is often seen as an empty event where students say little or nothing. Impromptu speaking is more than a filler. It has its roots in over two thousand years of rhetorical scholarship. Rather than being seen as an "empty" event, impromptu should be linked to the classical canon of memory. Students Students should be taught to prepare for the event by using their "storehouse of knowledge" as a place from which to derive their responses to topics.*

"The truth is out there." "Trust no one." *Xphyles* recognize these statements as posters hanging on the walls of the X-Files office at the F.B.I. Six impromptu finalists recognize these statements as quotations in their final round of intercollegiate forensic competition in 1997. With each round, the impromptu speaker faces the unknown. In spite of the ambiguity of topic choice, impromptu speaking consistently remains one of the most populated events in intercollegiate forensics. Dean (1987) reports that the event drew "104 and 202 students participating in the category at the 1987 American Forensic Association and National Forensic Association's respective annual tournaments" (Dean, 1987, p. 210). The numbers have grown over the past ten years. According to the tabulation sheets from the National Forensic Association's annual tournaments, impromptu speaking continues to draw over 200 students each year.

The popularity of impromptu speaking seems not to always result in academic excellence. Coaching strategies may contribute to this perception. First, many coaches offer impromptu to their students as an extra event for pentathlon, not to be taken seriously. Next, coaches urge new students to enter the event as a maiden voyage, instructing them to attempt to talk for three minutes. After all, it is an easier entrance into forensic competition than writing a speech. "Such practices demean the integrity and educational value of impromptu speaking" (Dean, 1987, p. 210). In addition, Klopf and Lahmann (1967) warn that beginning students entering impromptu without sufficient training may cause them more harm than good. If the critics are to be taken seriously, why does the event continue to flourish? Is it nothing more than a possibility of extra sweepstakes points? Is merely a fifth

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event for pentathlon? Is it training for the student "in thinking on his feet?" Possibly all of these could be included. However, there is a much more meaningful educational experience to be drawn from the event. It is the exercise in memory. " . . . these contests offer an opportunity to impress upon the participants the virtues of a well furnished mind and the inestimable value of point of view, pattern and direction in speaking (Eubank and Cullen, 1958, p. 218).

The natural extension of the last reason is to draw the relationship between impromptu speaking and the ancient canon of memory. It is through the use of a "storehouse of knowledge" that a student derives the content of the speech. Dean (1987) states:

> Impromptu speech relies heavily on what has been dubbed the 'lost canon' of rhetoric, memoria. Defined as 'that body of theory and advice that concerns managing and controlling utterance, according to plan, when speaking occurs,' memory has been praised by Quintilian as the 'treasury of eloquence' (p. 211).

The purpose of this paper is to strengthen the existing correlation between impromptu speaking and the "lost canon" of memory by suggesting additional coaching strategies. Justification for this paper is given by Boone (1987) when she states:

> The impromptu speech, perhaps the type most often given, is also one of the most neglected in public speaking courses and textbooks. Many texts give the subject a page or two; a few omit it altogether. Research on the matter is equally limited. Recent forensic-focused impromptu research is almost nonexistent (p. 39).

In order to facilitate the establishment of this relationship, literature will be examined in three areas: memory, impromptu speaking, and pedagogical approaches to coaching impromptu speaking as an intercollegiate competitive event.

## A REVIEW OF MEMORY

Thonnsen, Baird and Braden (1970) trace the origin of memory to the incident described in <u>De Oratore</u> "which presumably prompted Simonides to 'invent' the art of memory" (p.92). According to Cicero, Simonides was a guest at a dinner party in the apartment of Scopas. He was called away from the dinner table to consult with two youths. During his absence, the apartment collapsed killing the remaining guests. When friends were called upon to identify the bodies they were unable to do so. Simonides, however, was able to recall the guest and identify each according to the seating arrangement around the table. The literature reveals that Simonides was the first to comment "that the order of places would preserve the order of things, and the symbols of the things, would denote the things themselves; so that we should use the place as waxen tablets, and the symbols as letters" (p. 92).

Though Simonides was credited with originating the faculty of memory as an important practice, the "father of memory" is generally considered to be Hippias of Elis who lived in the 5th Century, BC (Hargis, 1951). While Simonides restricted his discourse on memory to mnemonics, Hippias extended the concept to include "knowing all things." This goes beyond the waxen tablets idea to give a more inclusive application to the idea of memory. Not only should the orator have the faculty to memorize and recite, he should also have the ability to call upon a wide range of information that has been stored in his memory. Hippias, being a Sophist, not only developed this extended view of memory, but also became its prime promoter. As Bromley Smith indicates, Hippias was "the man who first considered the training of memory an essential discipline in the education of the orator" (Smith, 1926, p. 138).

Plato and Aristotle concentrated their discussion of memory on a more broad perspective – a storehouse of knowledge – rather than isolating it to mnemonics. Plato considered it a valuable asset in the search for truth in speech. If one were to ascertain the truth, it must be the function of memory to store it. Aristotle makes no direct mention of memory in his Rhetoric. However, inferences from Aristotle may conclude that because one must store such vast amounts of knowledge, in time they will have to recall it and use the faculty of memory. Between the time of Aristotle and the origins of the Christian era, Smith indicates that memory must have been incorporated into a scheme of rhetoric, because the Auctor ad Herrenium regards it as one of the parts of oratory. (Smith, first introduced in this work as the treasure-house of ideas. "Now let me turn to the treasure-house of ideas supplied by Invention, to the guardian of all parts of rhetoric, the Memory" (Smith, 1926, p.138). The author of the Ad Herrenium supported Hippias's notion of two types of memory, calling them the "natural" and the "product of art." The natural is the treasure-house of ideas and the artificial is comprised of waxed tablets. Although the idea of general memory is maintained, the Ad Herrenium concentrates its discussion of memory on the artificial. (Hoogestraat, 1960). "A few years later Cicero, in his Oratorical Partitions calls memory the guardian of invention, arrangement, voice and delivery. His opinion of its place was not changed when he published his fifty-second year at the request of his brother Quintus the De Oratore" (Smith, 1926, p. 138). Cicero's work, De Oratore, gives the first complete examination of Memory as part of the five-fold division. Cicero also included mnemonics and memorization. It is in this work that memory was fully integrated into rhetoric as one of the five elements.

Quintilian's coverage of memory in the Institutes of Oratory consists of an extensive examination of the canon. For the most part, Quintilian restricts his approach to association.

He asked potential speakers to familiarize themselves with a series of visual images, such as a room of a house and fur-

niture in each room. They should associate part of what they have written or planned with each chair, statute, or the like in a room. Then when they speak, they can imagine they are going into the vestibule of a house so as to be reminded of words or thoughts associated with it (Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, 1976, p. 40).

Though Quintilian dealt extensively with the memorization of speeches, he too, considered memory to be the storehouse of ideas and knowledge.

Of the extant writings on the subject, memory is relatively neglected until 794 AD, when Alcuin reiterates Cicero's ideas. In a dialogue between Charlemagne and Alcuin the following can be observed:

Charlemagne: What now, are you to say about memory, which I deem to be the noble part of rhetoric?

Alcuin: What indeed unless I repeat the words of Marcus Tullius that memory is the storehouse of all our experiences, and if it cannot be used to hold our subject, our very words, then we know that even the most eminent of the speaker's other talents will come to nothing. (Hoogestraat, 1960, p. 244)

Continuing the tradition of the ancients, Thomas Wilson's <u>Arte of Rhetorique</u> (1560) represents an English reiteration of previous works. Basically, the canon of memory was ignored by the 18th and 19th Century English rhetoricians. Blair's <u>Belle Lettres</u> or Whatley's <u>Elements of Rhetoric</u> failed to include any section on memory as it applies to the speaker. After two thousand years, memory as taught by Hippias, had vanished from the art of public speaking. Today memory is dealt with mainly as a cognitive process within the science of psychology. It seems important to note that within the field of rhetoric, memory has been placed on a continuum from storehouse of ideas to mnemonics. What filters down to the contemporary rhetorician is best described by Hargis (1951) when he more contemporarily defines the canon of memory.

General memory, the storing up of knowledge through reading and study, the formal memory, the development of mnemonic devices for retaining words and materials for a speech or for speeches, appear and disappear in rhetorical history, alone and paired together. General memory bears a relationship to invention, by holding in the mind the 'available means of persuasion' once they are found; while formal memory relates to the exact retention of words, phrases, arrangements, and the like (p. 114).

After a review of the literature on the canon of memory, several salient considerations emerge (Hargis, 1951, pp. 114-117).

• The concepts of general and formal memory flourished through the classical period in both Greece and Rome but

waned in the teachings and writings of 18th and 19th Century rhetoricians.

• Memory is considered by many to be the "lost canon of rhetoric." However, it has extensive merit for both theoretical and practical applications within contemporary public speaking.

• As style gained prominence among orators, the idea of memory collapsed from one of its original conceptions as the storehouse of knowledge to a tool for delivering speeches without the use of notes.

Memoria, as a storehouse of knowledge, gave way to memorization. Memoria as memorization is present throughout the intercollegiate forensics world. Memoria as a storehouse of knowledge is found less frequently, primarily in impromptu speaking.

## A REVIEW OF IMPROMPTU SPEAKING

Impromptu speaking is has an array of definitions. "One source defines impromptu speaking as a speech which requires 'no formal preparation; spur-of-the-moment communication' (Dean, 1987, p.211). Klopf and Lahman in <u>Coaching and Directing Forensics</u> (1976) describe impromptu speaking as an event that occurs without preparation. They indicate that there are two types of impromptu contests. The most common type consists of announcing the subject before the contest begins. This allows the contestant time to prepare. In the more radical and less popular, according to Klopf and Lahman (1976), the contestant draws an editorial or newspaper story and reads it aloud and begins to speak. The description of this event does not meet with the experiential frames of most coaches and students participating in intercollegiate forensics today. Forensics competition has changed over the last fifteen years. A major change is that the rules for the events have become more standardized across the nation reflecting the format used by the National Forensic Association (NFA):

> IMPROMPTU SPEAKING: Contestants will receive short excerpts on general interest, political, economic and social issues and will have 7 minutes to divide between preparation and speaking. Speech should be at least 3 minutes. This is not mini-extemp. To remove the topic as a variable decision factor, all contestants in the same section will speak on the same topic (Boone, 1987, p. 41.).

Eubank and Owens (1958) suggest that

> Under the proper pedagogy, the student who enters the impromptu or extemporaneous speaking contests is likely to assume that he is about to learn how to speak without having something to say. The impromptu speaker is aware that he must draw from his storehouse of knowledge, have a strong motive to enrich the store and to fix to the mind

useful patterns into which to cast his material. He has to control alarm and panic and other extraneous emotions, keep his mental composure and set his memory to the task of recalling quickly the appropriate materials. He will learn how invaluable a broad background of reading and experience can be to the speaker (pp.218-219).

Without proper guidance, the impromptu speaker may view his/her speaking event as a negative experience that should not be repeated again. Rather than draw students to the event, we may be sending them into a situation that serves no positive purpose.

To provide a positive speaking situation for our students, it becomes necessary that we guide them to the rhetorical roots of the event. It should not take long for them to make the connection between the intercollegiate event of impromptu speaking and the ancient canon of memory. Once the connection is made, two things may occur: the student may accept the importance of the impromptu speaking situation, and they may realize that preparation is possible for the event.

In order to aid students in making the connection between memoria and impromptu speaking, an examination of the juxtaposition of the two may prove helpful. The relationship between the canon of memory and extempore speaking was posited by Quintilian in the Institutes of Oratory.

> The ability of speaking extempore seems to me to depend on no other faculty of the mind than this; for, while we are uttering one thought, we have to consider what we are to say next; and this, while the mind is constantly looking forward beyond its immediate object, whatever it finds in the meantime it deposits in the keeping as it were of the the memory, which, receiving it from the conception, transmits it, as an instrument of intercommunication, to the delivery (Reynolds & Fay 1987, p.86).

Basically, what Quintilian posits can be extended to include impromptu speaking because in essence the cognitive process of eliciting ideas from the "storehouse" is the same. What Quintilian suggests is that the ideas must be positioned in the memory in order to be brought forth. This justifies the idea presented by Eubank and Owens when they suggested that the impromptu speaker be well read in order to speak with substance on a variety of topics.

Further evidence for the faculty of memory is offered by Richard Weaver. According to Clark T. Irwin, Jr., (1973) in his article entitled "Rhetoric Remembers: Richard Weaver on Memory and Culture":

> Memory is the precondition because it stores past experience; history is a present recall of past thought about that experience. History involves valuations, the rhetor retrieves from memory thoughts about those historical incidents of

war, diplomacy, or personal life whose valuations have become relevant for rhetorical appeal. These fragments of value-laden past experience must appear or lie implicit in, even the most avowedly logical appeal (pp. 22-23).

Reynolds & Fay (1987) summarize Weaver's idea of memory that

. . . suggests that the mind will store experiences about events as well as facts from sources other than personal recall. This allows the student in impromptu a wider range of experiences to "tap" for his speech content. Not only does this broaden the speaker's reign of possible strategies, but serves to legitimate the "personal experience" appeals from the speaker as well (p.86 ).

Hargis (1951) sums up the connection between and the importance of memoria and impromptu speaking when he writes:

With contemporary usage of impromptu speaking as a forensic event, general memory should be given special consideration by the teachers of public speaking. If impromptu is to gain stature among public speaking situations, and if memory is to regain its place among the canons, teachers of speech must urge their students to approach the Ciceronian ideal that the public speaking must be the learned of all men (p.115).

Not only is the impromptu speaker encouraged to be a well-read individual but also to develop their ability to employ the classical canon of memory. For it is through this relationship that impromptu speaking may shed its reputation as a "filler" event and gain its full stature as an educational activity.

## A REVIEW OF COACHING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROMPTU SPEAKING

As has been stated previously in this paper, memory is comprised of the speaker's knowledge and experiences. The speaker must learn to draw upon those experiences as proof within the impromptu speech. Many student speakers lack the trust in themselves necessary to draw on their knowledge and strategically place it within a speech. The ambiguity of the speaking situation adds to their apprehension. One way to aid the student speaker is to help them to distinguish between extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking. Many students are intimidated by impromptu because they believe it is mini-extemporaneous speaking. They choose to stay away from the event because they "don't know a lot about current events." Preston (1992) states that impromptu speaking and extemporaneous speaking lack distinction.

Of the different event genres, only the limited preparation events have not been distinguished by their treatment of content. Textbooks often use these two terms interchangeably, and forensics research . . . has suggested that judging

feedback encourages students to pursue the same goals when participating in either event (p.19-20).

One major distinction offered by Preston (1992) is the literal vs. metaphorical analysis of the topic. ". . .while the extemporaneous speaker should seek to answer literally a significant question about current events, the impromptu speaker should strive for an insightful, metaphorical analysis" (p.20). Once the student speaker understands the distinction, a series of coaching strategies may be implemented that enhance metaphorical analysis of topics. Boone (1987) suggests the use of topoi as a starting place for the development of topic analysis once the metaphor has been identified. Reynolds & Fay (1987) support the metaphorical analysis of impromptu topics by offering exercises to be used during coaching sessions. They suggest preparing the student "by giving him/her a number of metaphors and having them translate them" (p.89).

A second area of preparation is to help the student understand the differences between time limits for extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking. The contestant generally has thirty minutes preparation time for extemporaneous speaking. Dean (1987) notes that impromptu speaking is different when he writes, "most college forensics tournaments designate a maximum time limit of seven minutes for the event" (p.212). In some cases, some tournaments specify a minimum length for the speech. Others leave the preparation/speaking time open. Removing the fear of time constraints may aid the student to reduce the frustration or panic levels that often exist. Dean (1987) suggests oral rehearsal as a major approach to increasing speaking time. "The more comfortable the student becomes with the event before the tournament, the greater the likelihood of success (p. 212). In addition, Dean (1987) suggests that coaches encourage students to expand illustrations and discourage them from writing extensively during preparation time (p.212).

In addition to reducing ambiguity, coaching strategies should provide practice in recall of information. Dean (1987) offers strategies for recall.

> One successful exercise to develop quick recall is to have students make four columns on a sheet of paper and give each a heading that represents an area in which the student feels well versed. . . The student has one minute to brainstorm and write down anything that comes to mind under the four given categories. After the brainstorming is complete, the student is given a quotation and asked to use at least one example from each of the four categories to illustrate the point the quotation is trying to make. (p. 217).

The teaching and coaching strategies suggested by Reynolds & Fay (1987), Boone (1987), Dean (1987) and Preston (1992) offer the student concrete ways to prepare for a concrete approach to impromptu speaking. One area remains.

Results from a survey conducted by Harris (1986) show that effective introductions and conclusions were two of the most important judging criteria used for impromptu speaking (p.140). Within a short period of time, students must identify the meaning of a topic, identify the thesis they will develop, decide on a strategic response, choose illustrations and examples to support the these, and create an effective introduction and conclusion for the speech. Most of the coaching strategies mentioned have dealt exclusively with the development of the topic. Dean (1987) states, "Like any speech, a crative, attention-getting introduction and a memorable, thought-provoking conclusion strengthen a presentation" (p.214). Dean (1987) suggest that student should not rely on one type of introduction. He states that telling a story "often helps make the speaker more personable, establishes common ground with the audience, and may actually reduce tension on the part of the speaker as he/she begins speaking with a familiar unit of information" (p.214). Unfortunately, many judges view personal anecdotes as a last-ditch attempt to generate an introduction or a conclusion. It is often difficult for the student to search for more creative entrances into the thesis. One way that may begin to offer a remedy is to have the student establish an impromptu notebook. Students should be prompted to record quotations, scenarios, questions, and remarks they find interesting and pertinent. For example, an anecdote that was used at a recent local school board meeting caught the attention of an audience member. She recorded it in order to remember for possible use in the future.

> A man phoned a pizza restaurant to order a pizza. "Do you want six slices or eight slices," the clerk asked. "Six should be enough," replied the caller. "I don't think I'm hungry enough to eat eight pieces."

Then there was the reply made by a conservationist in Africa when commenting on why lions cross the road in front of Land Rovers. "Instead of asking why the chicken crosses the road," he stated, "why not ask instead, why do we keep building roads where chickens walk." In both instances, the anecdote or story caught the attention of a listener. By recording the information, the listener has increased his/her chances of recalling it for future use. Recording various types of information in an impromptu notebook allows the student to review the book on the way to a tournament or between rounds. Reynolds and Fay (1987) suggests that a speaker take additional quotations to the tournament. During free time or while waiting in the hallway, the speaker may attempt to identify metaphors and practices thought process drills (p.90). It is during the same time period that a speaker could review the impromptu notebook. Introductions are often difficult to generate under pressure. A review of the impromptu notebook prior to the beginning of the round may provide recent information that may be used to build an introduction that extends beyond the personal experience type. The use of an impromptu notebook incorporates the use of memoria by helping to extend the storehouse of information of the impromptu speaker.

## CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed existing literature on the classical canon of memory, impromptu speaking, and applications for coaching impromptu. The importance of the recognition of the place of memoria in the training of the impromptu speaker and the use of the memory during impromptu training are important if we are to raise the level of excellence in the event. The use of metaphorical analysis of the topic the student can distinguish his/her work from the approach used in extemporaneous speaking. In addition, through the use of drills involving topoi, thought process drills, memory practice drills, and the formation of an impromptu notebook, the impromptu speaking event moves closer to its classical rooms in memoria. All of the suggested coaching strategies mention in this article aid the speaker in reducing ambiguity and increasing more effective use of time limits. Quintilian drew the link between the importance of memory and the position of rhetoric two thousand years ago when he stated: "We should never have realized how great is the power (of a trained memory), not how divine it is, but for the fact that it is memory which has brought oratory to its present position of glory." (Lorayne and Lucas, 1975, p. 2) The wisdom of Quintilian should not be lost for us. The use of memory is still essential in public speaking. Not for memorization of prepared speeches, but in the general sense – as a "storehouse of knowledge." In addition, Preston (1992) provides the application of impromptu speaking skills to the students everyday experiences. "Students can transfer these skills (using the metaphoric approach) to situations that require a short time to gather ones thoughts, but where thoughts can come quickly when approached metaphorically" (p.26-27).

> . . .students could better come sto grips with their own assumptions, their own points of view, and their own evaluations of various phenomenon that lead to action. Such knowledge would not only enable a student to better develop means of reacting to the language and actions of others, but would enable them to evaluate introspectively how their own off-the-cuff interpretations lead to action. Thus, impromptu speaking can enable the student to become more pro-active; not only in contests, not only in class participation, but also in society (p.27-28).

Perhaps it is the impromptu speaker who can benefit most from an understanding and utilization of the canon of memory. Following such considerations impromptu speaking may usher into prominence the lost canon of memory and in turn memory may add additional credence to the intercollegiate event of impromptu speaking.

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