## Branches of Oratory: Deliberative, Epideictic, and Judicial Rhetoric

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| **Deliberative.** When you argue about **choice**, you use deliberative rhetoric, weighing one choice against the other, considering the circumstances. | **Future.** What should happen down the road? | **Rhetoric promises a payoff.** What is the most expedient or advantageous course of action? | Think about **choices** and a **payoff** in the **future**:  
- Beach, or mountains this summer?  
- Should your company replace its computers?  
- Should we invade Iraq?  
- Should we take the interstate or the back roads?  
- Should the state legislature raise taxes to fund decent schools? |
| **Epideictic/Demonstrative.** When you argue about **values**, you use epideictic rhetoric.  

The rhetoric of the present handles praise and condemnation, separating the good from the bad, distinguishing groups from other groups and individuals from each other.  

Aristotle reserved the present for describing people who meet a community’s ideals or fail to live up to them. It is the communal language of commencement addresses, funeral orations, and sermons. It celebrates heroes or condemns a common enemy. It gives people a sort of tribal identity. | **Present.** What should things be like now? | **Rhetoric tends to finish with people bonding or separating.** | Think about **meeting or abusing group values** in the **present**:  
- Should abortion be legal?  
- Is your music bad?  
- How should we remember this dead person? (eulogy is the most common example of epideictic rhetoric)?  
- How should we cite our sources (e.g. APA-style)? |
Judicial/Forensic. When you argue about past events, you use judicial rhetoric. Forensic argument helps us determine whodunit, not what-will-we-do. The purpose of forensic rhetoric is to determine guilt and give out punishment.

Past. What happened?

Rhetoric promises judgment/punishment.

Think about blame and issues of justice connected to past events:
- Who stole my bike?
- Who used all the toothpaste?
- Who didn’t close the backyard gate?

Topics: Stasis theory asks writers to investigate and try to determine:
- the facts (conjecture)
- the seriousness of the issue (quality)
- the meaning or nature of the issue (definition)
- the plan of action (policy)

Some Examples

For more examples, see Jay Heinrichs (2007) Thank You For Arguing

She: Can you turn that down a little?
He: You’re the one who set the volume last.
She: Oh, really? Then who was it blasting “Free Bird” all over the place this afternoon?
He: So that’s what this is about. You hate my music.

What does she want out of this argument? Quiet. It’s a choice issue. She wants him to choose to turn the music down. But instead of choices, the argument turns to blame, then values.

Blame: You’re the one who set the volume last.
Values: So that’s what this is about. You hate my music.

Mervin: Who used all the toothpaste?
George: That’s not the question, is it, Dad? The question is, how are we going to keep it from happening again?

Mervin is operating in the judicial mode. He’s concerned with punishment/judgment.
Georg moves the argument into the deliberative or decision-making mode.