

Organizing an Impromptu Speech

Using Unified, Dialectic, and Critical Analysis

by Robert C. Carroll

Imagine for a moment that you are judging a round of Extemporaneous Speaking. For some readers of this article, that may qualify as a stretch; for others, it is a more common occurrence. Now imagine that a well-dressed, professional young person enters the room to deliver his or her speech. He or she provides a personal reference as an attention getter, then jumps into stating the question: “How will American policy regarding Iraq change during the Obama Administration?” Rather than providing an answer, the speaker proceeds to follow up the question with a preview statement: “First, we need to examine the *Economist* magazine of November 21, 2009; second, we need to examine the *New York Times* of December 2, 2009; and finally, we need to examine the *Wall Street Journal* of October 30, 2009 to see that American policy toward Iraq will change very little.” The speaker then proceeds to move from the center of the room to stage right and talks about an article in the *Economist* for 90 seconds, discussing the information contained in that article and relating it to the question. The speaker then moves to the center of the room to repeat the process for the second source. As can be guessed, the speaker then moves to stage left to repeat the process one more time for the third source. The speaker then returns to the center of the room and reviews the speech, restates the question, and revisits the attention getter. Now imagine that the next six contestants in this round duplicate this strategy, the only difference between speeches being the sources cited in the speech, not how the speech is organized around those sources. What would you do at the end of each speech? What would you do at the end of the round? How would adjudicate the competition? Would you rank the contestants based upon who provided the best sources? Or would you rank them

based upon who related the sources better to the drawn question? Or would you want to throw your hands up and shout something to everyone within range of your voice that this is not how the event is designed? And would your remarks on your critique sheets reflect this frustration?

This is exactly the sensation I experience whenever I judge a round of Impromptu Speaking on the high school level in the Midwest, most especially Illinois. In the 1990s, when the event was first introduced on our local level, this is not how the event was conceptualized, coached, or judged. Over the past decade, however, it appears that many abuses once banished from competitive Impromptu Speaking have crept back into the event. At one time, the application of Unified Analysis to the event resulted in a generation of contestants who were able to not only extrapolate a thesis from a wide variety

of teaching real critical thinking and public speaking skills, this is a travesty of the worst order.

In this article, I reintroduce Unified Analysis to a generation of readers who may understand this tool, then introduce two alternatives to Unified Analysis that teach logical reasoning and may calm the fears of some coaches and judges that a logical reasoning approach is too much like Extemporaneous Speaking. I will introduce each approach and briefly explain its intellectual background and then apply it to the same topics I used in my original article on Unified Analysis.

Unified Analysis

Unified Analysis first arose in the early 1980s as a means to organize the analysis offered in an Extemporaneous speech toward one goal: justifying an answer to the question. The original architect

“All three methods provide a speaker with the skills necessary to extrapolate and defend a thesis from a wide variety of topics.”

of topics, but also successfully defended that thesis through the use of logic (see my article “Organizing an Impromptu Speech Using Unified Analysis” in the May 1998 *Rostrum*, volume 72, number 9). Now, the dreaded three-example Impromptu speech has returned once again, reducing the event from one that teaches contestants analytic, argumentation, and logic skills to one that is little more than a contest to see which student can produce the three “best” examples and deliver this tripe in witty and fluent manner. For those of us educators who see the relevance of this event in terms

of Unified Analysis is David N. Ross, and his seminal work “Extemporaneous Speaking: Unifying the Analysis” is justly considered one of the most important contributions to the literature of forensic education ever written: it is a must read for anyone who considers him or herself an Extemporaneous speaker, coach, or judge. In the late 1980s, several contestants and coaches began to apply Unified Analysis to Impromptu Speaking. The idea remains similar, to unify the analysis offered in the Impromptu speech toward one goal: justifying the thesis extrapolated from the

topic. If the topic was a quotation (or phrase or proverb), then the thesis was derived from an interpretation of the quotation (or phrase or proverb) and defended. If the topic was a word, then the thesis was derived from the definition for the word. In either case, the objective of the speech is to defend the thesis through the use of logic by offering reasons why the thesis is valid and then use examples to help illustrate those reasons. Examples are neither analysis of a topic, nor are arguments or reasons in and of themselves; they are a means toward the end of explaining or illustrating abstract concepts or ideas for the audience, including the judge(s), to better understand. Examples serve the same purpose in an Impromptu speech that evidence serves in an Extemporaneous speech or an Oratory: to ground the analysis in concrete, factual information. It is this application of an analytic tool devised to improve one type of limited preparation public address speech, however, to which some coaches and judges object.

The speaker thus creates a speech which follows the following outline:

Topic:

Thesis -

1. First reason validating the thesis
 - A. First example
 - B. Second example
2. Second reason validating the thesis
 - A. First example
 - B. Second example

What follows is Unified Analysis being applied to several words, proverbs, phrases, and quotations. These are the same examples used in my original article applying Unified Analysis to Impromptu Speaking.

Word: Liberty

Thesis - liberty is the freedom from control and the right to act on your own
1st Reason - because it signifies freedom for individuals it implies people are not subject to absolute restrictions from the state
2nd Reason - because it signifies responsibility for one's actions it implies people may act in their own best interests

Word: Equality

Thesis - equality is the result of all people being the same under the law
1st Reason - because it is right treatment of all citizens
2nd Reason - because it is demonstrated through due process

Word: Eggbeater

Thesis - an eggbeater is a symbol for mixing things together
1st Reason - because it is used to beat the individuality out of an ingredient
2nd Reason - because it is used to blend separate ingredients into a new whole

Word: Lamp

Thesis - a lamp is a symbol for dispelling darkness
1st Reason - because it dispels the darkness of ignorance
2nd Reason - because it dispels the darkness of apathy

Proverb: "Revenge is a dish best served cold." –Ancient Klingon proverb.

Thesis - revenge is best achieved in a cold-blooded manner
1st Reason - because revenge is not taken in the heat of the moment - it is planned
2nd Reason - because revenge is not a crime of passion - it is a crime of retribution

Proverb: "Only Nixon could go to China." –Old Vulcan proverb

Thesis - an adversary will broker the best possible deal
1st Reason - because those who support the adversary will trust him/her
2nd Reason - because those who opposed the adversary will fear him/her

Quotation: "Rational men, who believe themselves quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." –John Maynard Keynes

Thesis - paradigms completely control how we view the world
1st Reason - because we evaluate problems through paradigms
2nd Reason - because we propose solutions consistent with those paradigms

Phrase: Rose Colored Glasses

Thesis - rose colored glasses allow us to view the best of all possible worlds
1st Reason - because they are worn by optimists
2nd Reason - because they can be removed or broken by pessimists

The major criticism against the application of Unified Analysis in Impromptu Speaking is that it "makes the event too much like Extemporaneous Speaking." Some coaches and judges have thus looked for a way to make Impromptu Speaking a more distinct event. As a public address event, Impromptu Speaking teaches and requires similar skills to Oratory and Expository Speaking. As a limited preparation event, Impromptu Speaking teaches and requires similar skills to Extemporaneous Speaking. That does not mean that it teaches and requires the same skills. All four require a student who is organized, curious, determined, and focused. Oratory and Expository require additional research, writing, and memorization skills. Extemporaneous requires extensive reading on current events, skimming and summarizing skills, and quick decision making. Impromptu takes those skills one step further, requiring a student with a vast knowledge of history, politics, and literature and an excellent ability to think on his or her feet. But it still teaches and thus requires logical reasoning, not analogous reasoning. Examples must be illustrations of arguments or ideas, not main points in and of themselves to be related to the topic. As previously argued elsewhere, a reasonably smart and talented Impromptu speaker could take any three examples offered by the audience and relate them to any topic he or she drew. This abuse persists, and there must exist a way to combat it. Unified Analysis is one method to correct this abuse and return the focus of the speech to extrapolating and defending a thesis.

Dialectic Analysis

Dialectic Analysis is one of the oldest tools of philosophical inquiry known to man. It was around for centuries before being utilized by Socrates and documented by Plato in his dialogues; because of their affiliation with this approach, it is often

referred to as the Socratic Method. I refer to it as Dialectic Analysis because of its development by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). In no way is what follows a substitute for reading more on Hegel by far more accomplished scholars or reading his original works of *The Phenomenology of the Mind* or *The Science of Logic*.

The dialectic begins with the dominant ideology or the truth of the day (let us call it the alpha). But because this truth is not an absolute truth, a counter truth will inevitably arise to challenge it (the beta). The confrontation of these two opposing truths will produce a new truth (the gamma), or new accepted mode of thought which is a combination of certain aspects of both opposing ideas, which will itself persist only until another contrasting truth arises (the delta). This process continues until an absolute truth (the omega) is reached, at which point, a counter truth cannot arise and the dialectic ends. This dialectic process refers to this ongoing clash of opinions and ideas which creates the values, and orders the priorities of the societies in which they are discussed. It is like a debate round where the result is not the triumph of one of the two sides, but a melding of their arguments and positions into a new mode of thought; a new dominant ideology of the day. Please understand that this is a greatly simplified version of this process, but it suffices for the purpose of this article and to teach this concept to secondary school students. It also seems to have a great deal of intuitive validity when explained to an audience of open minded individuals.

Applied to logic, the inquiry begins with a proposition, known as the thesis. To challenge this thesis, an opposing proposition is offered, referred to as the antithesis. Through an examination of the merits of each proposition and the relative strengths and weaknesses of both, a new proposition is reached, termed the synthesis.

Applied to Impromptu Speaking, the speaker begins by extrapolating his or her thesis from the topic drawn for that speech. The speaker then explains the derivation of that thesis and illustrates it with at least one example. Second, the speaker counters with the antithesis, explains its derivation and illustrates it with at least one example. Finally, the speaker merges the two contrasting propositions into the synthesis,

explains its composition, and illustrates it with at least one example. Unlike Unified Analysis, which may have two or three reasons (or propositions) validating the initial thesis, Dialectic Analysis requires three main points, as each proposition is an independent point. And unlike Unified Analysis, where the thesis statement and the preview statement are two separate statements, in Dialectic Analysis, the thesis statement is included in the preview statement, because it is followed by the antithesis statement and the synthesis statement.

The speaker thus creates a speech that corresponds to the following outline:

Topic:

1. Thesis
A. Example
2. Antithesis
A. Example
3. Synthesis
A. Example

This process is trickier to apply to Impromptu Speaking than one might first think. In order for the speaker to present a plausible antithesis to the thesis, it is necessary to develop both simultaneously during the preparation period, then think of the resulting convergence of both ideas. Speakers who immediately craft a thesis frequently find it difficult to craft an opposition to that thesis, let alone find common ground between the two opposing ideas. When used successfully, however, it creates a speech unlike any other a judge will see in a given round, one that uses logical reasoning to analyze the topic and one that in no way, shape, or form resembles an Extemporaneous speech.

When applied to words, the initial thesis is the definition of the word; the subsequent antithesis and synthesis, however, do not need to follow from that word, but must challenge (antithesis) and consume (synthesis) that definition.

Word: Liberty

Thesis - liberty is the freedom to act in one's own best interests
Antithesis - liberty is the freedom to act in one's own self interests (often referred to as license)
Synthesis - to fully appreciate liberty, individuals must exercise it with regards to others

Word: Equality

Thesis - equality is identical treatment for all people
Antithesis - equality is the treatment people deserve (often referred to as fairness)
Synthesis - to enjoy equality, people should receive similar treatment

Word: Eggbeater

Thesis - an eggbeater is a tool for mixing things together
Antithesis - an eggbeater is a tool for destroying individuality (eggbeaters kill eggs)
Synthesis - an eggbeater blends separate ingredients into a new whole (eggbeaters don't kill eggs, cooks kill eggs)

Word: Lamp

Thesis - a lamp is a symbol for dispelling darkness
Antithesis - a lamp is a symbol for fear of the unknown (don't be afraid of the dark)
Synthesis - a lamp is a symbol for investigating the unknown; confronting ignorance with knowledge

When applied to a quotation, proverb, or phrase, the thesis is the interpretation of the quotation, proverb, or phrase. Again, the antithesis and synthesis are challenges to and consumptions of that interpretation.

Proverb: "Revenge is a dish best served cold." –Ancient Klingon proverb

Thesis - revenge is a sign of strength and power (it is a cold-blooded action)
Antithesis - revenge is a sign of weakness and insecurity (it is actually a hot-tempered reaction)
Synthesis - injustices should be addressed immediately so revenge is not required

Proverb: "Only Nixon could go to China." –Old Vulcan proverb

Thesis - an adversary will force concessions from an opponent
Antithesis - an adversary will seek to place blame rather than solve problems
Synthesis - an adversary must be open to opportunities to broker deals

Quotation: "Rational men, who believe themselves quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the

slaves of some defunct economist.” —John Maynard Keynes

Thesis - we are governed by the thoughts of our predecessors (paradigms)

Antithesis - we are free to create our own thoughts and experiences

Synthesis - if we recognize the paradigms that exist, we may be able to shift those paradigms

Phrase: Rose Colored Glasses

Thesis - rose colored glasses allow optimists to see this as the best of all possible worlds (or every stranger as a friend)

Antithesis - pessimists view this as worst of all possible worlds (or every stranger as a threat)

Synthesis - realists see the bad in the world and the good that can result from change (or every stranger as a person)

The rationale against the adoption and application of Dialectic Analysis on a large level appears to be twofold. The first is that it is not easy to coach or use; if a student has trouble defining words and interpreting quotations, he or she will be even more challenged to produce a counter definition or counter interpretation and then a melding of those two opposites into a congruent whole. The second is that the speaker will spend more time talking about things other than the topic in the speech as opposed to the topic itself; once the introduction and thesis are complete, the speaker does not return to those ideas and this can bother those judges who feel that the topic is the essence of the speech. Despite its development at the same time that Unified Analysis was first being applied to Impromptu Speaking, it has never been widely adopted on the college level, where Unified Analysis dominates.

Critical Analysis

Unlike Dialectic Analysis, Critical Analysis is not a means of philosophical inquiry; it is purely a rhetorical strategy to create a unique framework through which to argue a thesis and analyze its impact. It is sometime referred to as the theory and practice style, but this does not fully explain its aims or describe its implementation. To best understand what is Critical Analysis, it is best to see how it is used.

When a speaker receives a topic, the speaker first extrapolates a thesis from

the topic, either defining the word or interpreting the quotation, phrase, or proverb. The speaker's all important next task is to derive an intellectual framework that provides context and meaning for the topic itself and the thesis. This is done through the selection of a tool, an examination of the key ideas of that tool, and an application of that tool to the topic. The tool is something of a theoretical nature: a religious concept (the Buddhist concept of Nirvana); a political philosophy (the Rawls theory of veiled ignorance); a communications theory (the Johari window); an economic concept (the Smith hidden-hand); a psychological theory (the Jung archetype); or a sociological or anthropological theory (the trickster). The tool is always something theoretical that requires substantial explanation because it may not be accessible to all members of the audience. The tool is what allows the speaker to provide the context for his or her analysis and justification for his or her thesis. In other words, not everyone in the audience would extrapolate the articulated thesis from the topic; in fact, no one might have arrived at that thesis, but by analyzing it through the perspective of the tool, it is possible for everyone to understand how the speaker derived the thesis. To complete the speech, the speaker then offers at least two examples that illustrate the thesis and are consistent with the intellectual framework constructed.

I sense I may be losing some readers at this point. The Dialectic approach is more intuitive, which is why I presented it first. This approach will require a walk through an in depth example. Consider the quotation from John Maynard Keynes, “In the long run, we are all dead.” The speaker might decide the best way to address this topic is through economic theory. The speaker then chooses as his or her tool the writings of the British economist Alfred Marshall (1842-1924), such as *Principles of Economics* or *Industry and Trade*. Marshall is one of history's most highly regarded economists for multiple reasons, one of which was his formulation of the concept of marginal utility. But he also systematized the idea of the short and long term thinking; hypothesizing that business, and indeed whole industries, might accept short term or short run losses, if larger long term or long run gains were possible. In other words, a business might first have to spend money to

hire talent and develop ideas and products to eventually make money. Intuitive to you and I in the early days of the 21st century, not so to the thinkers of the late 19th century. Marshall went on to argue that businesses, industries, and even the whole of society should focus its decision making on long run goals over short run objectives. Then came the “live-like-there-is-no-tomorrow” 1920s and everyone reading this article knows what happened next: one of the most calamitous economic disasters in world history. Keynes came along to pick up the pieces and explain that people do not engage in long term thinking because it is counterintuitive to ask mortal individuals to plan that far in advance. Keynes did suggest, however, that institutions could engage in long term thinking because institutions survive any of the individuals associated with them, and the individuals operating them should be concerned about perpetuating the institution above all else.

The speaker would then examine a couple of examples to demonstrate how this philosophy is still present. One example might be global warming, as politicians of every major developed and developing nation avoid taking action because they do not want to sacrifice short term job creation for long run carbon emissions reduction. Another example might be the cancer vaccine, as pharmaceutical companies focus more on creating easy and instantly marketable short term pharmaceutical products rather than investing the years of study and hundreds of millions of dollars necessary to develop a vaccine that could combat cancer (or AIDS or dementia).

The speaker essentially creates an outline that resembles the following:

Topic:

Thesis -

1. Theory or Construction of Critical Framework
 - A. Explanation of tool
 - B. Application of tool to topic
2. Practice or Further Application of Critical Framework
 - A. First example
 - B. Second example

It cannot be stressed enough that this is not three-example Impromptu under a different name. The critical framework is a distinct and separate point; it will last a good solid two minutes and be broken

down into two sections. The tool is not referred to as an example by the speaker; it is referenced as the tool or sometimes erroneously as the artifact, when it is a tool that allows the analysis of an artifact, which in this instance, would be the topic (word or quotation). Unlike Unified Analysis, which may have two or three points, or Dialectic Analysis, which always has three points (thesis, antithesis, and synthesis), Critical Analysis always has two points, the construction of the critical framework (which is how it is previewed) and the application of the framework (which is also how it is previewed). In all three instances, the main points themselves are previewed and reviewed, not the examples offered in each main point. Previewing and reviewing examples would be like an Extemporaneous speaker previewing and reviewing evidence and sources, because examples serve a similar purpose in an Impromptu speech as evidence does in a Extemporaneous speech.

The application of the tool of Critical Analysis to the examples further illustrates the idea.

Word: Liberty

Thesis - liberty is the freedom to follow one's own path

1. Construction of framework - Mill's theory of utilitarianism
2. Application of framework to Thoreau and Whitman

Word: Equality

Thesis - equality is opportunity for all

1. Construction of framework - Locke's theory of the state
2. Application of framework to Milton and *Metropolis*

Word: Eggbeater

Thesis - an eggbeater is a tool for mixing things together

1. Construction of framework - the legend of Alexander and the Gordian knot
2. Application of framework to Heller and *The Wrath of Khan*

Word: Lamp

Thesis - a lamp is a symbol for dispelling darkness

1. Construction of framework - the myth of Prometheus and the gift of fire
2. Application of framework to *The Lighthouse*, *Library of Alexandria*, and *Chariots of Fire*

Proverb: "Revenge is a dish best served cold." –Ancient Klingon proverb

Thesis - revenge is calculated and cold-blooded

1. Construction of framework - Buddha's teaching that life is lived in the moment
2. Application of framework to Hawthorne and *Enemy Mine*

Proverb: "Only Nixon could go to China." –Old Vulcan proverb

Thesis - an adversary will force concessions from an opponent

1. Construction of framework - Bismarck's concept of realpolitik
2. Application of framework to Eisenhower and Reagan

Quotation: "Rational men, who believe themselves quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." –John Maynard Keynes (said with regard to the aforementioned Marshall)

Thesis - we are governed by the thoughts of our predecessors

1. Construction of framework - Bacon's development of the scientific method
2. Application of framework to Doyle and Houdini

Phrase: Rose Colored Glasses

Thesis - rose colored glasses allow optimists to see this as the best of all possible worlds

1. Construction of framework - Voltaire's satire of optimistic folly in *Candide*
2. Application of framework to Swift and Twain

Like Dialectic Analysis, Critical Analysis was developed at the same time as Unified Analysis was first being applied to Impromptu Speaking. Like Dialectic Analysis, Critical Analysis did not catch on to a large audience. In part this is due to the requirement that a speaker has to be incredibly well read and well versed

in numerous schools of philosophy, political thought, economic theory, literary criticism, communication theory, social theory, anthropology, mythology, folklore, and critiques of established thought from both the left and right. To implement this approach on a continual basis, a contestant would require a working knowledge of at least a dozen philosophers and thinkers. And not only does a speaker need to fully understand those theories, he or she needs to be able to explain them without overly simplifying them to his or her audience. Again, it makes Unified Analysis seem like a simpler and more direct approach, one of the reasons why Unified Analysis is widely used and Critical Analysis is not.

The purpose of this essay was to present alternate methods of analyzing an Impromptu topic that would be unique to the event, not extensions of an existing strategy in a different event. While Unified Analysis can and should be used to organize an Extemporaneous speech, Dialectic Analysis and Critical Analysis cannot be used for that purpose. None is superior to the others; all three provide a speaker with the skills necessary to extrapolate and defend a thesis from a wide variety of topics. All three are vastly preferable to the dominant model of a list of three examples, which is not analysis in any sense of the term. If high school students are capable of learning and using Unified Analysis in Extemporaneous Speaking, then they are perfectly capable of learning and using Unified, Dialectic, or Critical Analysis in Impromptu Speaking. The event is designed to teach higher order thinking skills, which is not being done at present. But these abuses can be corrected and the event reoriented on its original lofty goals. ■

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