

COMMENTARY

Cheating: Is It Really that Big of a Deal? By Breanna Brekken (Apple Valley High School)

The following persuasive speech was delivered as a classroom assignment by sophomore Breanna Brekken. The directions were to select a problem and then to convince the audience to agree with your point of view or to take a course of action. The body of the speech was to follow the problem-cause-solution pattern of organization. This was the first persuasive speech given by the student. The time limit was approximately five minutes.

Breanna believes that cheating in our schools is a definite problem. She selected this topic because she thought it had both significance and relevance for her audience, which consisted of sophomores who were studying public speaking. Her choice showed responsibility—a key characteristic of an ethical speaker.

After researching the subject, she carefully selected evidence that would, first, verify the extent of the problem; next, uncover why students resort to cheating; and, finally, develop steps for a solution. Breanna successfully supported her thesis with supporting evidence and a clear organizational structure.

For more information on organizing speeches, please refer to Chapter 9 of *Speech: Communication Matters* or Chapter 11 of *Communication Applications*.

Cheating: Is It Really that Big of a Deal?

By Breanna Brekken
Apple Valley High School

Breanna realizes that examples create a visual picture in the minds of an audience. So, she selects two vivid examples of cheating to catch the audience's attention. She includes incidents that indicated an academic problem that is evident in junior high, high school, and college. This establishes an image of a problem that extends throughout academia.

To quantify the extent of cheating, she selects statistics. Her choice was particularly appropriate for her teenage audience. It establishes that even the best high school students cheat. This creates a link with her audience, which consisted primarily of students who take accelerated or advanced classes. Breanna then clearly states her thesis: "Due to this increasing trend, we must deal with the problem of cheating in our nation's schools." Then she clearly states her organizational approach to her topic in the preview: "We should understand the problem, why it occurs, and some solutions that can prevent it from occurring." She then signposts her first main point with a transition.

Breanna begins the body of her persuasive speech by establishing the "problem." This helps to convince the audience that cheating is harmful. Hopefully, they will be more likely to stop this behavior. One harm that Breanna wanted to emphasize is that cheating has long-term consequences. Her evidence from *Teen* magazine verifies this aspect of the problem.

During an eighth-grade science exam in Jackson, Missouri, a student appears to be checking his watch. What the student is actually doing is studying a scrap of paper underneath his wristband that contains all of the test answers written in tiny letters. In Phoenix, Arizona, a college student decides that she doesn't want to spend all of her time writing a term paper from scratch, so she purchases one off the Internet. All she has to do is "point and click."

Academic cheating is skyrocketing to an all-time high, and it is not only slackers who are cheating, but top students who would rather get a good grade than a good education. A recent survey conducted by *Who's Who Among American High School Students* claims that 80 percent of high achievers have admitted to cheating at least once, and half of them believe that cheating isn't even necessarily wrong. Additionally, about 95 percent of these students said that they have never been caught. Due to this increasing trend, we must deal with the problem of cheating in our nation's schools. We should understand the problem, why it occurs, and some solutions that can prevent it from occurring.

To begin, let's take a look at the problem of cheating. Cheating in our schools has become an enormous problem. It not only occurs on tests; students copy homework, plagiarize essays, and use *Cliff Notes*. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, 84 percent of college students believe they need to cheat to get ahead in the world today. The problem is so big that students believe cheating is necessary. Many also believe that cheating is not a very big deal. However, this is not true—cheating is a very big deal. Even if you're not caught, you pay later on in life when you don't know what to do. You might ask, "Why does it matter?" Let's say you cheated on a history exam, but you want to become a doctor. It wouldn't even matter because you wouldn't need to know those dates and facts in medical school, right? According to a 1998 article in *Teen* magazine, cheating in school sets you up for a lifelong pattern of cutting corners. Research shows that cheating in high school leads to cheating in college and beyond. So, cheating on that little history exam could lead to cheating in medical school. As a

result, you would not know what to do in a real-life situation, and you would be putting other people's lives at risk.

Now that we know the severity of the problem, let's take a look at why it occurs. The first reason cheating occurs is due to academic pressure. Students believe that they have to get "A's" to get into a good college. Another cause of cheating is parental influence. Experts claim that students actually learn to cheat from their parents. Parents let their children duck out of responsibilities, parents help finish those art projects their children didn't get around to, and parents give answers to those math problems that just don't make sense. Thus, they teach their children that it is okay to take the easy way out. Students also cheat because it is easy. Modern technology makes it easier than ever—we can now store programs on our calculators and get term papers off the Internet. There is even a Web site called "The Evil House of Cheat." According to *The Cheating Game*, by Carolyn Kliner, most students almost never squeal on classmates who cheat, which makes it even easier to cheat without getting caught. Cheating also saves time. Students just blame cheating on a time crunch. However, the number one reason why students cheat, according to the *Who's Who* survey, is because they believe that "it doesn't seem like a big deal." Many feel wrong doing it, but they think that it doesn't really matter because so many students are doing it.

... Some solutions are needed to put an end to cheating in our schools. One solution is to promote an honor code. According to Elizabeth Kiss, the director for ethics at Duke University, a full-fledged honor code includes: pledges students agree to, a student-run disciplinary process, and a reporting requirement. This would help the students learn the "fundamental values of integrity and honesty." Also, heavier consequences could put an end to the problem. Today cheaters that are caught rarely get harsh punishments. For example, a valedictorian at Brea Olinda High School in Southern California got caught [while attempting to] electronically alter a course grade. The punishment: being banned from the graduation ceremony. Stricter penalties would make someone think twice about cheating. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, just talking about cheating in the classroom can be enough to stop it. Teachers should "make clear that cheating will not be tolerated." The easiest solution is to make the personal decision not to cheat. You will benefit in the long run, and

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The second main point addresses the "cause." Persuasively, Breanna needs to help the audience understand why people do what they do. She realizes that if the audience understands the behavior, then they can figure out how to stop it. Once again, to help her audience easily follow her list of reasons, she chooses transitional words to signpost them. Notice her use of the following words: first, another, thus, also, and however.

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The final main point focuses on the "solution." It is important to correlate the causes with the solutions. Breanna suggests several steps that would help reduce cheating. Her suggestion of an honor code establishes clear ethical codes for students to follow. She also combines this with the need for tougher consequences for cheating. To gain credibility for these solutions, she includes documented evidence for her ideas. Finally, she appeals to the audience directly to make a personal choice and not cheat.

you will prove to yourself that you have mastered material and performed well under pressure—which are both big ego boosters.

In conclusion, you have seen the growing problem and now understand that cheating is a very big deal in our schools, the reasons why it occurs, . . . and a few solutions, the easiest one being to make the personal choice not to cheat. The problem of cheating in our nation's schools must be confronted. After hearing the statistics that I have provided, we should now realize how big a problem cheating really is. Many of us are affected by cheating every day, and if nothing is done, the problem will only get worse. If you are ever in a situation where you just want to take the easy way out, think twice. Cheating ultimately hurts the cheater—if not right away, it catches up to them later on in life.

COMMENTARY

Give the Greeks Some Credit

By Russell Freyman (Syosset High School)

Russ worked on this oration with Lanny Naegelin at a summer workshop at American University in Washington, D.C. Note how effectively Russ engages the audience by questioning them about their leisure activities. The Greek definition—with emphasis on “cultivating”—challenges the preconceived notions of the audience and invites them to reconsider their own activities. This original slant gives the oration the freshness of approach necessary to make it successful. He returns to the Greeks and another rhetorical question in the conclusion.

His coach Lydia Esslinger recalls his summer workshop experience:

“Russ loved working with Lanny (Lanny was very fond of Russ, as well. I know because I was teaching at the summer workshop and the Naegelins were housemates). This speech has the classic Lanny Naegelin touches: humor, lots of anecdotes, research into pop psychology. The speech is well balanced and fast-paced, offering the low-key Russ a chance to show his droll sense of humor. (As a side-note, the speech he wrote in his senior year was far more personal and probing; it dealt with the tension between holding on to one’s cultural roots and fitting into a heterogeneous culture. I was happy to see that he used some techniques he acquired during the summer and discarded others; that’s what learning is all about: moving on.) Research, practice, and hard work all made for a great speech!”

For more information on research, please refer to Chapter 8 of *Speech: Communication Matters* or Chapter 10 of *Communication Applications*. For information on building confidence, refer to Chapter 2 of both *Speech: Communication Matters* and *Communication Applications*.

Give the Greeks Some Credit

By Russell Freyman
Syosset High School

Top ten lists are popular with most audiences. Russell takes advantage of the universal appeal to draw the audience in. Then by asking the rhetorical question, Russell gets the audience fully engaged. The historical reference to Pericles, in a sense, justifies the importance of the topic.

Here Russell begins to define what he means by leisure. Carefully defining terms is crucial in formulating an effective thesis statement. By connecting leisure to "vitalizing humanity," Russell gives significance to his subject. You must always convince your audience that the topic matters to them.

Sleeping, watching television, listening to music, seeing a movie, bowling, swimming, playing cards, resting, snacking, and going to a bar. So what do we have here, my planned agenda for after the tournament? Not exactly. These are today's top ten leisure activities.

So where did yours come in the list? Well, don't pat yourself on the back yet, because I bet if we could ask him, the famous Greek king Pericles would tell you that the list falls far short of fulfilling the true purpose of leisure. You see, the Ancient Greeks defined leisure as a time to fill and complete the human being through cultivation of both the mind and the body. But today, there doesn't seem to be much cultivating going on.

In his book *The Greek Mind*, Walter Agard tells us that in Athens, all 7-14-year-olds devoted their leisure time to literature, music, physical education, and ethics. All adults shared in city-wide musical and athletic festivals, discussions with intellectual leaders, and public works programs involving sculpting, painting, and architecture. "That a sound body was the most favorable environment for a sound mind was a generally accepted belief"

However, the present definition of leisure is quite different. Most Americans casually regard it as having time at their disposal to do whatever they want. As a matter of fact, eight percent of the population feels a sense of gratitude to technology, because it's given them "more time to do nothing." The truth, however, according to a recent study by the National Endowment for the Arts, is that available leisure hours have dropped twelve percent. Yes, people are spending more time on the job than ever before. Leisure is becoming a more precious commodity. Unfortunately, though, we are making bad use of that time. And therein lies a danger, for as Carl Ridley points out in his article "To Make a Life," leisure is a time for "rejuvenation of the self and spirit." We need it to vitalize our humanity. So why are we missing out?

Gordon Gecko's statement in the movie *Wall Street* that "Greed is good," is one clear explanation. In his book *Hunger for More*, Laurence Shames speaks of how during the 1950s there was a general feeling of optimism that, like the Greeks, Americans would realize the virtues of leisure. However, he then goes on to point out that "What the formula failed to take into account . . . was greed." Yes, driven by a desire for financial success and status, the "go-getters," as he calls them, work forever. Simply put, leisure for them is like riding on cruise control between periods of high acceleration.

Automation and technology provide a second explanation for the misuse of leisure. In her book *Close to Home*, Ellen Goodman suggests that dependency on automation becomes an addiction. She paints a scene in which a family gets dinner, as she puts it, "down to a science." Because of our technological gadgets we're able to go from freezer to microwave to dishwasher and garbage disposal, in fifteen minutes. But instead of using the time we save effectively, we merely find more ways to use our little conveniences, such as the television, VCR, or CD player. Indeed for techno wizards all it takes to make a "perfectly hermetic evening" is "gourmet takeout and a movie on the VCR."

A third infringement on leisure is our inability to allocate time wisely. The Greek philosopher Theophrastus once observed that "Time is the most valuable thing a man can spend." Thus, time management is imperative. For most of us, though, time runs out of control. Tip O'Neil tells of how a French diplomat once bragged to him that he'd saved four hours traveling by the Concorde. When asked what he'd done with the time, the answer was "nothing." We often fall into the same trap.

Thomas Hobbes once said "Leisure is the mother of philosophy." Maybe that's why for so many Americans, thinking is an orphan. It is in times of idleness that most of our inspirations and breakthroughs take shape. Frances du Plessix Gray, in her sermon "In Praise of Idleness," tells us that only in our moments of repose are we fully able to realize that we do exist. And we're simply able to consider life. Simple contemplation can be both a leisurely and noble pursuit.

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The list of infringements on leisure begins here. Note that the list of problems is clearly organized and supported by a diversity of sources. He quotes a popular movie, a syndicated columnist, and a Greek philosopher.

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The fourth infringement on leisure is in our failure to think. Here Russell expands the argument; the justification is that the "decline in plain old good thinking" is the clearest sign of leisure misuse. Note that this is really a causation argument as well. If we don't think, we make bad choices about what to do with our leisure.
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The Joe Montana reference works on two levels. First, sports references are an effective way to present arguments to most audiences. The media rely on them to explain the news. Second, the inserting of a debate resolution is a nice inside joke for audiences composed mostly of speech folks.
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The solution begins here. General awareness and education may be common proposals but they are appropriate in this instance. What makes Russell's solution work is his specific explanation of how it should be implemented. The example of Harry Truman makes the ideas seem real and possible.
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Nevertheless, there has been a decline in plain old good thinking, and this is one of the clearest signs of leisure misuse. The problem is simple—with limited time, people choose to do what they enjoy. And for many, the physical is the fun, so the body gets all the attention.

Don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with being fit. We all hail to our gladiators every Sunday when football season reigns. But in contrast to the Greeks, our athletes don't go off after the game to discuss ethics, politics, and the social good. Can you picture it? Joe Montana walks into a crowded locker room after the big game and says, "Great game guys, but now, let's get serious. Resolved: Individuals ought to value work more than leisure." I don't think so!

Equally imbalanced are those who overlook the physical in favor of the mental. They may exercise the mind, but let the body waste away. You know the type. At school these are the ones we often call nerds. Their idea of getting physical is turning the page in a book.

But those in the greatest danger are the individuals who have fallen under the spell of "Couch Potato Syndrome." Okay . . . why should I care if some people decide to "veg out" as we call it? Most people either cultivate their minds and not their bodies, or their bodies and not their minds. So if I want to be a couch potato and cultivate neither, who cares? Well as Lilian Ruben suggests in her study of the American family, *Worlds of Pain*, when leisure becomes totally passive, it deadens the human spirit.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell puts it another way, "To be able to fill leisure intelligently, is the last product of civilization." Now that's heavy stuff. But it makes it very clear why it's imperative for all of us to become advocates of good leisure activity.

The place to start is with general awareness and education. People have to know the bottom line—that for psychological, physical, social, and mental health, a proper balanced use of leisure is a necessity. For me, balance comes as a result of spending part of my leisure exploring speech activities and part running track. Both give me a chance to revitalize myself through active engagement.

William Crowder of Purdue University suggests that to get the message about leisure out, we need to introduce it to the elementary grades through research assignments and experimentation with various activities. That way, young people can develop a sense of how leisure fits into daily life.

Once we're aware, the next step is making sure we schedule the time. We all know how easy it is to say, "I meant to read that book," or "I really would exercise if I had more time!" Well there's not going to be more time, and good intentions simply don't get the job done. It's up to us to manage our time, and, as we often hear, "You always find the time to do what you think is important!"

In his book *Life Sketches*, John Hersey takes us into the life of Harry Truman. While president, Truman was able to read six newspapers, walk two miles, exercise in his gym, swim for a half-hour, and all this, before breakfast. He was also an avid reader of biographies. Furthermore, he played the piano, wrote, and dabbled in a variety of sports—all, just for the fun of it. If the president, a man with just a few responsibilities, can somehow find the time to rejuvenate himself through leisure, I think we can too.

Then finally, as Nike often reminds us, "Just do it!" We have to remember that the same legs that can carry us to slouch on the couch, can propel us out the door for a walk. The same mouth that munches on potato chips can have an intellectual discussion. And the same hand that pushes the button on the remote to change TV channels, can also lift a weight. Now I'm not saying we should never put up our feet and watch a movie, or play cards with the gang, but don't overlook the need for a complete and balanced plan.

Carl Ritizzo thought the difference between work and leisure was whether he slept on the job or on the sofa. His wife thought leisure was a kind of suit. Neither did much about it. So by the time they were in their late thirties, life had become a continuous drudgery—the mindless boredom of assembly line repetition at work, followed by a routine of beer drinking and rest at home. Then, the guy who worked three people down from him at the Cofax Manufacturing Company asked Carl to join the company basketball team. It wasn't that Carl looked like he'd be a great player; he was barely six feet tall and had a double roll around the middle. But the team needed reserves. Carl kind of liked the activity. After about a month, he got his wife to join the ladies team.

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Russell inserts some humor here both to explain the solution in greater detail and to create warmth in the audience as he concludes his speech. Again, you see an example as a compelling way to sell an argument. Finally, he ends by referring back to the Greeks and by asking the audience one last rhetorical question. This invitation leaves the audience feeling good about Russell . . . and the topic.

Soon the two began jogging together and reading books about basketball players. One good habit led to another, and Carl and his wife started to have discussions about even more meaningful topics. The transformation that took place was remarkable, because instead of being lethargic, they became active. Instead of enduring the dull, they discovered the exciting. In the words of sociologist Walter Alvarez, they went from the "monotony of a Miller time existence" to the "fulfillment of meaningful leisure."

You see, the Greeks really did have some good ideas, and their idea about leisure is one of the best. Following their example can make a difference in our lives. It really can. So now, how about it, anyone want to go jogging?

COMMENTARY

Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts By Sally Koering (Apple Valley High School)

With the following speech, Sally Koering won the 1995 National Original Oratory Championship at the National Forensics League Contest held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She accomplished this achievement because she combined organization, persuasion, and delivery to communicate her message effectively. This commentary will focus on her use of the principles of organization.

Initially, Sally found it difficult to put her point into words. She was concerned that standards were being lowered, yet rewards were being given freely. She was also concerned that we could so casually give away that which should be considered a treasured gift. Her research uncovered that in many areas of society, even the most noble of awards were being given away rather than earned.

Eventually, after many revisions, she wrote the thesis: "We've become a society that believes we should take any gift that is offered." She then went on in her preview to specify that this attitude is particularly destructive when "a) we are given the gift of grades, or b) granted the gift of glory." Through a clear organizational structure, Sally was able to communicate concretely a creative yet powerful message—that too often we give away gifts that aren't meant to be given.

For more information on organizing speeches, please refer to Chapter 9 of *Speech: Communication Matters* and Chapter 11 of *Communication Applications*.

Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts

By Sally Koering
Apple Valley High School

Sally chooses to tell a story to gain the attention of her audience. She selects the ancient myth of the Trojan Horse. However, rather than simply retell a familiar story, she uses contemporary language and clichés, which adds humor to her attention getter. This allows her to elicit laughter from the audience and better gain their attention. It also establishes an image that would help the audience better understand her message.

The morning fog arose from the great hill overlooking the city of Troy. All was quiet. A huge wall encircled the city, protecting the Trojans inside. Outside the wall the soldiers of Greece awaited their chance to attack. They waited. And waited. Ten years they waited! Then, Odysseus, their leader spoke up, "I know! Let's give them a great big . . . wooden horse!" Now while the Trojans were initially suspicious, they decided, "Hey, you can't look a gift horse in the mouth." Big mistake. For once inside the city, soldiers would emerge from the Trojan Horse, unlock the gates, and allow the army to enter in. And as Homer recorded:

"With song and rejoicing they brought death in,
Treachery and destruction."

In other words, it was a bad day for Troy. But the horse was a gift. It was an offer they couldn't refuse. However, they should have.

This section establishes a link. First, she links the story of the Trojan Horse to modern society. History is repeating itself and once again we are accepting gifts that will lead to our destruction. She then states her thesis and further links the topic to the audience by stating authoritative analysis by Robert J. Samuelson. He agrees that this is a significant problem. This technique is designed to motivate the audience to listen to the speech, because the message is relevant to their lives. (See opening commentary regarding thesis and preview statements.)

And unfortunately, history is repeating itself. America is being offered its own Trojan Horse when we accept gifts that appear noble and grandiose on the outside, without scrutinizing the warrior-like destruction on the inside. We've become a society that believes we should take any gift that is offered. As social analyst Robert J. Samuelson concludes, "We're now at the point where people value status and success so much that we find new ways to create it, even if it means giving away excellence and honor." It's time we look the gift horse in the mouth. We are wrongly giving away gifts that aren't meant to be given. And, just as Troy was invaded and destroyed by a seemingly harmless gift, America is being destroyed from the inside out. It is Troy revisited every time we are a) given the gift of grades, or b) granted the gift of glory.

One less-than-studious student responded to Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* by saying that he wasn't sure what Hester Prynne did, "but she must have been good because she got an A." Unfortunately, this student typifies a mindset in American education, where simply getting the grade is the gift we're after. And many school systems conveniently

oblige. Students in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, can enroll in a physical fitness *reading* program. As the *Chicago Tribune* notes, students are assigned pamphlets about health and exercise and they receive credit for physical fitness without actually . . . well . . . getting physically fit! And just as body inflation might be a consequence of this class, grade inflation also seems to be a reality in the American education system. In fact, while SAT scores have dropped dramatically for both math and verbal, the average high schooler's GPA has risen. This seems to epitomize what noted psychologist John Rosemond warns us of—when people spend too much time giving kids what they don't really earn—when we coddle students with academic gifts—we rob them of an education. And this mindset is invading the workforce, as well. NYC was faced with a lack of qualified applicants for their Emergency Rescue System. Recently, they've been failing the exam. So, did city officials actively recruit qualified applicants? Intensify their training program? No. They gave half-credit for wrong answers. Now, applicants can pass the exam, but what seems to be forgotten is that when it comes to saving lives, we can't give half-credit. With the gift of grades, we sacrifice performance, progress, and people. For inside this Trojan Horse lies an army ready to spill out and spread the word that excellence is easy and mediocrity is good enough.

Now, if I don't make it to final round, or I don't get a trophy, it'll be OK 'cause I'll just buy one. In fact, I'll just give myself an Oscar. Oh, and you can have one too, because nowadays acclaim is for sale—the gift of glory can be yours. For only a small price at the Trophy Shoppe in Woodland Hills, California, you can wrap your hands around an exact replica of the Oscar. As Gita Siegman, author of the book *Awards, Honors, and Prizes*, states, "Americans today want a prize—any prize." As if we can receive talent, honor, leadership, or excellence from an award or medal. In 1989 the U.S. Army awarded nearly 250,000 medals. That's nearly one for every three soldiers. In 1992, *Parade* magazine informed men and women who served in the military that if they felt deserving of a medal, all they had to do was request one. Grant Gipe was lying in a hospital bed at Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas, where he had been evacuated as a "casualty of Panama's intense heat," when a general awarded him, and 209 others, a Purple Heart. He had not been shot in a fierce battle, or wounded trying to save a fellow soldier. That day, the Purple Heart was lowered to the level of heatstroke. When awards are given rather than earned, they are Trojan Horses striking down even our most noble virtues—honor and valor. There are medals but no meaning.

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Sally uses a humorous example as a transition into her first main point. Then she highlights the main heading of her first main point: "Unfortunately, this student typifies a mindset in American education, where simply getting the grade is the gift we're after." Notice that Sally backs this up with supporting points from training in our schools and the workforce. This cross section of evidence supports a growing problem for preparation and performances in real life.

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Sally again uses humor to transition into her second main point. Since this speech was given in a competitive setting, the audience could relate to the desire for a trophy. Sally uses this as a segue into her second main heading: "Oh, you can have this one, too, because nowadays acclaim is for sale—the gift of glory can be yours." She further supports this claim with a variety of types of evidence, including quotations, statistics, examples, and a story.

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In this section, Sally selects a diverse cross section of examples to reinforce the extent of the problem in our society. She then analyzes why we have let this happen and the harm that has resulted. It is important that the audience realizes the magnitude of the problem, so that they are more likely to seek change. An understanding of the cause makes the need for change more urgent.

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This final paragraph is the conclusion to her speech. Although it does not obviously highlight a summary, a closer examination shows that her solution not only gives the audience a way to change, but also implicitly recaps the problem areas she has covered. When she states, "These are the gifts that are meant to be given," she re-emphasizes to the audience one last time the thesis of her message. The final line served as a clincher that recalled the image of the Trojan Horse. Her final warning to the audience to "beware to Greeks bearing gifts" leaves a memorable final impression with the audience.

It's a Trojan Horse when this year, a Colorado high school will graduate 26 valedictorians. It's a Trojan Horse when Christian Fellowship Church of Maryland will give ten dollars to new members for simply showing up. And it's a Trojan Horse when Planned Parenthood programs will give teenage girls a dollar for each day they avoid getting pregnant. We've always said that it's better to give than to receive, but it seems we no longer know what gifts are appropriate to give. An article in the *Washington National Weekly* tells the story of a mother and her daughter. It seems that although her high grades and test scores refuted it, she asked her daughter to be declared "Learning Disabled" because, "She has to work so hard for her grades." Unfortunately, we seem to have gotten away from hard work and sacrifice and, in the process, we've lost the ability to distinguish between the right, the good, and the best. Too often we want the status and the success, and in the true spirit of democracy we want it for everybody. Frustrated teachers, parents, and students seem to view success as unfairness. But fair does not mean equal. It means, as Aristotle told us, giving each their due, what they deserve. After all, it is that separation that makes life challenging. Without it, everyone has the same talent, the same ability—no one is allowed to excel. And nobody deserves that. And you know, I don't think anybody wants that, either. But we get confused between what we want and what we deserve. Psychologist Michael Lewis explains that this is because in other cultures, children are taught to be proud, but in America, children are taught to be happy. And although happiness is important, when we give away pride in what we do, who we are, and what we stand for, happiness is hollow.

Now I'm not saying that all gifts are bad. In fact, I'm an avid fan of Christmas—and my birthday's coming up. But we need to reconsider what we are giving, and what we ought to give. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss found that across all cultures, with the ritual of exchanging gifts comes three obligations: to give, to receive, to repay. Today, we can return to this ritual. The cycle begins by giving—but only what is ours to give, not our standards—but our time, our talents, our ideas, and our heart. Second, we must not settle for accepting gifts that we do not deserve. But rather [we must] aspire and work to be worthy of the rewards we can achieve. And finally, we must repay. Because it is when we give back what we have learned, when we stand for what others should follow, we can move forward, so that the cycle is renewed. Within each of us are gifts that are noble, filled with hard work, dedication, sacrifice, and love. They are not Trojan Horses. They are the gifts that are meant to be given. And as long as we remember that, we can learn to beware of Greeks bearing gifts.

COMMENTARY

The Phat Life

By Gabriel Rosenberg (Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School)

Gabe Rosenberg was exceptional at the state and national levels with this speech. He was an Original Oratory finalist at both the 1999 National Catholic Forensic League and the National Forensics League tournaments. Gabe and his teacher/coach, William Hicks, called the many re-writings of this speech a "labor of love."

We live in a world where appearance seems to dominate the media. As a result, many of us don't like who we are or how we look. In comparison to the "beautiful people," we often just don't seem to "measure up." With this in mind, Gabe decided to write this speech. He used himself as the vehicle to let others know that it's OK to like yourself as you are. To him, the wordplay associated with the title of his speech, "The Phat Life," was both timely and appropriate.

Gabe's style of speaking is analytical, and his tone is congenial and personable. However, his use of language is particularly noteworthy. For more information about ways to incorporate effective language in your speeches, please refer to Chapter 13 in *Communication Applications* and Chapter 11 in *Speech: Communication Matters*.

The Phat Life

By Gabriel Rosenberg
Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School

I should have seen it coming. There I was, feeling slick, sleek, suave, svelte, when my aunt walked right up to me and said "Gabe, honey, you are looking fat."

Well I was shocked, stunned, surprised. Since when had Aunt Peggy been so "down" with the street slang? I mean, I knew I was cool but "P-H-A-T"? That may be taking it a bit far, but then she repeated it. She wasn't talking about how cool I was, but how corpulent I was.

Well, like I said, I should have seen it coming. The signs were all there: I had been shopping in the husky section lately, and the neighborhood children had been using me for shade. I quickly descended into several stages of coping: First came the denial, I wasn't fat. I had just been carrying around a little extra weight—still had some baby fat. I had been wearing stripes too much lately. Next came the violent rationalization: So what if I was fat? I could still be hip. What did, say, Brad Pitt have on me anyway? Besides fame, fortune, a beautiful trophy girlfriend . . . Maybe I was looking at this all wrong. What did I have on Brad Pitt? Well, besides sixty pounds, that is. Finally, I learned to accept it and drew up a long list of advantages I had over the average person. I could float. I was naturally insulated. I was never asked to run errands. I was always picked first for the tug of war team. And, most importantly, in case of a civilization-ending event, I could survive on my own body fat for up to three weeks. You might say I was Y2K compliant.

Amazingly, I was happy with who I was. No big deal, right? Unless, of course, you are the editor of *GQ*, *Vogue*, or any one of the magazines that make money off self-loathing, in which case it may be heresy. You see, in the United States today, there are a number of industries that have grown up around the idea of Americans having glossy covers. Fashion, cosmetics, plastic surgery all depend on Americans not being happy with who they are. Suspiciously, the same people who are telling us that we have to change our appearance are the ones selling us the means to do so. All across America people are selling out their happiness for petty possession,

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In 1999, the word *phat* was a positive slang term for someone or something that was "cool." Gabe is relying on our ability to see how the wordplay associated with the words *phat* and *fat* are important thematic elements in his speech.

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By referring to movie star Brad Pitt and the year 2000 computer scare, "Y2K," Gabe is using allusions, or references, to well-known persons, places, things, or ideas, to make his speech fresh and relevant to his audience.

gimmicky gadgets, imaginary ideals, only to be left with an empty heart.

E. M. Forrester once said, "Our life is material and carnal, yet we do not possess the means to deal with carnality and materialism. They are still entangled with desire." Or perhaps it was Madonna who put it better, "We are living in a material world and I am a material girl." Well, wake up, stand up, and turn around, America. The Declaration of Independence enumerates for us three inalienable rights. Our politicians proudly pontificate on the first two, life and liberty, but nobody seems to be paying any attention to the third. So I say it's time we re-examine and reassess our third inalienable right, the right to the "pursuit of happiness." In order to do that, we need to understand what the problem is, how it's caused, and, finally, how we can solve it.

Perhaps I was being a little bit hasty. It's difficult to imagine a smoky boardroom meeting populated with high-level executives plotting an insidious conspiracy against the average American consumer under the diabolical cover of Mary Kay. Well, even if the cosmetic industry isn't purposely poisoning our self-image, it's undeniable that the way they sell their product is having a profoundly negative effect. The American Mental Health Association estimates that as many as twelve million young Americans may have eating disorders. The fact that millions of Americans are risking their lives to "fit in" shouldn't have to be the first sign that there is a problem. Perhaps it should have been the use of the word *svelte*, which is actually Swedish for "to starve." Or perhaps it should have been the droves of high-profile supermodels, like Kate Moss, who have been svelting themselves right into rehabilitation clinics.

Compare that with the starlets of the earlier days Take Marilyn Monroe, for example, who was widely considered to be the most beautiful woman of her generation. By today's model standards, however, she was thirty pounds overweight or, as one commentator put it, "tubby." Now, I don't know what you all think of "tubby" Monroe. But, quite frankly, from what I've seen, *Vogue* wouldn't know beauty if it poked them in their emaciated ribs. In her book, *Losing It: False Hopes and Fat Profits in the Diet Industry*, author Lauren Fraser notes that Americans are spending forty billion dollars a year on weight loss. That's enough money to take everyone on earth to a movie, run the entire federal government for nine whole days, or put one-third of all graduating high school seniors through four years of college.

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Once again, allusions to high profile people and media magazines keep the audience's attention. GQ, Madonna, *Vogue*, and Mary Kay Cosmetics are all well known to Gabe's listeners. Supermodel Kate Moss is also used to reinforce his point about beauty obsession in America.

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Most would agree that saying "tubby Monroe" would be either ironic—or an oxymoron. The term irony means when you imply the opposite, while oxymoron is having two words in opposition side-by-side. Regardless, this language example is stating the absurdity of calling film icon Marilyn Monroe "overweight."

It's hardly surprising then, as Gallup Organization notes in a recent poll, that while few Americans say that education is one of the most important issues facing our nation, 61 percent say they are worried about saturated fat.

Notice the use of the "ing" sound in the words *nipping*, *tucking*, *liposuctioning*, and *turning*. This repetition is used for language and sound effect.

Our appearance obsession doesn't end there. We're in the grips of plastic surgery frenzy. We're nipping and tucking, liposuctioning and, of course, the all-important ten-thousand-dollars-a-shot laser surgery that is turning plastic surgery into a billion-dollar business.

In this section of his speech, Gabe is using irony to show how some Calvin Klein "experts" have gone overboard in their attempts to come up with the perfect scent.

Well, perhaps our drive for attractiveness has driven us right over the edge. You may not be aware of this, but there are literally thousands of scientists dedicated solely to making the American public smell better. They're called olefactorists, and if you want to talk about somebody who took a wrong turn at career day, look no further. It's not the importance of the task I question, it's the results. You see, their combined brainpower has yielded the aromatic scent of, and I quote, "birch twigs sweating in the sauna." Columnist Jim Hightower quipped on the subject, "I guess that's better than the smell of Bubba sweating in a sauna, but I'm not really sure." Yet the American public is more than willing to shell out for it. In case you were wondering, birch twigs are the miraculous ingredient in Calvin Klein's "Escape for Men."

Gabe uses alliteration, or the repetition of the first sounds of words, when he mentions "sleek, slight, supposedly sexy . . ."

So why are we so willing to slice, soak, and starve ourselves just to fit in? Where did we go so wrong that we can't be happy with ourselves as we are? It would be all too easy to blame the media, so I will. You see, we, as Americans, are becoming more and more dependent on the television set. We spend more of our free time watching it than almost anything else. And the television bombards us with images of sleek, slight, supposedly sexy individuals who are setting unrealistically high goals.

I know this may shock you, but I would contend that the television show *Baywatch* is not completely accurate. No, no, I know it's an outrageous claim, especially considering the wonderful acting performance of David Hasselhoff. But there are a few minor discrepancies. Take, for example, the fact that no earthly occupation would yield so many tan and taut individuals as there are on that show. And the next time you see a group of lifeguards, they probably won't look like they walked off the set of *Baywatch*. But changing the channel won't help. Every station, every network, is flooded with the same dangerously unrealistic images.

So what do I want you to do? Well, I don't want you to go home and pull an Elvis: don't shoot, break, burn, or bruise your television set. Nor am I suggesting that Kathy Ireland should wear a bag over her head. And I certainly am not attempting to organize the Million Pound March. You see, mass societal movements aren't going to solve our problem, because it's not a societal problem, it's a personal problem.

In her recent commentary on America's growing weight obsession, author Marilyn Wann suggests that Americans, as a whole, need to be not only more accepting of themselves as individuals, but also more assertive as to how others treat them. She suggests that we need to take pride in who we are, but, more importantly, say so. In that, she echoes the sentiment of the famous philosopher, Miss Piggy: "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it sometimes becomes necessary to give a stupid or misinformed beholder a punch in the eye."

I, too, suggest that we all need to learn the "phat" life. By that, I suggest that we all need to learn how to live our lives how we want to, not how the media dictates we have to. So if you want to change your appearance, by all means do so, but do so because you want to, not because Susan Powter tells you you have to. Art Buchwald once said, "The best things in life aren't things." You see, they're not lipstick, nail polish, perfume, or plastic surgery. Life is at its best when we are comfortable with who we are. And in order to do that we need to accept ourselves as we are.

So the next time I see Aunt Peggy, I'm going to tell her a couple of things. For starters, about the tuna fish casserole, please stop bringing it to the family reunion! But more importantly, yes, I am fat, but I'm happy. And in the end perhaps it's only natural that I'm heavy, considering I'm living a phat life.

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"Antithesis" is the contrasting of one term against another, which is its opposite. Gabe is, in essence, exhibiting this term when he contrasts author Marilyn Wann with Miss Piggy. Even though their advice is similar, their images aren't! Overall, Gabe is appealing to the intellectual and is also entertaining—hoping to reinforce his point about "beauty."

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Notice that Gabe's very last line is a repetition of his title, "The Phat Life." This language approach offers a unified, cohesive approach, and it gives his speech both uniformity and friendliness.

COMMENTARY

Trivial Pursuit

By Joseph M. Wycoff (Chesterton High School)

With this speech, Joseph M. Wycoff was a National Forensic League finalist in Original Oratory in 1985. What makes this feat noteworthy is that Joe was only a freshman. His message deals with the power of "details" and the lesson that the small things in life add up to form the greater truths and lessons.

Overall, Joseph M. Wycoff was a truly gifted performer, excelling at the state and national levels in Oratory, as well as in Humorous Interpretation and Dramatic Interpretation. However, he loved to teach. Even in high school, he worked with other students on his craft, oration, and acting. To this day, Joe goes out to schools and community groups to offer his expertise about the skills and "details" that go into effective public speaking and the performing arts.

This is an excellent speech in a number of different areas; we will, however, focus on "Logic and Reasoning." This topic is discussed in Chapter 12 in *Communication Applications* and Chapter 10 in *Speech: Communication Matters*.

Trivial Pursuit

By Joseph M. Wycoff
Chesterton High School

Most people find it irresistible. It can be as cheap as \$30 for an evening of fun and relaxation. It can be found for sale downtown in almost every city in America, and those who've tried it say, "It's the hottest game in town." What is it? Trivial Pursuit—a game which asks us to ponder questions such as: Who was Sada Haire O? What is "enophobia"? How many seconds usually elapsed before the tape self-destructed on *Mission Impossible*? Now the answers to these questions are: 1) the Japanese home run king, 2) a fear of strangers, and 3) six. And now I'd like to ask you, how many of you knew at least two of these answers? Now you'd probably like to ask me, "Who cares about at least two of these answers?" Trivial Pursuit may be fun, but knowing the answers to those 6,000 earth-shattering questions in those six major categories is far from crucial. I mean, let's face it, Trivial Pursuit is rather, well, trivial. Yet, millions of these games have been sold, all in our quest to be known as . . . the "duke of detail." Yet, isn't it ironic that we're willing to pay over \$30 to learn about supposedly irrelevant details, while ignoring the details in real life? We no longer pay attention to detail. We want things fast and loose with no fine print. But, unfortunately, life and people just don't work that way. . . . So let's play a new game called "Not-So-Trivial Pursuit."

Let's pick a card. Subject—Government and Politics. Question 1: "Name the city you're in" and "How many states are there?" While campaigning in the 1976 presidential election, Jimmy Carter made a speech to the people of Grand Rapids, Michigan. In his opening remarks, he told the people how happy he was to be in so fine a city as Cedar Rapids. Later when Gerald Ford came through, he told the people that he was utterly appalled. He stated that anyone running for a presidential office should at least know all the cities in the 48 states. Well, Ford not only lost the election, somewhere along the line he lost two states. Question 2: What political figure made the biggest Freudian slip in 1984? Answer? Edward J. Rolanda, head of the Reagan campaign. He turned the gender gap into the gender cleavage with his remark, "Geraldine Ferraro may be the biggest bust, politically, in recent years." Now you may be asking yourselves, "What makes these questions any

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All effective speeches need to be logical, but it helps if the speech can be both logical and creative. An *analogy* is a type of word "picture" or illustration that proves a point. Here, Joe is using the game Trivial Pursuit as an analytical, yet creative, "picture" to show how America needs to pay greater attention to the significant "details" of life.

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An effective speech needs to support the thesis, or main idea, with evidence. Good evidence provides verifiable facts that help prove that what the speaker is saying is, indeed, true.

different from the ones I asked earlier? Aren't they just as trivial?" It's bad enough when we read about the government buying thousands of dollars worth of new filing cabinets only to find out that the old file folders won't fit in them, or the military spending \$7,600 for the automatic coffeemaker on a cargo plane. Now, in themselves, these things do seem rather insignificant. I mean, what are we talking about—the mention of a city, a sexist remark, a filing cabinet But they all had an effect on something larger: credibility, accomplishment of a goal, and government organization. The single connection [among all of these]—the omission of a detail. Now I know how you feel. It is a bit hard to get involved in the details of things that are so large and so remote—big business, big government, big budgets. But what about when the details are a bit closer to home and affect the things we do have a say in, but many times, don't—such as our second and third categories: Details and Occupation, and Details and Education.

Question 1 of Details and Occupation: What's the fine print of your job description? Seventeen clerical workers in Bethal Park, Pennsylvania, know the complete answer to this question. It seems that the women joined Teamster Local 205 in order to improve their wages and working conditions. But they failed to notice what their manager later stated as being the "little terms of the contract." They are now required, if any of the twelve full-time male employees are sick or on vacation, to collect the garbage in the Bethal Park area. Well, they thought they were going to make a "Hefty" paycheck. They didn't quite "clean up" the way they expected. Question 2: How important is it to know how to read in the military? Answer: Recently the Navy reported that over \$250,000 damage was done to a diesel engine because the sailor working on it couldn't read the maintenance manual. Question 3: What caused Three Mile Island? Answer: You guessed it. Ignored details, among them tape put over a warning light and technicians that didn't know how to react. Professor Richard Mitchell of Glasboro State College states that "If skills had been taught well and learned in the schools, the accident at Three Mile Island could have been prevented. . . . An inbred inattention to detail found its inevitable climax at Three Mile Island and will be repeated again and again." He also says "Careless, non-reading, non-comprehending graduates take jobs with power companies, chemical manufacturers, railroads, and in a hundred other similar settings where instructions are complex and attention to detail and to standards is absolutely essential," which leads us to our third category, Details and Education.

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In this section of Joe's speech, he is using his reasoning power. He is drawing some conclusions based on the evidence that he has provided. This is also called "commentary," because he now comments on what all of the evidence means to him—and to you, the audience.

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Here, Joe is showing how "details" can play an important part in your personal life. He is analytically showing that paying attention to the "fine print" of life can offer personal and professional rewards.

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Once again, Joe is stressing that reasoning is critical to success. He uses Three Mile Island as an example to show that any occupation demands a complete understanding of the "small picture" so that the "big picture" can and does make sense.

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The accurate use of numbers and statistics can help prove your point. Joe uses statistics to quantify the impact of the problem and to show how our "detail ignorance" can lead to an unaware, uninformed nation.

Question 1: Where's Vietnam? You don't know? Well, don't feel too bad. On a survey of a cross section of students taken at Saint Mary of the Woods College, 99 percent of them didn't know either. Seventy-five percent couldn't locate Moscow. Fifty percent couldn't find Chicago. Nine percent couldn't even locate Mexico. Ironically, in an area in which it would seem the most attention to detail would be paid, it's being ignored with painful consistency. We don't do much better in our own country. Recently a Gallup Youth Survey reported that only six in ten teenagers could name the Vice President of the United States. Only 11 percent of the nation's young people could name the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Only 50 percent knew whether or not people who cannot read or write are allowed to vote in national elections, and only 23 percent knew the length of a U.S. Senator's term. Now this truckload of details may seem rather trivial to you, but when we look closer, we see that they do mean much more. In this "global village," as Marshall McLuhan calls our world, how can we even begin to understand various political alliances if we don't even understand our basic geographic locations. And how can we talk about protecting our proud, democratic society if we don't know the workings of our democratic system. And, in some ways, in education, lack of detail isn't only being allowed, it's even encouraged. Hey, don't want to waste time in science class by actually seeing how the experiment works? Simple, just look in the back of the book. See what's supposed to happen. Don't want to read a full-length novel for English class? Easy. Just read the *Cliff Notes*. When we ignore detail, all we're really doing is giving ourselves an incomplete picture. Many times it's those little details that cause us problems. Don't believe me? Just ask the politician who was publicly embarrassed because of that "one little slipup." Ask the job applicant who didn't bother with little things like punctuation and capitalization on his job résumé, and lost the job to someone who did. Ask the worker who can't get ahead in his job because his grammar is atrocious. . . . Without detail we lose a sense of accuracy, depth, and wholeness—and why? Because we either believe that the experts will do it for us, or details just aren't worth our effort.

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Joe is asking us not to make a hasty generalization, or to draw a conclusion that applies to all people. Obviously, some people do care about details and the parts that add up to the whole. Here, however, Joe is saying that the problem of "details" is still large enough to merit attention.

So now I guess we come down to the big question of the game. How can we stop ignoring details? The answer is simple. First, we have to realize that details are important, that the whole is the sum of the parts. Second, we've got to use what we have learned. We have to start paying attention to details and encouraging others to do the same. Now right here I'd like to stop and tell you what I'm *not* saying. What I'm not saying is that you should spend so much time on

details that you lose sight of your general purpose. Or that you should pay attention to unnecessary details. But we need to start pursuing the "not so trivial." Some have already started. Recently a game was produced called *In Search of Identity*. The object of the game is to introduce young black children to their heritage, to give them an exposure to some of their black heroes, and to inspire them to learn more. And that's the attitude we need. Not to just be satisfied, to take the easy way out, but to want to delve deeper. And I'm not just talking about occupation, education, and government, I'm talking about people and people's feelings. When was the last time you took the time to look away from life's hectic schedule to say those small things to the special people in your life? "Thank you," "I appreciate that," "I love you."

I'd like to conclude with a story. When French military figure, Marshall Lautey, was in his eighties, he approached his gardener about planting an orchard. "But," the gardener replied, "the trees would not bear fruit for twenty years." "Then," replied Marshall, "we must begin planting at once." Ladies and gentlemen, there are details in this room now that can make a difference, and, after all, we are anything but trivial. We must begin planting at once. It's time for us to start. So let's remember a few things. First, that the pursuit of detail is the pursuit of excellence and of understanding, and, the tape self-destructed in five seconds on *Mission: Impossible*, not six.

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The term *reasoning* means that "you can draw conclusions from the evidence." Joe wants you to draw the conclusion from the evidence that he has presented that details—whether they involve our jobs, our nation, or our personal lives—do matter, and that we need to spend as much time examining the specifics that make up our "day-to-day living"—as we do playing the board game, *Trivial Pursuit*.