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The disciplines of oratory and technical writing are more similar than we’ve been led to believe. What seems to draw attention is the negative and what doesn’t work, but let’s change focus and find what connects the two. Both forms of delivery have in common the need for cause and effect when it comes to their audiences. In oratory, aside from the delivery, the most important component is the way in which one captures their audience, as well as their reaction. One form of technical communication is what’s known as articulation, which one needs to communicate efficiently, whether as an orator or the latter. A technical communicator “works to create symmetry within the negotiation of differential relations of power between sender and receiver” (Slack et al., p 14). Not only does the technical writer deliver their works in favor of power and utilizing as so, but they are a chameleon of sorts in that the technical writer can also use power to “disrupt relations of power”, (Slack et al., p 15) much as the skilled orator does when addressing and connecting with the audience. It is important to get down on their level, so to speak.  And in doing so, the skilled orator must “be engaged with sufficient resourcefulness and expertise . . . “ and  cannot do so “without knowledge of statutes, tradition, and law, and without an understanding of human character and behaviors” (Bizzell et al., p 916). To know your audience, to connect with your audience, and to provide them with factual evidence, is to master oratory and the delivery of information through technical writing. Contrary to this method of communication, is the transmission lens.

In simple terms, the transmission view is a means of delivering a message clearly and deliberately. It is used to invoke “a desired mental and/or behavioral change in the receiver” (Slack et al., p 15). This method may be seen as a double-edged sword, where the writer or orator is faced with a moral dilemma of sorts: to use this power for good or malicious intent. In oratory and technical writing,  the main components are to be “clear, accurate, complete, and easy to access” (Slack et al., p 18).  The ways in which the deliverer chooses to string his or her words together are of the utmost importance here. Learning one’s audience, in terms of their cultural norms and appealing to them, is one way to facilitate proper delivery. The skilled orator knows all too well that he or she “must adapt to the way most people think and feel” (Bizzell et al., p 919). There must be a clear and concise method of delivery to achieve the desired results. Language usage is important here, along with length, style, and tone. Another skill used in providing proper oratory, as well as use in technical writing, is choosing the correct and fitting word to drive one’s point home. Misuse of language in technical writing is the foe of this form of communication, like its misuse in oratory.

Just as the orator must possess knowledge of each subject matter in which they are delivering their verse, so too must the technical writer. From the standpoint of technical writing the issue is in constantly trying to “fix already slippery meanings”  and it’s “important for the communicator to become expert at understanding and manipulating language” (Slack et al., p 23). In oratory and technical writing, alike, the skills to articulate clearly, ethically, and factually are critical. Having a clear understanding of human emotions is an important element in delivering a message. We know that the orator is keen at identifying and “dealing with people’s feelings” (Bizzell et al., p 919), whether they be negative or positive. The orator knows how to navigate such emotions of anger or happiness.

 In addition to this, organization is key in both disciplines. For a speech that is “well organized, distinguished, and characterized by a particular kind of artistry and polish” (Bizzell et al., p 918).  Those in these fields of communication would do well to have an outline provided to properly deliver their message. A certain level of charm is present, however, there is a delicate balance to maintain. For this charm “should be austere and firm, not sweet and overripe” (Bizzell et al., p 957). The technical writer simply has little room for anything but this simplicity of nature.  For the orator, this is a learned skill, not a requirement, and will serve to separate them from the rest. The ability to produce a sort of plainness of speech, and a level of eloquence is all but mandatory in speech and technical writing. In this sense, “It should be lose but not rambling” and the deliverer must avoid “cementing his words together too smoothly” (Bizzell et al., p 1038). The use of metaphors must be limited, but present as well, for it appeals to the imagination of the audience.

Nothing draws on the parallels between technical writing and oratory than the simple notion that the two are now growing together, rather than apart. This is stated clearly when reading that “Although stylistics, grammar, editing, and the use of media still play a major part in the education of technical communicators, it has also become essential to add their educational repertoire work in rhetoric and composition, linguistics, problem solving, audience analysis, and ethics” and must “focus on stylistics, the proper use of forms” (Slack et al., p 19). For the object is to deliver one’s message in a clear and concise manner, much like oratory. Any proper speech, and delivery of writing in the technical sense, must possess certain characteristics and have a solid foundation to follow through and deliver one’s message. It is of great significance to “add, subtract, select, and change meaning” (Slack et al., p 24). There are many moving parts and the skill to navigate each part is imperative.

Works Cited:

1. Bizzell, Patricia and Bruce Herzber, The Rhetorical Tradition, 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020.
2. SLACK, J. D., MILLER, D. J., & DOAK, J. (1993). The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority. Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 7(1), 12–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651993007001002>