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If you can believe it, back in the beginning of 2008, very few Americans had ever heard the name “Sarah Palin” before. Of course, it wouldn’t be long before she was thrown into the public spotlight, campaigned alongside John McCain, and would later be blamed by pundits throughout the country for ruining John McCain’s hopes at the presidency. What caused this meteoric rise and fall of Sarah Palin’s vice presidential campaign, though?

A bit of background would be helpful in understanding why the relatively-unknown Sarah Palin was selected as John McCain’s runningmate in the 2008 election. John McCain is a moderate Republican, and his campaign strategists worried that he would have difficulties courting conservative voters. Although John McCain wanted his vice-presidential runningmate to be Joe Lieberman (Bumiller & Cooper, 2008), a former conservative Democrat who left the Democratic party to run as an independent, his strategists feared that Lieberman was far too centrist to shore up McCain’s weaknesses in winning over conservatives.

Prior to this, the Democratic primaries featured a fiercely-fought race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. When Clinton lost the primary to Obama, the McCain campaign felt that it could pick up women voters who were upset over the loss of Hillary Clinton. Although nobody outside of the McCain campaign saw it coming, Sarah Palin fit the mold of everything John McCain was looking for; being a woman, she appealed to women voters, and she had strong conservative credentials that would help win over the conservative vote.

Sure enough, the initial reaction to Sarah Palin was strong; in the single day following the announcement of Sarah Palin, John McCain received \$7 million in campaign donations (Mosk, 2008). In just one day! McCain also saw a surge in his popularity among white women voters (ABC News, 2008). Everything was going according to the McCain strategists’ plan.

But then, on that fateful day of September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008, a 40-minute interview was aired on ABC News in which Katie Couric interviewed Palin. The interview revealed just how unfit for the office Sarah Palin was. In the interview, Palin made a number of gaffes (not the least of which was when Palin was unable to name even just one news source that she reads on a regular basis); the gaffes in this interview would be the first in a long series of gaffes made by Palin in many media appearances. Many pundits viewed the Couric interviews as the turning of the tide of public opinion against Palin.

Here is one such question and answer exchanged between Couric and Palin about whether the \$700 billion corporate bailout that occurred under President George W. Bush should be preferred over bailing out individual middle-class families (Sullivan, 2008):

COURIC: Why isn't it better, Governor Palin, to spend \$700 billion helping middle-class families, who are struggling with healthcare, housing, gas and groceries, allow them to spend more and put more money into the economy instead of helping these big financial institutions that played a role in creating this mess?

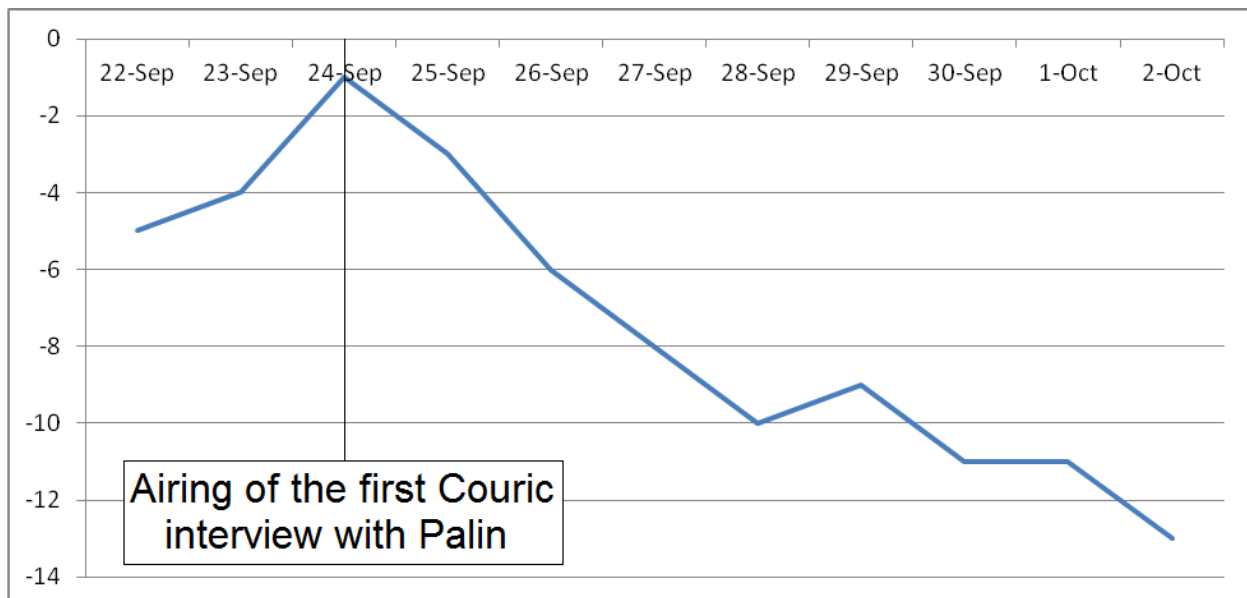
PALIN: That's why I say, I, like every American I'm speaking with, we're ill about this position that we have been put in where it is the tax payers looking to bailout, but ultimately, what the bailout does is help those who are concerned about the healthcare reform that is needed to help shore up our economy, helping— Oh! It's got to be all about job creation too, shoring up our economy, and putting it back on the right track, so healthcare reform and reducing taxes and reining in spending has got to accompany tax reductions and tax relief for Americans. And trade, we've got to see trade as opportunity, not as— competitive— scary thing, but one in five jobs being created in the trade sector today, we've got to look at that as more opportunity. All those things under the umbrella of job creation. This bailout is a part of that.

The original question, if you can even remember it by now, was about the corporate bailout. Palin, however, rambles and veers all over the place. She starts by talking about healthcare reform, and then makes bizarre appeals to job creation, shoring up the economy, and free trade.

This utter lack of organization in her thoughts makes it difficult to interpret her meaning. There is, no doubt, some logical connection that Sarah Palin (or, more likely, Sarah Palin's speechwriters) came up with for when she was asked about the bailout, but her inability to explain the connection between her thoughts and the organization of her "speech" made her look drastically uninformed and unfit for the vice presidency.

Palin's favorability ratings immediately slipped. On the days leading up to her interview, her net favorability rating (calculated by taking the number of people with a favorable opinion of a candidate and subtracting the number of people with an unfavorable opinion of the candidate) was steadily rising. On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, her net favorability rating was -5 (42% favorable, 47%

unfavorable). This number would rise to -4 (43% favorable, 47% unfavorable) on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and ultimately to -1 (44% favorable, 45% unfavorable) on the 24<sup>th</sup> (the date of the first segment of the Couric interview). Then, after that fateful day, the public reacted almost immediately. Palin's net favorability rating dropped to -3 (43% favorable, 46% unfavorable) on September 25<sup>th</sup>, to -6 (41% favorable, 47% unfavorable) the day after that, and ultimately slipping all the way to -13 (40% favorable, 53% unfavorable) by October 2<sup>nd</sup>, a week after the interview. (All polling numbers come from DailyKos, 2008).



**Figure 1: Sarah Palin's net favorability rating was going up until the fateful day of the Katie Couric interviews, the first of which aired September 24<sup>th</sup>; after that, Palin's net favorability rating plummeted.**

Palin's inability to effectively organize her thoughts signaled the beginning of the end of her hopes at becoming Vice President of the United States. You, however, can learn from her mistakes.

As you organize your speech, remember that you have two goals: comprehension and retention. Your speech must, first, be understandable to the audience; it means little to have incredible ideas if the audience doesn't understand them. Second, though, you want your speech to be memorable; one challenge of speechmaking is that a speech is fleeting, it's ephemeral, it's a one-shot deal. You give the speech once, and then it's over, and you just hope that members of the audience remember it long enough to consider your ideas later on. This is quite different from a

written paper where there is always a written version that the reader can refer to at any point, even months later. For that reason, it's important when crafting a speech to make the speech memorable as well as understandable, something that the audience can think about even after you've delivered the final word of the speech.

Before you can organize a speech, you must first **Brainstorm** ideas to include in the speech. Once you've done so, then you should organize your thoughts according to three themes: **Structure**, **Stream of Thought**, and **Stickiness**. Structure refers to the overall organizational strategies you choose, stream of thought to the logical flow between your points, and stickiness to strategies used to improve audience retention. All three techniques improve audience comprehension and retention.

## **Brainstorming:**

A major problem with Sarah Palin's speech is that she was brainstorming during the presentation. Given the key issues at the time of the 2008 election, she should have been very thoroughly prepared for the bailout question, and should have had her response well thought out already. Unfortunately, she simply didn't. Instead of having a polished, prepared response, she just spit out a bunch of ideas that were poorly developed on healthcare reform, job creation, shoring up the economy, and free trade.

Coming up rapidly with numerous (albeit disorganized) appeals, justifications, and main points for your speech is necessary, but this should be done during the preparation of your speech, and not during the presentation of your speech.

Why? It has a lot to do with how the brain is structured. Your brain is divided into two hemispheres: the left brain and the right brain. The left brain is responsible for ordering, sequencing, numbering, and thinking logically. The right brain, on the other hand, is responsible for creativity.

During the brainstorming session, let your right brain take control. Throw out thoughts and ideas in a random order, whenever they come to you. Write them down on a sheet of paper or a whiteboard. Your left brain may be tempted to take over, and try to apply structure and order to the speech, thinking "That point doesn't go there! It should go next to that other idea" or thinking "This doesn't belong in this speech at all!" Although your left brain may try to take over, don't

let it! At this point of time, you're trying to freely associate ideas, and get them all down on paper.

Perhaps if Palin had started off brainstorming the ideas that she wanted to cover under the bailout, the results would have looked something like this:

<b><u>The Corporate Bailout:</u></b>		
Makes me ill	Leads to healthcare reform	Creates jobs!
Reduces taxes	Reins in spending	Leads to free trade
	Shores up the economy	

**Figure 2: How Sarah Palin's thoughts might have been brainstormed. The thoughts aren't organized yet; only the right brain has been used at this point. Using the left brain will come next.**

Well, there's still no organization to those thoughts, but at least they're now down on paper, and can eventually be organized once the left brain gets involved!

At this point, however, it's important to avoid using the left brain because very often when the left brain applies order, it forgets something very important, something that doesn't quite fit into the logical progression of the thoughts and ideas so far. You may end up leaving out hugely important details if your left brain takes over too quickly. So, start thinking creatively with your right brain, and only after you've completed the initial brainstorm can you look to apply order to the speech, when you start applying *structure* to the speech.

## **Structure**

Barbara McClintock is a Nobel laureate physiologist. Her work was groundbreaking; in the 1940s, she was the first person who realized that genes were responsible for turning physical characteristics on and off, a very important finding in our current understanding of DNA and, by extension, the human genome. Her work, however, was met with skepticism and by 1953, she stopped publishing altogether because nobody believed her. It wasn't until 40 years after her original findings, in 1983, when the scientific community finally recognized the importance of her work, and granted her a Nobel Prize.

Why was she met with so much skepticism, though? Although one could certainly argue that there was a certain amount of prejudice regarding women scientists in the 1940s, another contributing factor was that she didn't communicate very well, and people never understood what she was saying. A contemporary, Dr. Rollin Hotchkiss, explains that McClintock was an expert

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microscopist, who would zoom in and out on genes on her microscope. It was important to see the minute details, but then zoom out and see what she was looking at on a bigger scale. The problem, according to Hotchkiss, was that she also organized her thoughts this way. She'd move from macro, to micro, back to macro, even within a single sentence (Keller, 1983)! Her thoughts were so disorganized that, even though Hotchkiss and her other colleagues knew she was saying something important, they simply didn't understand what she was trying to say!

McClintock's work in the 1940s wasn't recognized until 40 years later in 1983 when the scientific community finally understood it. Just think that if McClintock's findings on DNA were understood sooner, we could have been 40 years further in our understanding of DNA and, by extension, the human genome. It's a frightening thought that there can be brilliant people, such as McClintock, who have very important findings, but aren't able to share them simply because their thoughts aren't organized.

Thankfully, it's very possible to overcome the pitfalls of a disorganized speech. In fact, there are many ways to present your ideas in an organized, cohesive fashion. For now, though, you will be given a single organizational template for organizing your speech. This template can never steer you wrong, and if you use this method of putting your speech together, it will always be organized. There are just eight simple parts; all you have to do is fill in the blanks, and you'll have a neatly organized speech! The eight parts are: hook, thesis, preview, body #1, body #2, body #3, review, and finale. They look like this:

**Introduction:**

1. Hook – How will you rope the audience in and get them excited to hear you?
2. Thesis – What is the overarching theme or idea that the speech is about?
3. Preview – What are the three (or so) main points that you are about to discuss?

**Body:**

4. Body Point #1 – What is the first major area of analysis in your speech?
5. Body Point #2 – What is the second major area of analysis in your speech?
6. Body Point #3 – What is the third major area of analysis in your speech?

**Conclusion:**

7. Review – What were the three (or so) main points that you just discussed?
8. Finale – How will you go out with a bang, leaving your audience wanting more?

**Figure 3: The above is one possible organizational template; just fill in the blanks for each of the eight elements above, and your speech will be neatly organized and ready for you to deliver. This organizational template will never steer you wrong, and will always produce**

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**a well-organized speech. Recognize, though, there are many effective ways to organize speeches, and this is just one.**

Each of these eight elements will be covered below, and you'll better understand how to write each of them effectively; before discussing each of the eight elements, individually, though, let's turn back to Governor Palin's remarks on the bailout, and start applying our left brains to see if anything simply doesn't belong.

<u><b>The Corporate Bailout:</b></u>		
Makes me ill	<del>Leads to healthcare reform</del>	Creates jobs!
<del>Reduces taxes</del>	<del>Reins in spending</del>	<del>Leads to free trade</del>
	Shores up the economy	

Wow. Well, we've pretty thoroughly gutted Palin's original brainstorm, but in eliminating a lot of ideas that just don't make sense, we'll greatly strengthen the rigor of those that do make sense (since those ideas will now receive a greater emphasis, free from dilution by the other points).

What did we remove? First, there's no clear link between the corporate bailout and healthcare reform; it was especially unfortunate that Palin began her remarks with this thought since first impressions tend to last (as will be covered below). There is also no clear link between the bailout and tax reduction; as it happens, tax reductions for the middle class and small businesses were included in the act that included the bailout, but that's certainly not a reason to support the bailout, and if tax reductions were the goal, that could be done independently of the bailout. The idea that the bailout reins in spending is absurd; spending \$700 billion on a bailout is the opposite of reining in spending! Finally, there is also no clear link between the bailout and free trade; it's best just to eliminate this idea altogether.

What about the three ideas that we're left with, though? The idea that it makes Palin ill is not a reason in and of itself to support the bailout, although Palin's admittance of her own initial negative feelings toward the bailout humanizes her and may even help in winning over skeptics, people who also feel sickened by a \$700 billion bailout, so let's not eliminate that thought just yet. The other two arguments, that it creates jobs and shores up the economy, are the two biggest justifications for the bailout. These are arguments that absolutely must be included in her remarks.

Having cleaned up Palin's initial brainstorm a little bit, it will make it easier to construct her thoughts throughout the rest of the speech creation process. Let's turn to that process now, starting with the three elements in the introduction.

## Introduction:

The introduction is what sets the groundwork for the speech to come. A good introduction does two things: first, it gets the audience excited about the speech to come, making them want to listen, and second, it defines what the speech is (and isn't) about, letting the audience know what to pay attention to. As mentioned above, the introduction consists of three parts: a *hook*, a *thesis*, and a *preview*.

### *Hook:*

The hook is what draws the audience in, what “hooks” their attention, and makes them want to listen to the remainder of the speech. In order to better appreciate the importance of the hook, you need to know two things about first impressions: first, they're formed remarkably quickly, and second, they tend to form lasting impressions.

How much of a professor's lecture do you think you need to listen to before you'd be able to accurately predict the professor's end-of-semester teaching evaluations? Do you think you'd need to see the professor's performance over a few classes? Do you think you'd be able to predict the professor's performance after a single lecture? What about just half an hour of a lecture? How long do you need to be around the lecturer to predict how good a lecturer that person is? In a classic study, a pair of social psychologists at Harvard University, Ambady and Rosenthal (1993), sought out to determine the answer to that question. They started by showing study participants a 30-second clip of a professor lecturing; even after just a 30-second clip, participants were able to significantly predict the end-of-semester evaluations. So, then they shortened the clips to just 15 seconds; again, participants were able to significantly predict the end-of-semester evaluations. Then they shortened it again, this time to *just six seconds!* Even after watching just six seconds of a professor lecturing, the participants were able to significantly predict the professor's end-of-quarter teaching evaluations!

Similarly, whenever you give a speech, it takes just six seconds for people to form an impression of you, and whatever that impression is, it tends to last. In a more recent study from another pair of social psychologists, Sunnafrank and Ramirez (2004), college freshmen in a class introduced each other for a brief encounter (three to ten minutes, depending on which section of the class they were enrolled in). After that first encounter, they were asked to evaluate the other person, and also were asked to predict what sort of relationship they would have with the other person (ranging from “nodding acquaintance” to “close friend”). Over the next nine weeks of the quarter, the students were given many opportunities to interact with one another, and learn about



the other person (learning both about qualities that the student might like or dislike). It would seem that after continuous interactions over a nine-week period, students would be given plenty of opportunities to change their minds about their first impressions. But they didn't. Their impressions of the other person in week nine were significantly correlated with the first impression, and students were able to significantly predict the nature of the relationship even after only a brief interaction. It did not matter, by the way, whether the students were given three minutes, six minutes, or ten minutes in that first interaction; three-minute interactions yielded as accurate predictions as ten-minute interactions.

Although first impressions don't *always* create permanent impressions (for instance, you probably have people in your life who you once disliked and are now close friends, or vice versa), but, even so, the power of that first impression cannot be understated. Certainly it takes a long time to undo a first impression, and that's something to be aware of when giving a speech; if first-impressions of a fellow student could not be undone even after nine weeks of a course, it's very unlikely that you'll be able to undo a first impression in the context of a relatively short speech.

Why is it that first impressions tend to last, though? Well, obviously a certain amount of time, the first impression is correct; for instance, if the first few seconds of that lecture was, indeed, boring, and then the rest of the lecture continued to be boring, then the first impression was absolutely correct.

Even when first impressions are wrong, though, they tend to stick because of a powerful bias in our brains known as the *confirmation bias*. That is, once we form a hypothesis about someone or something, our brains start searching for information to confirm our original suspicion. Of course, once it finds any supporting evidence whatsoever, we tend to think "Ah ha! I was right all along!"

This bias was seen quite clearly during the Washington D.C. sniper incident in 2002, when a pair of snipers was shooting civilians from atop buildings. After the first shooting, a witness reported seeing a white van. This account was reported and spread like a wildfire through the media. After each subsequent shooting, witnesses reported seeing the same white van. Police pulled over many white vans, but never found the suspects in any of them. It turned out, of course, that there was no white van at all (the actual car used during each of the shootings was a blue sedan) (Roberts, 2009). But people's confirmation biases took over; people kept looking for a white van, and they found it.

By now, you should have a very thorough understanding of first impressions. They are formed quickly and, even when they're wrong, they tend to last (because of the confirmation bias).

When giving a speech, then, it's of vital importance that the first six or so seconds of your speech set the right tone, and immediately get the audience excited about your speech. These first six or so seconds will disproportionately affect how the audience will perceive your speech. It's of utmost importance to make these first six seconds as impactful as possible, but how do you do that?

First, don't waste time with pleasantries, introductions, or unnecessary fillers. The first six seconds of the speech are so critical in setting the tone of the speech, and it's quite dull if you start your speech the same way as so many other people. Such overused openings are "Today I'm going to tell you about..." or "Hi, my name is Matt Vassar, and..." or "Thank you for letting me speak to you today..." If you want to sound like every other speaker, use one of those introductions as your opening words.

If, however, you want to stand out and be interesting, use one of the openings below.

Here are five ways that you can open a speech; it is important to note that each of these five techniques can be used effectively or ineffectively. For instance, just because you ask a question does not mean that it's a good question. You can use one of the five techniques below, but make sure to give it a little bit of punch:

**Five ways to open a speech:**

1. **Question** – ask something provoking of the members of the audience.
2. **Fact or Figure** – give an interesting or shocking fact or figure.
3. **Story** – tell an interesting or humorous anecdote to members of the audience.
4. **Quotation** – an interesting and relevant quote from a contemporary or historical figure.
5. **Startling Statement** – making an unexpected statement will get people's attention.

*Question*

Asking an interesting, thought-provoking question can get people's attention. The beauty of the question as an opening to a speech is that even if members of the audience don't know the answer to your question, they then listen to you to hear the answer. If the answers in the audience tend to be predictable, you can also use questions very effectively as a segue into the speech matter. For instance, if you are teaching how to use PowerPoint more effectively, you may ask people what they dislike about PowerPoint presentations. Invariably, someone will respond "text-heavy slides" or "bullet point-driven slides." This may naturally transition into your thesis statement of something along the lines of "Visually stunning PowerPoint slides can be created if images are used instead of text."

## *Fact or Figure*

Using a shocking fact or figure can immediately get people’s attention. Quantitative figures almost always seem big; for instance, “40,460 American women are expected to die from breast cancer this year. That means that by the end of this one-hour speech, five women will have died from this disease.” Qualitative figures can also be used for dramatic emphasis; for instance, “All over the land, discrimination and systematic exclusion of people is happening, based on nothing more than the color of their skin. It’s probably happening right here, right now.” These certainly catch the audience’s attention, and make members of the audience want to hear what the rest of the speech is about.

## *Story*

Humans are naturally suckers for stories. It’s not a coincidence that almost all of human history was passed down through stories, and even lessons were taught in the form of stories. Aesop’s Fables quite literally ended each story with a moral to it, or a lesson for how one should live life. Even *The Bible* imparts lessons through stories; it teaches people how to live their lives, but the lessons are embedded in story form. Stories can be very powerful; people love hearing them, so they’re naturally entertaining, but they also can have meaning and lessons embedded within them. Starting your speech off with a relevant and interesting story is almost guaranteed to get the audience excited about what you have to say.

## *Quotation*

Using an interesting, relevant quotation can pique the audience’s curiosity, especially if the quote isn’t used in the way that the audience might expect. For instance, if I began my speech “The great inventor and politician Benjamin Franklin once said: ‘Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.’ [pause] By that logic, I must be the unhealthiest, poorest, and stupidest human being alive—because I *love* my sleep!” If the rest of the speech was on the importance of getting a sufficient amount of sleep, that opening probably will get the audiences’ attention just fine!

## *Startling Statement*

Being contrarian and saying something that nobody expects is a great way to get people’s attentions. Humans naturally become alert when sometime unexpected or startling happens, and you can take advantage of this innate instinct by opening your speech with something surprising. For example, if you were speaking in front of a health clinic, and you began your speech saying:

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“The secret to losing weight is by eating more. [pause] I know that sounds odd; we’ve been told all of our lives that the way to lose weight is to *reduce* what we eat. A recent study from Penn State University found that simply adding one cup of reduced-sodium soup actually causes you to lose weight. Here’s the kicker, though: not only did soup-eaters lose about the same amount of weight as traditional dieters, but the soup-eaters also kept the weight off better than those on a traditional diet (Rolls, et. al., 2005). Why? Because the amount of calories in soup is very low, but also filling; this means that by the time you grab for your favorite junk foods, you’ll be less hungry and eat fewer of it.” People don’t expect to lose weight by *adding* foods to their diets, and when you make such a shocking, unconventional statement, it gets people’s attention and makes them wonder how they could possibly lose weight by adding more types of foods into their diets.

One thing that the startling statement does very well is that it piques the audience’s curiosity; once you say something unexpected, the audience is curious about how you could justify such an unusual claim. Piquing the audience’s curiosity is something that you should always shoot for, no matter what type of hook you give. Get members of the audience a little bit curious, keep them on the edge of their seats, and they’ll be waiting in suspense for you to reveal what you’re doing with your speech.

Take a look one more time at the brainstorm for Sarah Palin’s response to the bailout question, and see if you can find a good hook for the reorganization of her speech:

<b><u>The Corporate Bailout:</u></b>		
Makes me ill	Creates jobs!	Shores up the economy
The way Palin began her actual response to the question, with the idea of how the bailout “makes her ill,” is actually a pretty catchy way to introduce the speech. Since Palin supports the corporate bailout, one wouldn’t expect it to make her ill. This startling statement immediately gets the audience’s attention, and makes for a good hook.		

Of course, once you’ve gotten the audience’s attention, you then need to explain what your speech is about.

## ***Thesis***

Writing a good thesis statement is as challenging as it is essential to giving a speech; the challenge of writing a thesis statement is that a large amount of meaning must be packed into a

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small amount of words. A thesis statement is only one or two sentences long, but is the overarching idea that links all of the speech’s ideas together.

Looking to the way proverbs are written should help in writing a thesis statement. Proverbs are short, concise statements that tell truths. The reason proverbs have been passed down for centuries, or even millennia, is because of how simple they are to say, but how meaningful the expression is behind them. “A stitch in time saves nine.” “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.” “A penny saved is a penny earned.” Each of these is a short statement packed with a lot of meaning.

The importance of the thesis statement can’t be understated; good thesis statements have earned people millions, or even billions of dollars. For instance, Domino’s Pizza, now the second-largest pizza franchise in the world, created an entire business around the thesis statement: “You get fresh, hot pizza to your door in 30 minutes or less—or it’s free!” This is a short statement, but it’s packed with meaning, and it gave everybody working at Domino’s a clear objective to achieve. What about FedEx? “When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.” Another excellent thesis statement, with a whole lot of meaning packed into a small package.

You should strive to do the same; make sure your thesis statement conveys the overarching principle or idea given throughout the speech, but pack all of that meaning into only a few words.

Turning to Palin’s response once more, is there a thesis a statement somewhere in her thoughts?

<b><u>The Corporate Bailout:</u></b>		
<b>[hook]</b> Makes me ill	Creates jobs!	Shores up the economy
<p>Palin’s support of the bailout is predicated on the idea that the bailout would create jobs and shore up the economy. A big problem in Palin’s remarks, though, is that there is no thesis statement that connects the bailout to these two supporting ideas. How exactly does the bailout promote job creation and a shored up economy?</p>		
<p>Determining an answer to that question also determines what the thesis of the speech would be, and fortunately, there’s a pretty intuitive link between the two ideas. The banks being bailed out are responsible for funding so many businesses through loans. Many businesses are started up or expanded through the use of loans. Without businesses being able to open and expand so easily, the economy suffers. Furthermore, without new businesses or expansion of old businesses, opportunities for job creation is lost. So, Palin is quite correct that if our banks go bankrupt, the</p>		

economy and job creation suffers. Bailing out the banks, thus, promotes growth of the economy and job creation.

We still don't have a thesis statement, though; remember that a thesis statement needs to be concise, and only one or two sentences (like a proverb). So, what's a simple statement that encompasses all of the ideas, capturing the essential nature of the banking system as the lynchpin of our economy?

Perhaps something along the lines of the following would make for a good thesis statement: "Banks form the backbone of our economy". We can expand it slightly (not much, though, because a thesis must be concise) and add in a justification for why banks are so important to the economy: "Banks form the backbone of our economy; without them, businesses will have difficulty expanding and providing jobs." Such a thesis statement clearly indicates the need of the banking system, and frames the key ideas to follow.

## *Preview*

Once you've come up with the overarching theme that links all of the ideas of the speech together, it's time to come up with three or so main points. The preview is where you briefly discuss what the three or so main points are before delving into them in depth. Although Aristotle originally came up with this formula, the US Army distilled it into the following training method:

1. Tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em
2. Tell 'em
3. Then tell 'em what you told 'em."

The preview is the "tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em" section. It's where you give the audience a roadmap that the presentation will follow. It's where you briefly and succinctly mention what your three (or so) main points are, and what you intend to cover for the remainder of the presentation.

You might think that it's an awful lot of repetition when you preview your main points, give your main points, and then review your main points. This is by design! Remember that a speech is different from a written document in that it's fleeting; while a document can be read again later on, a speech cannot. You have one chance to get your points across to the audience, and if they missed something, it's gone. So, the built-in repetition of having a preview and a review ensures that members of the audience will have at least three opportunities to catch your main points, thus increasing the chance that they'll remember them later on.

In labeling your main points, make sure to keep your labels concise. The three main points in this paper (structure, stream of thought, and stickiness) are deliberately only one to three words each. Such short labels tend to be memorable, whereas having very long labels for each of your main points makes it a lot harder for the audience to take in your points and remember them. Keep the labels of your main points simple; make them easier to remember.

## **Body:**

The body is where you “tell ‘em;” it’s the most substantive part of your speech, where you elaborate on your three or so main points, and give all the supporting facts that back up your thesis statement. As you construct the body of your speech, there are two things you should consider: the body points themselves, and the transitions between body points. Later on, in the stream of thought section of this paper, there will also be discussion on how to order your main points, but for now the focus just will be on constructing them.

### ***Body Points***

Each body point should be a well-reasoned justification for the original thesis statement. You should support your reasoning with facts, figures, information, quotes, data, etc. Make sure that each body point is thorough and sufficiently proves what it sets out to prove.

As you continue constructing your speech, you should be aware of how writing differs from speech. In speech, sentences tend to be shorter. Although a long sentence can be untangled in writing, it’s very difficult to listen to and keep track of a very long sentence with multiple subordinate clauses when you can’t see the grammar and punctuation that is written. Also, a simple syntax, subject → predicate → object, is usually used in speech; it’s very rare when that order is inverted. Keeping the syntax simple and the length of the sentences short produces prose that is easy to listen to and understand.

### ***Transitions***

One thing that newer speechmakers often struggle with is how to transition between thoughts and ideas. Try to think of the logical relationship between the two different thoughts or ideas, and then explain it as you move from point A to point B; doing so will create a nice, smooth, *organic transition*.

Too often, though, speakers use inorganic transitions. That is, they will say things like “Now that I’ve, first, talked about Mercury, let’s talk, second, about Venus.” The problem with this is that it

doesn't explain the relationship between Mercury and Venus; it just very abruptly moves us into a totally new area of analysis. Perhaps a better transition would be "Mercury is the planet closest to the sun, but as we move further away from the sun, we see that the planets' geologies can be quite different. As can be seen with Venus..." This transition explains the precise logical relationship between the two main points (proximity to the sun), and also gives us a nice smooth transition into the next area of analysis.

Taking a look at Sarah Palin's response to the bailout question, are there three or so main points that fall under the category of job creation?

### **The Corporate Bailout:**

[*hook*] Makes me ill

[*Thesis*] "The backbone of our economy"

[*Body*] Creates jobs!

[*Body*] Shores up the economy

Although we eliminated a lot of Palin's supports for the bailout that weren't as well substantiated (e.g., that it leads to health care reform), we do have a couple of very strong justifications for the bailout, namely that it creates jobs and that it shores up the economy. Let's label these as our body points. We'll decide later on which order the body points go in, but for now, let's just make sure we have our body points labeled.

Are they substantive enough?

The first idea, that it creates jobs, certainly seems like a substantive justification for the bailout; if businesses don't have their bank accounts honored, they, too, will go bankrupt, resulting in a massive loss of jobs. Without a reliable banking system to extend loans to businesses and provide safekeeping for the business' money, the job market suffers, which affects all Americans throughout the country.

The second idea, that it shores up the economy, seems like an even bigger justification for the bailout! The economy is fully reliant on banks as the backbone of the economy; people keep their money in their bank account, and without trust and reliability in the banking system to hold that money safely, people will not invest their money, and banks will not invest in businesses. Shoring up the economy through the bailout certainly seems important.

So, there we have it. Two very important main points, both economic justifications for the economic policy of the bailout.



## Conclusion

The conclusion is the last impression you have on the audience, your last opportunity to encourage them to take action after the speech, or to consider your viewpoint and why it is important. The conclusion, then, has two purposes; first, it reminds the audience what was covered throughout the speech, and second, it leaves a lasting impression that makes them want to investigate your subject matter further.

In order to meet those objectives, your conclusion should be divided into two part: a *review* and a *finale*.

### *Review*

Just as the preview “tells ‘em what you’re gonna tell ‘em,” the review is now where you “tell ‘em what you told ‘em.”

Briefly summarize your three (or so) main points, and remind the audience what was covered over the course of the speech. Again, this built in repetition helps the audience to recall your speech even after the speech is over, so it’s important to have this one last layer of repetition in your speech. In order to maximize the benefit of this repetition, make sure to use the same concise labels that you used in your preview. So, just as this paper previewed the three main points as “structure, stream of thought, and stickiness,” the review should use the exact same terminology, and remind the audience that the three main points were “structure, stream of thought, and stickiness.” Once you remind the audience of the three main points, you can very briefly summarize what each of those points covered.

### *Finale*

Every showperson in Las Vegas knows that you put your two best routines at the very beginning and the very ending of the show. Why? Because the first act is what makes the audience stick around, glued to their seats for the remainder of the show. The last act, on the other hand, is what leaves them wanting more, what sends them out the door with wallets open, straight to the showperson’s merchandise stand.

It’s similar in speech construction; you want a great opening routine for your speech, but you also want a great closing routine, something that ties the entire speech together and leaves the audience wanting more. The very purpose of giving a speech is getting the audience to consider some viewpoint or idea they weren’t previously exposed to; by the end of the speech, they’ve

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been exposed to that viewpoint, but ideally you want them to consider it further. A great finale encourages them to do precisely that.

One very effective way to tie the entire speech together is to give your hook, and then whatever you mentioned in your hook, don't mention it again throughout the entire speech until you reach the finale. Then tie the hook and the finale together, explaining how they both relate to the subject matter of the speech. This technique of relating the finale back to the hook brings a sense of psychological closure, and makes the speech feel as though it's all neatly packaged together as a whole.

So, what about Governor Palin? Let's turn to her remarks and see if we can find a way to neatly package everything together in the finale.

## **The Corporate Bailout:**

[*hook*] Makes me ill

[*Thesis*] "The backbone of our economy"

[*Body*] Creates jobs!

[*Body*] Shores up the economy

Since Governor Palin started off the speech with the idea that it makes her ill, let's bring the speech full circle and end with that idea as well. "Even though the idea of a \$700 billion bailout made me feel ill at first, I still strongly support the bailout. In fact, I realized that it's the only possible way for the American economy to recover."

With the entire speech tied together, from the hook to the finale, Palin's remarks will now seem organized a lot more effectively.

Once you have all your ideas down on paper, the next step is determining how to order each of them. Of course, you already know that you will give your introduction first, your body second, and your conclusion third, but you don't know the ordering of your individual three (or so) body points. How do you determine your stream of thought?

## **Stream of Thought**

Once you have three (or so) main points to your speech, you need to decide how you will organize your main points, and in what order they ought to be presented. There are nearly an endless number of ways to logically organize your main points, and it's not so important which logical progression you use, so much as that you have some form of logical progression that moves us from one point to the next.

Here are several possible streams of thought, although it's important to note that this is not an exhaustive list and you can probably think of many other streams of thought that would also have a logical progression:

## **Chronological:**

One way to order your main points is simply in the order the events happened; this is a particularly commonly-used stream of thought when telling a story, although it can also be used outside of stories. For instance, in a speech on the evolution of biological life on earth, our three main points might be single-celled life, plant life, and animal life. This would follow a chronological order that demonstrates that first single-celled life emerged, then plant life, and finally animal life.

Incidentally, as you just observed many narrative speeches in class, you probably noticed that many of the narrative speeches followed a chronological order. The stories were simply told in the order that the events happened.

## **Causal:**

A close cousin of the chronological stream of thought is the causal stream of thought. This method of ordering your points also moves in the order events happen, except that in the causal relationship, one event causes the next.

Sometimes the three main points may be cause, effect, and solution. That is, something happened in the past (cause) that created a problem (effect); the speech's final point, then, discusses how to solve this problem (solution).

Other times, instead of discussing problems, the causal relationship may instead discuss a unique opportunity. In this case, perhaps the first main point would still be the cause, which is something that came about to create the second main point, the opportunity. The third point, then, discusses options for leveraging the new opportunity.

## **Funnel/Reverse Funnel:**

Think of the shape of a funnel. The biggest part of the funnel is at the top, and the smallest part is at the bottom.

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A speech following a funnel stream of thought starts with the broadest area of analysis, then moves to the second-largest area of analysis, and finishes with the smallest area of analysis. For instance, a discussion of US politics may start with international politics (e.g., the UN or NATO), continue with national politics (e.g., the United States Federal government), and finish with local politics (e.g., state and local governments).

The reverse funnel is exactly the opposite; it starts with the narrowest area of analysis and expands to broader areas of analysis as the speech unfolds.

(Incidentally, this handout follows a funnel stream of thought. It starts with *structure*, a macro-level view of the speech and how you construct the broad-level organization of the speech. It then moves into *stream of thought*, which just discusses the organization of the three or so body points, specifically. Then, it concludes with *stickiness*, which consists of sentence-level strategies that can be used to enhance audience retention.)

## **Spatial:**

A speech organized spatially simply follows the order that things appear in space. This could be north to south, south to north, west to east, east to west, top to bottom, bottom to top, left to right, right to left, and so forth.

A speech on NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) might start with Canada, continue south to the US, and conclude with Mexico.

It's again important to note that the above list of streams of thought is *not* exhaustive, and there are many more logical orders that can be used to create a well-organized speech. It's not so important which stream of thought you use, so much as that you have *a* stream of thought in the speech, not just so the audience can understand the logical relationship between each of your points, but also to benefit you.

Earlier, you read about the importance of *organic transitions*. One benefit of choosing a logically-organized stream of thought is that you will always have a built-in organic transition. For instance, if we were giving the NAFTA speech (organized based on spatial cues, from north to south), our transition from the Canada to the United States practically writes itself: "Canada certainly isn't the only country affected by NAFTA; as we head out of Canada's borders to the south, we see that the United States is also affected by it."



repetition in the preview, body points, and review; if you decide to use a different organizational strategy, you should still strive for repetition.

This is a hallmark of many other successful speeches. The most famous speech of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. He uses an enormous amount of repetition throughout the entire speech, not the least of which was the famous refrain: "I have a dream."

If you went home at the end of Dr. King's remarks and forgot everything else he had to say, you would probably remember that he had a dream. Once you remember he had a dream, then it's a lot easier to reconstruct the rest of the speech: he has a dream that his four children will be judged not by the color of their skin but the content of their character, he has a dream that little black boys and black girls will join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as brothers and sisters, etc.

Martin Luther King Jr. gives us a nice "anchor" with his phrase "I have a dream," a nice bite-sized chunk that we can easily grab a hold of, and then recall much more of his speech later on. Similarly, the preview and review of your speech function as nice little bite-sized chunks for the audience to remember.

For instance, if you forget everything else from this handout, I would hope that you remember my "anchor" phrase: structure, stream of thought, stickiness.

There are, of course, other ways to create stickiness, too, though, so let's discuss some rhetorical strategies that improve retention:

## **Simplicity**

As discussed earlier, using simple, concise labels tends to make your ideas catchier and more memorable. It's easy to remember three short phrases than it is to remember entire sentences, so strive for simple, concise statements wherever possible.

## **Alliteration**

One strategy that can improve stickiness is through alliteration, that is making all of your main points start with the same letter. If you observed that the three main points presented in this handout (structure, stream of thought, stickiness) all started with the same letter, you probably will remember better the three main points of this handout later on. If you forget one of the three,

you'd probably recall that they all started with the letter "s," and that would give you a hint as to what the forgotten body point was.

## Acronym

Making your main points spell something can also improve stickiness. For instance, instead of "structure, stream of thought, stickiness," I could have just as easily made my three main points "Structure, Order, Stickiness." This would have spelled out SOS (the common nautical abbreviation, Save Our Ship, that's used to signal distress). I may even play with that a bit in the context of the speech: "Your speeches are currently in distress. The audience forgets every word you spoke as soon as you're done speaking. But what do you do when you're in distress? You call SOS. In this case, SOS stands for : Structure, Order, Stickiness."

## Rhyming

What should you do if your clothing catches on fire?

If you received the common advice as a child, you probably instantly recalled that you should "stop, drop, and roll." This advice is even more memorable because it rhymes, which makes the idea stickier and more memorable.

## Parallel Structure

Using parallel structure can make the speech stickier. For instance, I once had a student give a speech on how to create a start-up company. She said you had to "find the dream, work toward the dream, and reach the dream." These three main points are memorable because they follow a parallel structure, namely "(blank) the dream." You, too, can make your speeches more memorable by utilizing a parallel structure.

## Analogy/Extended Metaphor

Although it's been many years since I worked on my undergraduate honor's thesis, I still recall the political science professor who came to our Honors College and explained to us *how* to write an honors thesis.

He said that we often joke that everything we ever needed to learn, we learned in kindergarten. He quickly quipped, though, that he doesn't believe this, being a college professor himself! Nonetheless, though, there is some truth to this, and he said that when he went to his daughter's

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kindergarten class, he learned of their three rules that apply equally well to writing an honor's thesis: share, don't hit, and write every day.

Share your ideas with everybody in order to strengthen and get feedback on them. Don't hit; although it may be tempting to write off another scholar who disagrees with you, it's better if aren't so dismissive. Instead, engage the opposing viewpoint, and explain why it doesn't apply to your research. Finally, write every day; a 40-80 page honors thesis is a daunting task if performed all at once, so write a bit each day and you'll get there in no time!

He spoke these words years ago, yet I still remember them because of the very effective extended metaphor, comparing his daughter's kindergarten class with the writing of an honors thesis.

It's important to note that, like stream of thought, this section on stickiness is *not* an exhaustive list, and there are no doubt many more ways to make your speech memorable. Having some form of stickiness in your speech, though, can really help with retention.

Having now covered structure, stream of thought, and stickiness, let's turn back to Palin's remarks one more time and try to construct a better response to Katie Couric's question about the bailout:

## **The Corporate Bailout:**

[hook] Makes me ill

[Thesis] "The backbone of our economy"

[Body1] Creates jobs!

[Body2] Shores up the economy

We already have our speech organized, and we even have nice concise labels for our preview, body points, and review that should help with stickiness! Let's go ahead and create the full response for Palin.

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COURIC: Why isn't it better, Governor Palin, to spend \$700 billion helping middle-class families, who are struggling with healthcare, housing, gas and groceries, allow them to spend more and put more money into the economy instead of helping these big financial institutions that played a role in creating this mess?

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Honestly, Katie, the idea of bailing out the very same corporations that got us into this mess in the first place—well, it just makes me sick. But sometimes you have to feel sick in order to feel better. Sometimes you are injected with a virus as an inoculation to ensure that you’ll be healthy in the long-term.

That’s what the bailout does. It’s the inoculation that ensures the long-term health of our economy.

Why is it necessary to bailout the banks that got us into trouble in the first place? Because the banks form the backbone of our economy. Without a healthy banking sector, there will not be a healthy economy. The banks are critical, and once they’re saved, it will ensure job creation and the shoring up of the economy.

Imagine a world where we allow our banks to go bankrupt. Imagine a world where the financial sector is not able to give out business loans to new companies, or to existing companies as they expand. Without the banks in place to ensure loans to these companies, there will be a massive decrease in jobs. If we allow our banks to go bankrupt, it’s the individual middle-class family that suffers.

This runs all the way across the economy. Without a functioning financial sector, nobody will be able to trust the safety of their bank accounts. The economy, and society, as we know it will cease to exist. This is why a functioning financial sector is necessary not just for individual job creation, but also for shoring up the economy elsewhere.

So, even though the idea of the bailout makes me feel sick, it’s also necessary. It’s necessary for job creation, and also necessary just for the very functioning of our economy.

This is precisely the inoculation the country needs, and I’m proud to be running along John McCain, who, if elected, will skillfully guide the economy out of the recession and into financial prosperity.

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The above response utilizes the organizational structure used above; it previews the two main points, and reviews them, with the body in between. It has a catchy hook, which is brought up again in the finale. It utilizes repetition, simple and concise statements, as well as an analogy (the bailout as inoculation for the long-term health of the economy) to make the speech stickier.

## **Conclusion**

Regardless of your personal politics, it's quite obvious that Palin's public perception sunk precipitously once her interview with Katie Couric aired. Palin wasn't hopeless, though; if she just ***Brainstormed*** ahead of time and then used better ***Structure, Stream of Thought***, and ***Stickiness***, her remarks may have been salvaged.

As you venture forth with your speechmaking, make sure to utilize these techniques in order to ensure that your speech is understood and memorable (in all the best ways possible)!

## **Acknowledgments:**

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