



Historical Association
The voice for history

The Agincourt Tournament:

public speaking guidance





Public speaking guidance for the Agincourt Tournament

Introduction

A quick Google search will show you very quickly that there is plenty of general guidance on the Internet for effective public-speaking and for improving your debating skills. Certainly it seems that public-speaking as a skill is becoming more valued than ever by universities and graduate employers. On this page we have put together some top tips for effective public-speaking, followed by some specific advice for tackling the Agincourt Public-Speaking Tournament including the judging criteria.

1 General tips on public speaking

Writing your speech

A good speech is usually very straightforward and logical. You should avoid complex structures and focus on the need to explain and discuss your ideas very clearly. As in any essay, an effective speech will usually include three parts:

- an introduction identifying your key points and signposting your argument
- a coherent series of main points presented in a logical sequence
- a clear, powerful and purposeful conclusion.

Start planning by making a list of all the points you wish to make, expressing each in a few words or a short sentence. Consider whether all the points you have made can be



grouped together into three key points. It is much better to make three strong, well-supported points than to confuse your audience with too many. Indeed, if you try to pack more in you will find yourself needing to rush through, thereby negating any impact you were hoping to make. Next, consider how you can embellish each of these points with an explanation and evidence. While the evidence part is where you can make things interesting for your audience, be careful not to lose the points of your argument with too much detail.



Write in your signposts to help the audience navigate their way through the different points in your speech. These can look like the following:

- 'I will begin my argument by explaining how....'
- 'Having explained how... I will move on to my next point'
- 'The final point of my argument centres on....'.

Don't neglect your conclusion. Make sure that it effectively wraps up your speech by emphasising what you have achieved, for example: 'Through points X, Y and Z I feel I have made the case for...'. Finally, you can finish with a short, powerful and memorable quote, such as: 'To conclude my argument I would like to quote.... Thank you for listening.'

Above all, your speech requires clarity. It is much better to keep it simple if you wish to make an impact upon your audience.



Rhetorical tools for emphasising your points

More advanced speech-makers will use rhetorical tools in order to make an impact and hammer their points home. One example of a rhetorical device is the **tricolon**. This is when you use three parallel words, phrases or clauses. The following are examples of the use of tricolons:

'You are talking to a man who has laughed in the face of death, sneered at doom, and chuckled at catastrophe.'
(The Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, 1939)

'Never was so much, owed by so many, to so few.'
(Winston Churchill, 1940)

'Government of the people, by the people, for the people'
(President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, 1863)

Using **contrasts** can also be a way of reinforcing your point. These are often with the repetition of words but in changed order. For example:

'We didn't land on Plymouth Rock; Plymouth Rock landed on us.'
(Malcolm X)

'It is not how old you are, but how you are old.'
(Jules Renard)

Don't forget also to use similes, metaphor and alliteration. These can all add to your persuasive language. In particular, metaphors at the start of a speech are very good for grabbing the audience's attention by creating vivid images. For example Victor Hugo, no mean wordsmith, brilliantly described Waterloo as the '**the hinge of the door** to the nineteenth century'. On the subject of Gallipoli, a battle which has resonated hugely through Australian history, Shirin Yasar, at the University of Melbourne, writes 'Gallipoli ultimately served as the event that allowed the nation to **forge** its distinctively Australian identity, the beginning of **severing itself from the shadows** of collective colonial identity.' *The Daily*



Telegraph writes that Agincourt is '.... part of the binding of England, the emergence of the common man as a vital part of the nation'. Similes can also be used to surprise the audience – but try to avoid clichés when using these devices.

Cue cards

While there are some (rare) lucky individuals who are able to memorise their speech and deliver it without notes, most of us mortals need some sort of script to help us remember. Reading from a sheet of paper with your argument written out word-for-word will make it difficult to make eye contact with your audience and will sound unnatural. Most experienced public-speakers will use cue cards to help them. Cue cards make it easier to make eye contact, gesture and move freely. These are small postcard-sized cards with your argument written upon them. You should have a card for each of your points, using bullet points or numbers to allow your supporting explanation and evidence to stand out. Additionally, you should write out your signposting/transition sentences at the start of each card. Colour-coding the main point, supporting information and transition sentences on each cue card can also be useful in making the components stand out. Remember, each part of your speech should be reducible to a key word or phrase which should be highlighted. Don't be tempted into simply re-writing your whole argument word for word on to the cue cards.

Practice

Make sure to practise your speech. Do so with your friends and family as an audience or even in front of a mirror. It is going to be very important to get your timing right in this competition so do make sure to work your speech down to the allocated time. When you get to practise upon an audience, be brave and ask for honest feedback. See if they



can repeat back to you the main points of your argument. If they can't, then a re-draft is required. You could give your audience a check-list of questions such as: Was the opening effective? Were the words clearly spoken? Could you hear adequately? Do the transition sentences between the different points work?

Body language

Make sure to smile at and make eye contact with your audience. A smile and a hello at the start of your speech will trigger a smile in your audience as an almost reflex response, which in turn will help you feel more at your ease. Do also stand up straight and try to come out from behind the podium if there is one. Walk around a little and gesture with your hands. Don't keep your hands in your pockets or glued to the podium! Where practical, good presenters will often walk from side to side and look at different parts of the audience.

Your voice

Do practise changing your volume and tone to emphasise your points. Try not to sound like a robot with a monotonous voice. Speak with energy. The last thing you want is to come across as uninvolved, uninteresting and unenthusiastic (please note the alliteration!).

Nerves

Being nervous before one gives a speech is entirely natural. In fact, some nerves are good for you as it will make you more energised and stop you sounding 'flat' to your audience. On the other hand, too much nervousness can be a problem and can lead to breathlessness. So do take a few slow deep breaths before your talk starts. You should also make a conscious effort to slow down. When nervous you will speed up and the audience will not be able to follow you. Moreover,



you should be reassured that most of your mistakes will be far less noticeable than you think. Before you start speaking make sure to have drunk some water as this will help to open up the throat and will help to calm nerves. Having some water within easy reach when speaking is also a good idea.

A little advice from an ancient master

The first known book in western civilisation on the art of rhetoric was written by Aristotle in 350 BC. Aristotle contended that public-speaking had three core elements, which all good speakers called upon:

Ethos The art of convincing your audience that you know what you are talking about and that you are someone they will like

Pathos The art of getting your audience on your side of the argument by appealing to their emotions

Logos The hard facts and evidence that gives your argument its validity.

In other words, for the Agincourt Tournament:

- engage with your audience
- show that you are interested in what you are presenting and
- that you know something about it.

By following the guidance above your speech should contain each of Aristotle's three elements.



2 Speaking for the Agincourt competition

For the Agincourt tournament you will have four minutes to deliver your speech. Whatever other examples you bring in to make your points about why some battles resonate through history you must make sure that central to your argument are our three focus battles: **Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme**. This means you will only have time for several key points and your argument will need to be very tightly organised. Most certainly if you hope to do well you will need to practise against time. The four minutes will go very quickly! Make sure each point is well made and counts.

In examining why some battles resonate in history more than others you can, among other factors, bring forth a combination of arguments connected to political impact, collective myth and memory, national identity, social impact, literature and changing technology and weaponry. Having said that, given the time limits you will need to weigh up carefully which factors are the most important.

The judges will be marking you using the following criteria:

- Reasoning and evidence /15
- Organisation and prioritisation /10
- Expression and delivery /10
- (In the later rounds an additional judging element will be introduced)
- Response to questioning /10



Coming up with an argument

Group brainstorm For this question you could start by harnessing the power of a group brainstorm.

- a. Begin at a general level by listing the battles of Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme but also ask your group of trusty historians what other battles in history stand out in popular imagination. This will give you a greater sense of perspective. List all of them on a flip-chart or whiteboard. Try to come up with a range from different periods and combatants/ peoples/nations. At this stage it would be more illustrative to consider a multitude of battles from different cultures and parts of the map. Certainly, in the follow-up to this exercise it would be interesting and revealing to do a further comparative investigation into which battles most resonate in other people's histories and why.
- b. Next, draw up a *spider diagram* and for each battle consider what makes this battle stand out from the countless other battles that have taken place through history. For what reasons has it entered the popular imagination? You may like to consider whether each battle stands out for any of the following causal factors:
 - It was a turning point or decisive moment in a conflict.
 - This battle had great political consequences.
 - This battle had great social impact i.e. as a result of the victory or defeat or simply through the mass experience shared by the combatants.
 - This battle has helped shape a country's national identity either at the time or since.



- The battle is remembered because it has entered popular myth.
 - The battle led to a change in military technology or tactics.
 - It was a particularly bloody battle.
 - The battle stands out because of a particular individual involved.
 - This battle was an example of victory against all odds.
 - This battle stands out as it seems to encapsulate a particularly strong emotional theme or narrative.
 - The battle was particularly well chronicled by participants or historians at the time.
 - This battle has become part of classic literature and/or drama.
 - The battle stands out because of the particular *reasons* for which it was fought.
 - Do any other factors come up?
- c. Next, your group should consider what connections you can make between these battles and why they stand out. Can the battles be grouped into particular categories where they seem to display several common factors? Do the actual factors seem to crop up together and can they be merged? Are any patterns emerging?
- d. Now you should have well and truly considered common factors in why some battles resonate through history and applied these to our focus battles. You could also try to *Venn diagram* Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme. What factors stand out as shared and what factors are particular to each?



- e. You will need to do some further research on Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme. A read through the preface of any serious account of each of these battles will certainly give you a quick idea about why this particular battle is remembered. Remember if you get through to the later rounds you will be asked questions at the end of your presentation and you will certainly need some deeper knowledge of the impact of these battles to draw upon in your responses.

Structuring an argument

By now you should have an idea of what factors seem to emerge more commonly with battles which resonate. You will probably have found that our three battles, Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme, share some common factors but also have reasons for resonance which are particular to them.

As previously mentioned, your argument is to last four minutes. This will be strictly enforced. You should therefore distil your argument down to several *explained* and *evidenced* points. Of course, how many points you make comes down to you but I suggest it will be difficult to make more than three or four well. Furthermore, while your argument *must* bring in the three focus battles you can add others to illustrate your points, as in:

‘Similarly to Agincourt, the Battle of Bannockburn resonates in Scottish history as it occupies a special place in Scottish national identity: a victory against the odds against an old enemy....’

How you shape your speech is also completely down to you but do aim for clarity: you cannot convince a confused person! In your opening be direct and *identify* your key



points, signposting what is ahead for your audience. You may decide to start with common factors and apply them to our three focus battles in turn. Or you may go to the battles themselves first and draw out why each is remembered, highlighting the commonalities and those factors which are different before making your conclusion. You may decide to go in a different direction altogether. You may argue, with reference to our three, that the reasons for different battles resonating are so varied that no general rules can be made. Each battle is remembered for a particularly strong emotional theme or narrative – a history ‘sound-bite’ – and they simply catch the collective imagination which then carries them forth in popular literature through the centuries.

Practise

Once you have written your argument my advice is to transfer it on to cue cards as explained above. Practise your timings with a friendly and constructive critic(s). In terms of content, ask them about how clear your arguments are and whether the points you make are explained and evidenced. Be honest. Do you sound interested in the topic? Or is your delivery so flat that you are sending them to asleep?

The questions

When you are doing your practice runs do also get your audience to ask you challenging questions about your ideas at the end of speech. This will be a part of the Agincourt Challenge and you will be marked on your ability to respond to the judges’ questions in the later rounds. Look at this as an opportunity to show off your understanding of the topic. If you are skilful enough you may also be able to use the questioning as an opportunity to re-make points that you did not put across very well originally.



In preparation for the competition you should also consider what would be the counter-arguments that can be made to your points and how to respond to them. Again, talk to a friend or your teacher. They may be able to come up with counter-arguments which you have not considered. Just be sure that your reply to any counter-argument is consistent with *your* original argument.

...Finally

Be brave and good luck! We look forward to seeing you in London for the big tournament.

Judging guidelines

EXPRESSION AND DELIVERY /10

Focus here is not on what is said but HOW it is said and how well the speaker engages the audience

- How well is the speaker using his/her notes – are they simply reading out from speeches written in full?
- Is the speaker clear? varying speed, volume and tone to increase interest and draw their audience in?
- Is their use of language persuasive and precise?
- Are they using body language effectively: eye contact, hand gestures, facial expression?

ORGANISATION AND PRIORITISATION /10

- Was the speech well rounded and clear?
- Were the arguments ordered into a logical and coherent speech which was easy to follow?
- Was the weight of content appropriate for the four minutes? Was the time given to each point appropriately balanced?

REASONING AND EVIDENCE /15

Focus is on the content of the argument and how well it is explained

- Are the arguments well explained and logical?
- Are the arguments supported by enough appropriate evidence?
- Are the arguments well focused and relevant to the question?
- Has the speaker made central to his/her argument our three focus battles, Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme?

LISTENING (for the later rounds) /5

- Has the speaker responded confidently and immediately to questioning?
- Has the speaker fully answered your question?