

Contrast = Better Speeches

By Brian Woolf (November 29, 2020)

Giving a speech? Want your message remembered? Your key points readily recalled? Then invite contrast to be one of your closest speech-crafting companions...

Why? Contrasts are *mental speed bumps* - they are little wake-ups. They grab audiences' ears and minds; they sharpen their attention; and they re-connect with minds that may be wandering.

You are probably familiar with the phrase: *Change is the only constant*. It's an example of contrast. The words *change* and *constant* are opposites yet, when combined, they make an ear-catching, thought-provoking statement.

The power of contrasts is in the opposite words and phrases which force your ideas to not only stick out, but also stick in your audience's minds.

Contrast has been used to persuade, entertain, and teach ever since the birth of the written word. Here are seven contrasts, including four "doubles," that are still as fresh and relevant today as two millennia ago:

A crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet attended in anxiety Aesop (c580 BC)

Women: can't live with them or without them ... Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (411 BC)

Your silence gives consent ... Plato (c. 400 BC)

Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without one ... Chinese Proverb

Evil arrives faster than it departs ... Roman Proverb

A room without books is like a body without a soul ... Cicero (c.70 BC)

Be quick to forgive and slow to condemn ... Bible

Yes, contrast has been around a long time. The Ancient Greeks called it *antithesis*. Aristotle believed it makes your audience better understand the point you are making. Yet, today, this great power tool is still underappreciated (and therefore underused) by many speakers.

Contrasts are like spices which, used sparingly, titillate and differentiate. But note, as the following illustrates, they can also be used in concentrated doses for dramatic effect:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,

it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,

it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,

it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,

it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,

we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,

we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way-

The above comprise the first 14 of 20 clauses of the first sentence of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens' top-selling novel of the 15 he wrote. Wikipedia tells us this 1859 work is the world's best-selling novel of all time. Perhaps this opening set of contrasts put readers into the right frame of mind.

Most of our speech contrasts, however, will likely be short, but with the same goal: catch our audiences' attention with specially-crafted, easy-to-remember contrasting words.

The bottom line on contrast's power was best captured by speech coach, Diane Windingland, who mused: *If Hamlet had asked: I wonder if I should kill myself?* would we have remembered the line? [No way!] So Shakespeare had Hamlet ponder: *To be or not to be, that is the question* - which is what we've been pondering ever since. That,

dear reader, is the power of contrast. May we all craft contrasts that linger long in our listeners' minds.

To help ferment your contrast creativity, here's a wide cross-section to consider. As you read, discover how and why contrasts "work," then adapt those that resonate to help you build your own collection for even more memorable speeches. Enjoy the journey and the result.

From Toastmasters World Champions of Public Speaking (WCPS)

I know what I'm saying - I just don't know what you're hearing ... Michael Aun, WCPS 1978

By "retirement" I mean the sudden stoppage of work: going from the dynamic career to the doldrums, from vigor to vegetation ... [then later] ... Don't look back or look down. Life isn't a vicious circle. It's a rising spiral, a cornucopia of opportunities ... Roy Fenstermaker, WCPS 1983

*The great French impressionist Henri Matisse watched as a nurse placed a paintbrush between the pain-ridden, rheumatic fingers of the aging artist and asked: Why do you continue to paint? Renoir replied: My dear friend-The pain passes, but the beauty remains ... ~ Harold Patterson, WCPS 1987 (titled *The Pain Passes*)*

Ours is a time in which the famous are becoming infamous ... ~ David Brooks, WCPS 1990

I went in a specialist - I came out a sergeant ... Otis Williams Jr, WCPS 1993

He didn't answer me - or did he? ... Craig Valentine, WCPS 1999

I don't want to brag but in six short months I took a \$60,000 debt and I doubled that debt. That's right! I turned my Subway sandwich shop into a non-profit organization! ... Darren LaCroix, WCPS 2001

Real men love for a lifetime, not for a moment ... Randy Harvey, WCPS 2004

I had changed everything in my life, but nothing had changed ... Lance Miller, WCPS 2005

In my hands was a letter that was going to change my life. I stared at the return address - Massachusetts Institute of Technology - the graduate school of my dreams. Would it begin with "Congratulations!" or "You've got to be kidding!!!" ... ~Vikas Jhingran, WCPS 2007

In an ordinary kitchen-I learned an extra-ordinary lesson ... Mark Hunter WCPS 2009

Miss Mamo was hopeful. She went from waiting to die to dying to live ... David Henderson, WCPS 2010

That was Leviathan, the great blue whale, whose yesterdays are a hundred million years, yet of his tomorrows, there are none ... Jock Elliott, WCPS 2011

After a long line of loud "No's," one silent "Yes" kept me going ... Pres Vasilev, WCPS 2013

Pull Less, Bend More ... Manoj Vasudevan, WCPS 2017 (also title of speech)

Instead of looking into a mirror of defeat, it became a window of possibilities ... Ramona Smith, WCPS 2018

From Toastmasters at all Levels of Competition

Forget the thing that hurt you, but never forget what it taught you ... Charlie Anderson

Grandma, now there's a word filled with memories: most of them good - the rest of them good for you ... Robert Killen

I grew up in Pakistan; Linda grew up in Texas. I was mocha; she was latte. I was a PC; she was a Macintosh. What a lovefest! ... Safaraz Nazir

I know the global financial crisis was bad - but this was a real budget motel! ... Linus Chang

I'd rather be disliked for what I am - than liked for what I am not ... Sister Mary Joseph

Is yours a life of chance or a life of choice? Kathryn McKenzie

Mom had so much to say - but I'd given her so little time. I was listening [points to ears] - but I wasn't listening [points to his heart.] ... Kwong Yue Yang

One evening I hear this huge crash and then - something worse - silence! ...Katina Hunter

Our future is today ... Eric Feinendegen

These special people, now in life's twilight, still desire recognition. Indeed, they would rather be recognized now than eulogized later ... Brian Woolf

Was he high on drugs-or low on intelligence? ... Joe Grondin

From Politics and History

A lie told often enough becomes the truth ... Lenin

A society that has nothing to die for has nothing to live for; it's no longer a stream, it's a stagnant pool ... Mark Steyn [Multi-contrast]

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country ... John F Kennedy

Churchill wasn't their first choice, but he became their last hope ... Anon

Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder ... Arnold Toynbee, Historian

If all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within 50 years all life on Earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish ... Jonas Salk

Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few ... Churchill (Aug 20, 1940)

Sixty years ago, I knew everything; now I know nothing. Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance ... Will Durant, Historian

The best way to honor veterans is to create fewer of us ... Daniel Sjursen (US Vet, 2006-12)

Those who vote, decide nothing. Those who count the vote, decide everything ... Stalin

War does not determine who is right - only who is left ... Bertrand Russell

We agree that something needs to be done. We also know that nothing will be done ... George Friedman

We have perpetual war for perpetual peace ... Gore Vidal

Whether you're a hawk or a dove, you're just a bird living in the same environment, in the same world ... Jesse Jackson, DNC 1988

You and I are told we must choose between a left or right, but I suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There is only an up or down. Up to man's age-old dream - the maximum of individual freedom consistent with order - or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism ... Ronald Reagan [Multi-contrast]

From Life

Abandonment is a critical component of change ... Roger Stangeland, CEO, Vons

Clem Pinckney always had the biggest presence in the room; he also had the smallest ego ... (eulogized by) Ross Turner, SC State Senator

Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do ... Steve Jobs

Even though we live in the same neighborhood, we live in different parts of the galaxy ... Anon

He's not against freedom in principle, only in practice ... James Grant

If you can't change your mind, you don't have a mind to change ... Anon

It is better to fail doing something than excel doing nothing ... Anon

It is easier to preach ten sermons than live one ... Anon

It is not what we receive that enriches our lives, it is what we give ... George Albert Smith

It's not what you've lost but what you have left that counts ... Harold Russell [Lost both hands in WWII]

Make a plan for your life-and if you don't make a plan, you've made a plan ... Amy Coney Barrett

Not to decide is to decide ... Harvey Cox

The days take forever, but the weeks fly by ... Mike Gallagher

The fastest way to succeed is to replace bad habits with good habits ... Zig Ziglar

The fullness of life is in its hazards, not its safety ... Anon

The more I learn, the less I know ... Anon

Today's peacock is tomorrow's feather duster ... Anon

We listen too much to phones, too little to silence ... Anon

Why fit in when you were born to stand out? ... Dr Seuss

You are what you do, not what you say you'll do ... Carl Jung

From Observations of the World Around Us

A discussion is an exchange of knowledge; an argument is an exchange of ignorance ... Robert Quillin

A man always has two reasons for doing anything: a good reason and the real reason ... J.P. Morgan

America is a constipated nation - if you pass small stools, you have to have large hospitals ... Dr Denis Burkitt, Author of Don't Forget Fiber in Your Diet

Americans are well-fed and poorly nourished ... Nido Qubein

In our brief lives we learn so little about so much ... Anon

In some decades, nothing happens; in some weeks, decades happen ... Lenin

It's not what we receive that enriches our lives, it's what we give ... George Albert Smith

Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer ... Michael Corleone [Al Pacino] The Godfather II

Modern slaves are not in chains, they're in debt ... Anon

Other Contrasts that Created Mental Speed Bumps

As my muscles weakened, my writing became stronger. As I slowly lost my speech, I gained my voice. As I diminished, I grew. As I lost so much, I found myself ... Neil Selinger, reflecting on his battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. [Multi-contrast]

At high school, I read "1984" as an interesting fantasy; today I read it as a fearful reality ... Anon

Be who you are and say what you mean-because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind ... Dr. Seuss

He dispels the myth that there's no unicorn; he is one ... Clemson Coach Dabo Swinney, describing a unique player.

I bear a message of challenge, not self-congratulation; I want your attention, not your applause ... Mary Fisher

Whether we have a little or a lot to say, let's say it well ... Anon

Copyright © 2020 Brian Woolf

And there's more where this came from...

Visit Brian Woolf on the web for his complete collection of
articles, speeches, insights and practical advice, at

www.brianwoolf.com

Email: brian@brianwoolf.com

Tel: +1 864 458-8277

BRIANWOOLF.COM