

Political rhetoric: 'a mildly dirty word' because of its association with deception, or a linguistic tool with which to draw out the truth?

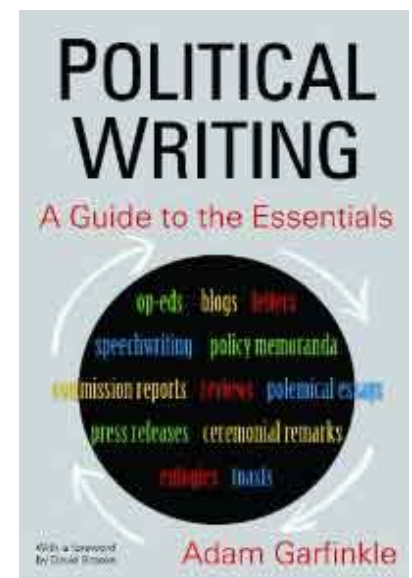
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In *Political Writing*, Adam Garfinkle demonstrates how political rhetoric can be communicated through blogs, speeches, and reports, it provides a valuable assessment and guide on how a message can be conveyed in a convincing and insightful manner. Andrew S. Crines finds that it provides an insightful introduction to rhetorical theory, the character of political elites, and the intellectual heritage of rhetoric.



Political Writing: A Guide to the Essentials. Adam Garfinkle. M.E. Sharpe. May 2012.

How political figures communicate with the electorate is an ever evolving component of engagement with ideas, philosophies, policies, and political analysis. Such is the importance of greater communication that political parties invest heavily in emerging media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter as well as YouTube. No longer can political elites rely upon conventional methods such as the Paxman interview or the print media. Politics today is interactive, and the public expect to be more involved, which demonstrates the importance of clear and concise communicative methods.



This book showcases the means of communicating. It evaluates the fundamentals of rhetoric, better speech writing, essays and reviews, the delivery of speeches in various contexts, the use of new media such as blogs, and an assessment of the editorial process. The book is rooted in the historical analysis of political rhetoric. "To study rhetoric and the character of successful polemic is a very old pursuit. Indeed, if you were among the tiny fraction of elite men in Europe who received a formal education between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the advent of what we very loosely refer to as modernity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rhetoric would have been a major part of your curriculum" (p.4).

Yet the centrality of rhetoric and oratory in the curriculum has shifted. Modern society has come to see rhetoric as "a mildly dirty word" because of its association with deception (p.10-11). Critics of political communication as a linguistic form argue that, given the perception of some political elites

to have used effective rhetoric and oratory over the course of the previous century in order to promote an illiberal agenda (Mosley historically, Galloway more recently), it simply cannot be trusted. This has held back a full embrace of the study of rhetoric and oratory, seen as an antiquity of political analysis.

What this book demonstrates is that now, communication needs to be managed, not for the purposes of overt deception, but rather to promote perspectives through linguistic construction. Harking back to Churchill, “truth is so precious that it must be attended by a bodyguard” of carefully crafted rhetoric. That rhetoric must aim to demonstrate the complexities of that truth (truth being a perspective), acknowledging the nuances within, whilst drawing out the individual politicians ideological position.

Each chapter aims to equip the reader with a broad conceptual awareness of the contemporary means of engaging in this process. The chapters also strive provide the reader with an accessible conception of communicative enhancement, tied to suggestions likely to improve the abilities of the reader in those areas. For example, to be an effective political commentator, one must first be able to translate what is read into a concise form derived from their own perspectives. This enables the political scholar to not only reinforce their own knowledge, but also effectively communicate it to the reader. Also, more broadly the author rightly argues that to be an effective writer, one must also be a broad reader. For example, a scholar of Conservatism or Socialism would do well to read the works of such figures as Rousseau, Wittgenstein or Hazlitt, thereby enabling the writer to broaden their intellectual capital, enhancing their rhetorical skills. Importantly, however, one must retain a contemporary language rooted in Orwell’s fifth criteria of effective communication, yet to have an awareness of an older form is vital in order to build up such intellectual *ethos*.

The book continues in this style across the other areas previously mentioned. It is not, however for the advanced rhetorician. Rather, it is clearly (as the cover stipulates) a *guide to the essentials*. Those seeking a more advanced understanding of communication would be better served by Max Atkinson’s *Lend Me Your Ears*. Moreover, the book provides recommendations for more advanced reading at the end of each chapter, enabling the more studious reader a broader range of materials (if required).

In the context of an early guide, this is an excellent book which provides the basic tools required to branch out into the world of rhetoric and oratory. Given that the author argues an awareness of such basic tools remains broadly absent, perhaps this should not prevent the more advanced political reader from engaging with this text. It provides an insightful introduction to rhetorical theory, the character of political elites, and the intellectual heritage of rhetoric. Importantly, it appropriately connects that to contemporary society, providing an awareness of how linguistic construction can and does impact upon the success of political elites. Indeed, by demonstrating how political rhetoric can be communicated through blogs, speeches, and reports, it provides a

valuable assessment and guide on how a message can be conveyed in a convincing and insightful manner. As such, this book is of value to politicians and scholars alike.

Andrew Crines is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Huddersfield, specialising in oratorical and rhetorical analysis across British Politics. Dr Crines has written a monograph entitled 'Michael Foot and the Labour Leadership', and is currently editing a volume with Dr Richard Hayton (Huddersfield) on Oratory in the Labour Party. [Read more reviews by Andrew.](#)

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