

**Words That Move: An Introduction to Speechwriting
With Aaron Hoover & Chris Moran
IDS 4930/Special Topics In Interdisciplinary Studies/One Credit Hour
Spring 2026
Wednesdays, 4:05 p.m. to 4:55 p.m., Dauer Hall 0342**

Aaron's contact

Ahoover@ufl.edu

352-328-4340

Office of the Provost

235 Tigert Hall

Office Hours: 2:30-3:30 p.m. Wednesdays, 235 Tigert Hall

Other Hours by Appointment

Chris's contact

chrismoran@ufl.edu

352-226-5879

Office of the Senior Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources

1001 McCarty Hall D

Other Hours by Appointment

Speechwriting, the course:

You'll read, listen to, watch, and analyze great speeches to develop your appreciation of the genre and to learn what sets speechwriting apart from other modes of communication. You will get an introduction to the many tools speechwriters use, including interviewing, storytelling, rhetorical devices such as metaphor, and audience and historical research. Finally, you will learn by doing. You will be assigned to write four short speeches, deliver them as time allows, and receive feedback from peers and instructors. You'll also hear from leaders and top professionals on specific elements of speechwriting practice and art and get an introduction to the profession.

Speechwriting, the craft:

Speeches are a time-honored way to deliver important messages to live audiences. Great orators succeed based on well-thought-out and, often, emotionally moving remarks. The crafting of those remarks includes the work of

researching, interviewing and marshaling the tools of rhetoric to persuade, move, inform and entertain. Speechwriting involves creating great moments -- at a lectern, atop a pile of rubble or at a beautiful wedding – by carefully considering which words are appropriate for an occasion and organizing them into a cohesive compelling message.

Student learning outcomes:

The course will:

- Introduce you to the art and craft of speechwriting through reading/watching/critiquing speeches, learning from the instructors and experts in the field, and your own hands-on speechwriting assignments.
- Teach you the key rhetorical and structural tools to write effective speeches, including tailoring for audience, storytelling, humor, metaphor and brevity.
- Give you the tools to write a range of effective speeches, from ceremonial speeches to keynotes to eulogies and toasts.

Readings, participation & grades:

READINGS: You will read, watch or listen to speeches, and read/review materials about speechwriting, weekly.

PARTICIPATION: You will get the most benefit from this class if you apply yourself to the opportunities to write – and to actively engage in discussions about speeches delivered by the famous and by your classmates. You may be asked to respectfully and empathetically critique speeches and in turn welcome feedback from others about your own work.

USE OF AI: This course seeks to teach you the basics of speechwriting. We think that's best accomplished without resorting to AI, so use of AI for writing in this class is not allowed. If you choose to use AI for research, be careful. Factual accuracy is necessary, and AI “hallucinates” facts.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is mandatory. Per UF policy, excused absences with documentation will not penalize your grade. Students are allowed one unexcused absence. Subsequent unexcused absences result in a one-letter grade deduction per absence.

POINTS & GRADES:

Participation: 40 points

Speech of introduction: 15

Research assignment: 15

Story speech: 20

Toast: 10

PARTICIPATION GRADING CRITERIA

All class sessions involve active discussion based on the readings and cases. Be prepared to share your ideas and to listen to and interpret the issues presented by others. We will grade your participation using the following guidelines:

- Poor Participation (D-F): The student rarely or never offers comments and questions in class, and/or does not appear to be regularly paying attention to lectures, presentations, or in-class activities.
- Fair Participation (C): The student occasionally offers comments and questions in class, and/or is mostly engaged in class, paying attention to lectures, presentation, and in-class activities.
- Good Participation (B-A-): The student regularly offers comments and questions that demonstrate more than surface level understanding of course material, and/or the student regularly pays attention to lectures, presentations, and in-class activities.
- Excellent Participation (A): The student regularly offers comments and questions that demonstrate more than a surface level understanding of course materials, and the student regularly pays attention to lectures, presentation, and in-class activities.

GRADING SCALE

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-92.5
A-	92.4-89.5
B+	89.4-86.5
B	86.4-82.5
B-	82.4-79.5
C+	79.4-76.5
C	76.4-72.5
C-	72.4-69.5
D+	69.4-66.5
D	66.4-62.5
D-	62.4-59.5

Letter Grade	Number Grade
E	59.4-0

COURSE COMPLIANCE

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see this [link](#).

Weekly Class Agenda, Preparation and Homework (always noted in green).

Week 1: January 14, Introductions to Each Other and to Speechwriting, Syllabus

For our first class, we will get to know each other, go over the syllabus, and have a conversation about speeches and speechwriting. Please:

- Complete and submit this super brief [Qualtrics](#).
- Prepare to introduce yourself and discuss your personal interest in speechwriting, or why this class?
- Think about the following questions for our discussion:
 - Why, in this age of electronic communication, do speeches matter?
 - What makes a speech good or bad?
 - Who is a speaker that you admire?
 - What's a speech that moved you?
- For the last part, we'll discuss the homework assignment and the next class.

Homework for next week, January 21 class:

- Read "Guide to Interviewing One Pager" PPT slide.
- Draft five questions you plan to ask your subject and submit to Canvas site by 11:59 p.m. Sunday, January 18. Note: This assignment is ungraded, but submission counts toward participation grade.
- Read "Guide to Writing Intros" one pager.
- For next week's class, we will be pleased to host via Zoom our first guest speaker and a master of the art of the introduction: Josh Piven, longtime speechwriter at the University of Pennsylvania. To prepare for our discussion, please watch the following three brief introductions written by Mr. Piven for the Penn Provost and *come to class with at least one question to ask Mr. Piven*:
 - Introduction of [NBC News Anchor Andrea Mitchell](#)

- Introduction of former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power
- Introduction of Hamilton creator Lin Manuel Miranda

Week 2: January 21, The Art of Introducing a Speaker, Interviews

Our second class will focus on preparing you for your first graded speechwriting assignment: Write a **300-word (or less)** speech of introduction for one of your fellow students. We will spend the first few minutes of class discussing the crafts of interview subjects and writing introductions, drawing on the assigned one-pager guides. We'll also divide you into pairs so that you may interview one another. For the second part of class, we will be pleased to host Mr. Piven, who will give a brief talk and then answer your questions.

Homework/Assignment For Next Week, January 28:

- Interview your classmate and make yourself available to be interviewed.
- Write your speech of introduction and turn in by 11:59 p.m. Monday, January 26.
- Make your speech brief, fun and warm!
- We'll grade your speech based on the following criteria:
 - Follows basic introductory speech structure.
 - Meets length requirement of **300 words or less**.
 - Accurately summarizes your subject's bio and major interests.
 - Includes at least one brief story, anecdote, or key detail.
 - Uses humor, a joke, or a warm tone to appeal to audiences.
 - Makes the audience want to hear from your speaker!

Week 3: January 28, Let's Hear Your Speech!

We'll go over a handful of basics of speech delivery, and then you'll each deliver your speech of introductions. We'll follow up with discussion about strengths and areas for improvement as time allows.

Homework For Next Week, February 4, Speeches and Leadership.

Read the following speeches:

- Crystal Eastman’s “What Feminism Means to Me” PDF from “Speaking While Female” (pp. 241-245) by Dana Rubin.
- Ronald Reagan’s “Address to the Nation on the Explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger,” words [here](#) & in PDF homework, video [here](#).
- Keynote speech by Walmart CEO Doug McMillon at Consumer Electronics Show 2024. Video [here \(timestamp 8:40-14:00 \)](#)

Week 4: February 4, Speeches and Leadership

We’ll continue to hear your speeches of introduction if any remain from previous class, then spend the rest this class discussing the three assigned readings/videos. Please come to class prepared to discuss:

- These are very different speeches by very different leaders. How does each serve (and show) leadership by the speaker?
- What similarities do the speeches share? How about differences?
- What moved you in these speeches and why?
- What rhetorical flourishes can you identify (eg. a telling detail, sticky phrase or good transition)? How were they effective?
- A place where the speaker lost you, if they did.
- What part of one of these speeches would you turn into a TikTok?

For the second half, we will discuss the profession of speechwriting, since public and private leaders often rely on professional speechwriters. Our guest speaker will be David Murray, who founded and heads the Professional Speechwriters Association. *Come to class with at least one question for Mr. Murray about speechwriting as a career and/or how speechwriters assist leaders.*

Homework For Next Week, February 11, Overview of the Craft of Speechwriting

- Read “[Mayor Wu’s Annotated State of the City Address](#)” by Ezra Zwaeli. Pay close attention to the annotations, since they offer a rare behind-the-scenes view of the process and decisions that go into writing a substantial speech.

- Watch Dr. Christine Hanlon's [lecture](#) on Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

Week 5: February 11, The Craft of Speechwriting: An Overview

We'll walk through the elements of a well-constructed speech, using examples from the annotated address by Mayor Wu. We'll also talk about different speech structures, including Monroe's Motivated Sequence for persuasive speeches, referencing the assigned Hanlon video. You should emerge from this class with a solid grasp of the fundamentals of the speechwriting craft.

- Homework For next week, February 18, Researching Speeches
 - Look over the website of the UF [Special and Area Studies Collections](#) at Smathers Libraries to get a sense of their vast scope.
 - Look over the "Vertical File Index" and "Series P4 Murphee" docs to open your eyes to the rich variety of information available in the collections that may not be available online.
 - **Carefully review** the Research and Writing Guide 226 Slide outlining your second writing assignment.

Week 6: February 18, Researching Your Speech (Getting Beyond the Internet)

Note: We'll meet for this class in the Judaica Suite, part of the UF Special & Area Studies Collections Library, on the 2nd Floor of Smathers Library East.

Good research is essential to good speechwriting. We will focus on historical research – especially researching primary historical sources that are either offline or only available in online archives. Meeting in the UF Special & Area Studies Collections Library, home to UF's historical archives, we'll get an introduction to the library's amazing archives, and how to use them effectively, from guest speaker and UF Archivist Sarah Coates. We'll end the class by going over your assignment for your second speech: Choose **one** of the following research and writing tasks (Due at 11:59 p.m. Sunday, March 1.)

- 1) The UF President is under pressure to change the lyrics of the classic UF pep song from "We are the boys of old Florida" to "We are the people of old Florida." Research the history of UF songs/chants in the UF and newspaper archives and cite this history in a short persuasive speech, using Monroe's

Motivated Sequence and other techniques you have learned, by the President to UF Board of Trustees arguing **for this decision — or against it.**

- 2) 2024 marked the 100th anniversary of the 1924 completion of the UF Auditorium and its Anderson Memorial Organ. Draft the President's short speech to the UF community at a ceremony celebrating this centennial, discussing the most interesting elements of the history of the building and the organ — and explaining why they both still matter today.
- 3) The Florida Museum of Natural History will open its newly remodeled and expanded Powell Hall exhibition space in 2026. Dive into the museum's rich history for a ribbon-cutting speech at the new facility celebrating this opening and exploring the museum's importance to the university.

We'll grade your assignment based on the following criteria:

- Meets length requirements of **750 words or less.**
- Uses and cites archival documents and newspaper articles as outlined in the Research and Writing Assignment PDF.
- Follows both structure and conventions for persuasive or explanatory speeches as outlined in previous classes.
- Uses humor, anecdotes, and other rhetorical techniques to strengthen the speech's impact and move audiences.

Homework For Next Week, February 25, focus on speeches by university leaders:

- Work on your research speeches, due March 1.
- Read:
 - "Me and My Ten-Pound Title," PDF Remarks at the Association of Academic Women fall meeting," Sept. 13, 2010
 - "A Historic Academic Year," PDF State of the University Remarks, August 25, 2020.
 - "Creating the Silicon Valley of Agriculture," PDF groundbreaking event on November 7, 2025
 - "It's Who You Are," PDF UF/IFAS employee meeting, August 28, 2019

Week 7: February 25, Focus on Speeches by University Leaders

For university leaders such as presidents and senior vice presidents, speeches are a big part of the job. They speak to donors, the Board of Trustees, employees, professional colleagues, alumni, legislators, supporters, and students. Speeches constitute a major part of their public leadership. What they say at the podium signals university priorities and vision. In this class, we'll discuss the ways university leaders make use of speeches to increase the reach and impact of the University of Florida.

Homework for Next Week, March 4, Focus on Rhetoric

- Complete your research speeches, due at 11:59 p.m. March 1.
- Read Chapters 6-7 Lehrman Schnure PDF from "The Political Speechwriters Companion" by Rob Lehrman and Eric Schnure.
- Read "31 Useful Rhetorical Devices" <https://www.merriam-webster.com/grammar/rhetorical-devices-list-examples> and bring a single example of the use of a single device of your choice.

Week 8: March 4, Focus on the Age-Old Art of Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of writing and speaking professionally, especially as a means of persuasion. A speech isn't just what you have to say. It's how you say it. What looks like magic from a spellbinding speaker is often the applied use of rhetorical techniques that can be learned and honed just like any other skill. There are myriad tools and techniques. We'll discuss some of the more commonly used ones and how they're used in speeches.

Homework for week 9, March 11, Movie Speeches

- [Black Panther UN Speech](#)
- [The Barbie Monologue](#)
- [Funeral speech in Four Weddings and a Funeral](#)

Week 9: March 11, Movie Speeches!

Few of us have had the good fortune of hearing historic or life-changing speeches in person. Thankfully, we have Hollywood to fill in the gap. For this class, we'll watch and discuss 4 of the greatest speeches ever delivered on the silver screen

(or your smartscreen), identifying the ingredients that make them memorable. What can we learn about public speaking from Hollywood's best actors, and what can we learn about writing from some of its best writers?

Homework for week 10, March 25, Focus on Storytelling in Speeches

- Read PDF "How to Tell A Story" by NYT Writer Daniel McDermott.
- Read PDF "For the Love of Zorro," by Chris Moran for Jack Payne.
- Read/watch George Saunders' [2013 Commencement Speech at Syracuse](#)
- Read/watch [Dyana Nyad 2013 TED Talk, "Never, Ever Give Up."](#)

NO CLASS SPRING BREAK WEEK (March 17)!

Week 10: March 25, Focus on Storytelling in Speeches

Some of the most powerful speeches draw on the speaker's personal experiences, both dramatic and seemingly mundane (per the assigned Saunders speech). Good speakers connect with audiences by sharing how their experiences led to turning points or insights that shaped their lives and trajectories. We'll discuss the importance of storytelling in speeches, including your third graded assignment due April 5: Write your own personal story speech.

Homework For Next Week 11, April 1, Focus on Humor in Speeches

- Read PDF "Writing to Make Them Laugh" pp. 153-172 in *The Political Speechwriters Companion*, Second Edition, by Robert Lehrman and Eric Schnure.
- Watch Julia Louis-Dreyfus [Acceptance Speech](#) for the 2018 Mark Twain Prize; Steve Carrell's [Commencement Address](#) to Northwestern University in July 2025; others TBD.
- Prepare two questions for next week's guest lecturer: Presidential Speechwriter and Humorist Eric Schnure.

Homework for Sunday, April 5:

- Work on your third graded assignment: Write a personal speech telling a story of a life turning point that shifted your perspective and direction in a significant way – and explain why it matters to your audience of fellow

students. Was it when you overcame a fear? When you made a friend? When you vaulted a hurdle? When you lost someone close to you? When you discovered a love or a passion for a subject, sport or hobby?

- Tell us the story using all the speechwriting techniques we've discussed, taking care to explain its relevance or importance to your audience.
- **Strict maximum length 750 words.** Due by 11:59 p.m., Sunday, April 5.

We'll use the following considerations in grading this assignment:

- Meets length requirement of **750 words or less.**
- Tells an original and authentic story.
- Meaningfully connects your story with the audience.
- Offers a universal lesson or observation.
- Uses the structures and rhetorical devices previously discussed.

Week 11: April 1, Focus on Humor

This class will focus on humor, a key ingredient of successful speeches. We are thrilled that former White House speechwriter [Eric Schnure](#) — co-author of "The Political Speechwriter's Companion: A Guide for Writers and Speakers" and cofounder of the D.C. communications consulting firm The Humor Cabinet — will join us to discuss the art and craft humor in speeches. *Please come prepared with at least two questions for Mr. Schnure.*

Homework For Next Week, April 8

- No reading assignments. *Continue to work on your story speeches.*

Week 12: April 8, Let's Hear Your Stories

Students will share their "Tell Your Story" speeches.

Homework For Next Week, week 13, April 15:

- Read the Introduction (pp. 1-4); "A Brief History of Raised Glasses" (pp. 5-14); "The Art of Toasting" (pp. 25-28); and the example toasts on assorted pages, all in the TOAST PDF, from Toasts: Over 1,500 of the Best Toasts, Sentiments, Blessings and Graces by Paul Dickson

Week 13, April 15, Focus on Toasts

As we open this class, students will continue to share their story speeches, if needed. For the bulk of our class, we're thrilled to have as our guest British speechwriter [Guy Doza](#) to discuss the art of writing and delivering toasts. The British take their toasts very seriously — and Guy will give a wonderful lesson on how to make these tiny speeches sing. (Listen carefully, because you may soon find yourself giving a toast at a friend's wedding or workplace team's dinner!)

Homework For Next Week, final class, April 22:

- Complete your fourth and final graded assignment: Write brief toasts (*Strict maximum length 150 words*) toasting either A) the end of our class and the end of the academic year B) the University of Florida or C) the coming summer. Drafts due 11:59 p.m. April 19.
- We'll use the following considerations to grade this assignment:
 - Meets length requirement of **maximum 150 words of less.**
 - Reflects warmth, humor, irreverence, other elements of good toasts.
 - Tells a story, uses a strong metaphor, makes a good joke or leans into the tradition of clever wordplay in toasts.
 - Ends with a punch.

Week 14, April 22, Final Class: Toasts

As your final graded assignment, you'll give your toasts, and we'll celebrate speeches -- and your new knowledge and talent of speechwriting.

Professors Hoover and Moran will bring the N/A bubbly!