**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts

**Grade level/band**: 11-12

**Task source**: College Readiness Assignments for Texas (CRAFT)

**Speaking to the Occasion**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

1. **Task overview**:

After viewing, listening to, and studying commencement speeches by notable figures, students will write and present their own graduation speeches. The entire class will first listen to at least two commencement speeches to extrapolate their thematic, structural, and stylistic features and will discuss how these elements function in their rhetorical situations.

Before composing their own speeches, students will work independently to locate and analyze a commencement speech, doing the research necessary to understand the interrelationship of message, speaker, audience, and occasion. Students will continue to work independently to identify thematic and stylistic patterns employed in the speech, and then consider how these and other resources of language might be used in their own speeches. Each student will write and deliver a high school commencement address that contains qualities typical of graduation speeches. Students will also be responsible for creating a writer’s statement that analyze their speech in terms of tone, message, and use of rhetorical devices, as well as reflects upon the creation and inspiration behind their speech.

1. **Aligned standards:**
2. **Common Core State Standards**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/4/) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/5/) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/6/) Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/11-12/3/) Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/11-12/6/) Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/1/) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/3/) Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/5/) Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

1. **Critical abilities**

Communication in Many Forms: Use oral and written communication skills to learn, evaluate, and express ideas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting while considering the audience.

Interpersonal Interaction and Collaboration: Develop a range of interpersonal skills, including the ability to work with others, to participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

1. **Time/schedule requirements:**

This assignment could take as little as a week of intense work or up to two weeks. At least one day should be spent reading, listening to, watching, and discussing speeches to discern their characteristics and how they address specific rhetorical situations. One day should be spent allowing students to locate speeches and research the background of the speaker, audience, context, etc. Outside of class, each student should analyze the speech he or she has chosen. Students should then begin to write their own commencement speeches, in and out of class. One class day should be devoted to peer reviews of students’ speeches. Outside of class, students should revise their drafts and practice their presentations before presenting to the class.

1. **Materials/resources:**

Materials for Students:

* Internet access for students to find commencement speeches
* Student handout, *What to Note When Examining Commencement Speeches*
* Student handout, *Speech Evaluation Form*

Teacher Resources:

* Find two or more commencement addresses for class discussion. Download the text from the video or audio presentations so that students can refer to the written version of the speech while listening. Websites containing transcripts of speeches or links to videos of motivating or entertaining commencement speeches can be found here:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/05/17/ten-best-commencement- spe\_n\_204427.html

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcYv5x6gZTA

* As needed, prepare a review of language elements (e.g., theme, tone, detail, figurative language, and other rhetorical/literary devices, such as alliteration and anaphora). Be selective and include only those students are likely to encounter. Helpful websites include the following:

<http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>

<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/50-rhetorical-devices-for-rational-writing/> http://rhetoric.byu.edu/

* As needed, prepare instructional notes on common commencement topics or themes (gratitude to parents, instructors, institution; value of knowledge; praise of student accomplishments; challenges students might face in college classrooms and workplaces; the impact of current events on listeners; expectations for graduates) and characteristics (second person pronouns to address graduates; strategic questions; humor; anecdotes; inspirational quotations). Use these to prompt student analysis during class discussion so that the class can compile its own list.

1. **Prior knowledge:**

Students should be able to:

* Demonstrate prior knowledge in writing, reading, listening, and presentation skills, characteristics of effective speeches (e.g., opening hooks, memorable conclusions, transitions to link topics, humorous or inspirational anecdotes) and characteristics of ineffective speeches (e.g., use of tired clichés and platitudes; generalities with no specifics)
* Be familiar with characteristics of effective and ineffective speaking styles (e.g., posture, body language, eye contact, voice, enunciation, pacing)
* Have a working understanding of rhetorical situation, including a complex sense of audience
* Demonstrate prior understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading
* Use word processing software
* Use effective search strategies for Internet research
* Understand the following key concepts and terms:
* Alliteration
* Anaphora
* Anecdote
* Audience
* Body language, posture, eye contact, gesture
* Cliché, platitude
* Enunciation
* Hook
* Opening
* Pacing
* Topic focus
* Transition
* Voice

1. **Connection to curriculum:**

This task would fit well during the latter part of a term/semester, once students have gained facility with textual analysis and all parts of the writing process.

1. **Teacher instructions:**

DAYS ONE–TWO

* Show the class two or more commencement addresses for class discussion. Provide students with the text for speeches if they are presented in audio or visual form.
* In small groups, have students analyze the organization, message, and presentation skills of the speaker to figure out what factors make the speech effective or ineffective. The handout *What to Note When Examining Commencement Speeches* lists some criteria to look for.
* Have students analyze the speeches to discern how the speakers develop an engaging message, use language resourcefully, and deliver a speech effectively for a specific audience on a specific occasion. Have them discuss what makes speeches humorous, inspirational, conventional, unconventional, controversial, etc.
* As a class, prepare a list of commonly used rhetorical devices that writers use to enhance their commencement addresses.
* Discuss how audience members often belong to different demographics (age groups, relationship to occasion) that may influence how they react to a speech. Do the themes in the speeches appeal to the audience? Do all members of the audience respond in the same way? Do parts of the speech seem geared toward specific subsections of the audience (e.g., graduates, parents, teachers, administrators)? How does the speech manage to appeal to the graduates themselves, who have different school experiences, different personalities, and so on?

DAY THREE

* Have students use the Internet to research commencement speeches to find one that they find effective. Students should also conduct background research on the speaker and the context of the commencement address.
* Have students begin analyzing their speech in class if time permits, then complete the analysis for homework.

DAY FOUR

* Individually, students will begin drafting their five-minute commencement speech. Students should complete drafts for homework.
* Introduce the concept of a *writer’s statement*, which will accompany their speech. In this statement, students will need to analyze their speech in terms of tone, message, and use of rhetorical devices. This is an opportunity for them talk about the creation, inspiration, and direction of their speech, as well as reflect on the revision process they went through. Tell students they will need to use examples from their written speech to support their statement.

DAY FIVE

* Gather materials (e.g., highlighters, sticky notes, and scratch paper) to help students give concrete advice to writers to use in the revision process.
* Students will participate in the review and revision process with peers and instructor.
* Set aside time to conference with students on their speech if needed, focusing on whether the organization, tone, style, and content are appropriate to a commencement address.

DAYS SIX–SEVEN

* Students will revise their commencement speeches. This can be completed out of class, for homework.
* While revising their speeches, have students draft their writer’s statements. These statements will allow for reflection and will provide insights into what each student was thinking during the composition and revision of their speeches. The statements should be 600-700 words in length and analyze their speech in terms of tone, message, and use of rhetorical devices. Remind students to cite evidence from their speech in the writer’s statement.
* Allow some in-class time for students to practice delivering their speeches in groups to obtain feedback from peers.

DAYS EIGHT–TEN

* Students will deliver speeches to the class and any visitors the instructor chooses. As they listen to the speeches of classmates, have students take careful note of which features of the delivery are effective and which are less effective, and consider how what they’ve surmised could prove useful in the future in crafting and delivering oral presentations and in conveying messages to an array of audiences. Provide ways for the audience to provide feedback, using the *Speech Evaluation Form.* Students will study any feedback they receive.
* Students will turn in their final versions of their commencement speech along with a completed writer’s statement.

1. **Student support:**

* Provide questions to guide students’ organizational and stylistic analyses of a sample written speech, possibly with passages underlined or highlighted to focus attention on specific attributes of an effective commencement address.
* Have students work in small groups to analyze an additional speech.
* Provide specific, guided tutoring to students in need of greater direction and structure for the completion of the assignment.
* Review the writing process, focusing on those aspects with which individuals are struggling (prewriting/invention, revision, editing).
* Conference more than once with students on their individual speeches. The following factors may be considered when assessing a student's performance on this assignment. These assessment factors should be made clear to all students at the beginning of the lesson:
* Speech includes an introduction, body, and conclusion, with an organization that supports the logical progression of an idea or main point.
* Speech acknowledges occasion and audience.
* Speech is situated in an historical moment, but challenges listeners to contemplate both the present and the future.
* Literary and rhetorical devices are used resourcefully (e.g., to appeal to the senses, create images, suggest mood).
* Tone is suitable to occasion.
* Anecdotes, stories, and/or humor enliven the message and connect with the audience.
* Delivery is well-paced.
* Delivery complements message (e.g., words are clear, tone seems natural).

1. **Extensions or variations:**

* **Choose a person you would most like to have as your high school graduation speaker. Write a proposal to your school administration that argues the reasons for your choice.**
* **Write a statement of goals for your future and how you plan to achieve each goal.**
* **Research and write an essay about high school graduation traditions and the history behind them in your school, your culture or another culture. You should include topics like clothing, music, ceremonies, and the roles of students and adults in these traditions.**
* **On your own, watch several movies and/or television shows where characters are graduating from high school or beginning college. Analyze how these movies and shows present what life is like during this time. What lessons, struggles, and victories do they emphasize? Do you feel that these movies and shows are accurate reflections of “real life”?**
* **Some suggestions: Ferris Bueller’s Day Off, A Cinderella Story, Grease, Say Anything, Can’t Hardly Wait, The Sure Thing, Toy Story 3, High School Musical 3, American Graffiti, The Perks of Being a Wallflower, The Social Network, Accepted.**
* **After listening to your classmates’ commencement speeches, create a list of the “Top Ten Pearls of Wisdom for High School Graduates.” The lists may be serious or satirical, but they must all be based on the speeches your classmates delivered.**

1. **Scoring instructions:**

The speech will be scored using the SCALE Effective Communication Oral Presentation Rubric and the writer’s statement will be scored using the LDC Informational/Explanatory rubric.