SAMPLE SPEECH

The following speech was given by John Coleman, a student at Berry College in Georgia. John was coached by Randy Richardson and Chip Hall, and won third place at the 2004 Interstate Oratorical Association Annual Contest, which was held at Glendale Community College in Arizona.

John’s topic was one that he cared deeply about: Growing up in the Deep South, I gained an appreciation of rhetoric from the men who had changed my world: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, among others. The passion with which these men defended human rights inspired me to no end, and the subject about which they were so passionate—slavery and human rights abuse—enthralled me from an early age. My second semester of college took a class entitled “Slavery in the Age of Freedom,” analyzing the historical tensions between slavery and our founding ideals, and I read as much on the subject of American slavery as I could digest. Knowing this, it will not come as a surprise that when an alumna of the Berry forensics program emailed my coach and me with a National Geographic article on the topic of modern-day slavery I was hooked. There simply was no other topic for me.

If you don’t care about your subject no one else will, and there is something particularly keen in the human mind that picks up on emotional dishonesty.

John’s general purpose was to persuade, and his specific purpose could be expressed in the following purpose statement:

After listening to my speech, my audience will help me spread the word about the problem of modern slavery.

John’s thesis statement, which suggests a proposition of policy, might be worded as follows:

We should do what we can to stop modern slavery.

John’s concern with his credibility as a speaker began with his research on this topic:

The research process started, for me, in the Berry College Library. The first publication I referenced was National Geographic, the magazine from which the topic arose, and I followed the sources they cited to see what else I could gather. There were a number of organizations, like Free the Slaves (at www.freetheslaves.net), that proved essential to my research, and each source gave me new leads to follow. It is important to find the most reputable information available in order to gain credibility for the speech, particularly as I had no preexisting authority (I was only a 22-year-old, middle-class, white American college student, after all), and sourcing out good articles from publications like National Geographic can lead you to all the right places.

Each piece of evidence that John chose, therefore, was subjected to a test that kept both credibility and ethics in mind:

Building from these sources, it was simply a matter of looking at the data in a fair way, and taking those statistics and anecdotes that seemed accurate, fair, and reasonable. If the New Yorker, National Geographic, and the State Department all agreed that 27 million people were enslaved (they did), then my numbers were solid. If one less-reputable source claimed that number was closer to 400 million, I had to throw out
that number despite the impact it might have on my audience. Some speakers go for the most outrageous numbers they can find, but remember this: your audience will be intelligent and attentive. If something is so outrageous as to sound inflated or illogical, they will pick it up. It is better to evaluate the reasonableness of the numbers you encounter.

John was also concerned with audience analysis from the start. He knew that his forensics-contest audience had interests in rhetoric and American history, so he tailored his approach for them:

Modern-day slavery, particularly as it occurs in Asia and Africa, might seem distant to many of the people to whom I would have to deliver my speech. However, connecting modern-day slavery with our nation's own slave tradition was a way in which I could bring the topic home. I knew a lot about the topic of African slavery in the United States, and to establish a rhetorical framework for the speech, I decided to let the great abolitionists of our history speak for me. I researched the speeches of William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, and others, and I gathered quotations from them. I felt they could draw the audience in to the horrors of modern-day slavery—something for which most of them had no frame of reference.

Along with common ground, John also considered the diversity of this audience:

I would be speaking to Republicans and Democrats, Asians and Caucasians, teachers and businesspeople, and the very diversity of those individuals required me to construct a speech with broad appeal and employ language that would not alienate anyone. If I were too quick to demonize corporate America or the existing administration, many people who otherwise might have been sympathetic to my cause would quickly dismiss me.

John used a problem-causes-solutions organization. His persuasive structure can be seen in the following outline. (Parenthetical numbers refer to paragraphs in the speech.)

**Introduction**

I. Attention-getter (1–2)
II. Preview of main points (3)

**Body**

I. Modern slavery is a far more extensive problem than you would assume. (4–7)
   A. Worldwide numbers are huge: 27 million slaves. (4)
   B. Human abuses are devastating. (5)
   C. U.S. numbers are also large: 100,000 slaves in America. (6)
   D. U.S. sex tourism also supports slavery. (7)
II. Modern slavery has three prominent causes. (8–11)
   A. Slavery has become highly profitable. (9)
   B. Slavery thrives on the cooperation of corrupt corporations and local governments. (10)
   C. Slavery has been ignored by our own country. (11)
III. Modern slavery can be fought on three fronts. (12–15)
   A. On the governmental level, laws can attack the problem. (13)
   B. On the corporate level, boycotts can attack the problem. (14)
   C. On the personal level, your actions can attack the problem. (15)
Conclusion

I. Review of main points (16)

II. Final remarks (16)

As you read John's speech, notice how he expands on this outline as he develops his argument point by point.

**FREE THE SLAVES**

John Coleman

1. "On this subject I do not wish to think, or speak, or write with moderation... No! I will not equivocate; I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." Fortunately, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was heard. By 1865, our country had split the blood of its sons and daughters to redeem the blood of its slaves. By the late 1800s, slavery was extinguished from the earth.

2. Or was it? According to National Geographic of September 2003, far from extinguished, in recent years this not-so-peculiar institution has thrived—now claiming more lives than were bought and sold in four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. 27 million people. 120 nations. Terrorizing mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters, the persistence of the institution the State Department called, in a June 25, 2003 congressional hearing, "the emerging human rights issue of the 21st Century," slavery now warrants our attention and response.

3. So, in order to fight an evil six millennia in the making, we will first look to the problem of modern slavery. Second, we will examine its causes, and, finally, we will look into some ways in which we can fight these abuses today, and assure that, absent equivocation or moderation, the long-suffering voices of 27 million can now be heard.

4. In his September 23, 2003 address to the United Nations, President George W. Bush proclaimed of the modern slave trade, "There's a special evil in the abuse and exploitation of the most innocent and vulnerable," and while the President notes correctly the cruelty of this institution, modern-day slavery has a different formulation than the racially based chattel slavery of the ante-bellum South. According to Dr. Kevin Bales, Director of the Free the Slaves Foundation, modern slaves share several common characteristics—they are bought and sold, owned, mentally or physically abused, and forced to labor. We are not speaking of mere repression here, nor are all slaves sex-slaves or cocoa workers in the Ivory Coast; and, if anything, the number 27 million—excluding hundreds of millions enduring child-labor and indentured servitude—is low.

5. The abuses themselves are devastating. According to Transitions Online of April 7, 2003, in Serbia and Montenegro, girls as young as fourteen are kept in box-sized rooms where, raped, beaten, and scarred by cigarette burns and tooth marks, they are forced to service customers in the same area in which they sleep and eat. Abortion is forced. Disease is common. Hope is a fantasy. According to the Africa News of July 11, 2003, in Nigeria, where slavery estimates range upwards of 900,000 people, young girls are trafficked into countries like taly each year. This article tells of two of them, ages 13 and 14, locked in dehydration so desperate they had to urinate for each other to drink so that they would not die. In Europe, Community Care of August 7, 2003 tells of a 7-year-old boy purchased like a sacrificial lamb on the international slave market and reduced to a mutilated torso in ritual killings.
6 And if you think these abuses are confined to war-torn countries thousands of miles from home, you are wrong. According to the State Department's 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report, there are now more than 100,000 slaves living and dying in the United States—with 18,000–20,000 new slaves crossing the border each year. In April of 2003, the New Yorker reported on massive slave plantations in South Florida where immigrants were smuggled, forced to labor, and beaten or killed if they try to escape—all in tomato fields and orange groves funded by the likes of Taco Bell.

7 According to Attorney General John Ashcroft in a speech on January 29, 2004, the Justice Department is currently investigating 142 such cases; and what we can't get at home, we get abroad. According to the Associated Press of September 24, 2003, Americans currently account for approximately 25% of the sex tourism industry—a system responsible for the rape and abuse of thousands of young boys and girls in developing nations. And with abuse and debasement so sickening, it is easy to echo Garrison's denouncement of moderation and insistence on being heard.

8 However, these 27 million voices have largely gone unheard, and while the causes are as numerous as the problems, the most important are three—increasing profitability, the cooperation of corporations and local governments, and the half-hearted efforts of our own country.

9 First, with the explosion of global populations and the failure of societal safety nets, slavery has become the world's most profitable institution. According to House Committee Chair Dan Burton's Congressional Testimony of October 29, 2003, while the average slave costs around $40,000 in today's money in 1850, that cost has fallen to $150 today, and as slaves can generate revenues of up to $80,000 per year, the costs and benefits of this transaction form a deadly combination.

10 However, corporations must provide these profits and governments must overlook them, and as rescue worker Sompop Jantrak said on CNN of September 25, 2003, “Corruption is everywhere.” According to the Nation of June 30, 2003, corporate cooperation with slave practices abroad is nothing new. The Unocal Corporation supported slavery in Burma for years, and, more recently, companies like Pepsi and Exxon Mobil have fallen under the same scrutiny. According to the LA Times of March 5, 2004, Taco Bell has been implicated in such practices domestically, and according to the American Journalism Review of June/July 2003, the tally of those complicit in these practices extends beyond corporations to NATO officials, UN peacekeepers, and local district attorneys.

11 Finally, the half-hearted efforts of our own nation are at least partially to blame. According to the Weekly Standard of October 6, 2003, while the United States spends more than $1 billion to fight the drug trade every year, we spend only $60 million to fight slavery. In the United Nations that number is $450,000, and this combined expenditure of $2 per slave does not constitute a spending priority. While our government has declared a war on terror, it appears that our willingness to combat the terror of slavery is lukewarm to say the least.

12 In his autobiography, Frederick Douglas noted that “The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.” And in the fight against modern slavery, endurance will be key on three levels: governmental, corporate, and personal.

13 First, on a governmental level, the Bush administration has made efforts to combat slavery, but those efforts must now become a priority. According to the
Cox News Service of March 4, 2004, in September of last year, the first U.S. citizen was prosecuted under a new law that makes it illegal to travel abroad to have sex with children in slavery, and other such simple measures are necessary to combat this growing epidemic. According to freetheslaves.net, you can write your congressional representative about a variety of such issues, and this Web site provides you with the forum to do so.

14 Second, you can direct similar efforts against the corporations that fund these practices. According to Forbes of April 28, 2003, many organizations such as the International Labor Rights Fund have already begun to bring suits against those corporations complicit in the slave trafficking practices of their business partners abroad, and you can support them in these efforts. According to the University Wire of March 1, 2004, the "boot the bell" campaign has already started to remove Taco Bell from dozens of college campuses and boycotts are still effective. Remember, you are not powerless, and if there is one group that corporations must listen to, it is us, the consumers.

15 Finally, take personal action. According to the previously cited New Yorker, concerned citizens first exposed slave abuses in South Florida, and remain the greatest tool for the liberation of this nation's 100,000 slaves. Be aware, and report abuses when you see them. Finally, Satya of June/July 2003 says that you can support one of many international organizations like Bal Vikas Ashram in India which raids slave camps and rescues and raises the children they free. I've brought a list of the most pertinent of these organizations, so that you, if you like, can donate your money or your time. Both are desperately needed.

16 In an 1858 speech, Abraham Lincoln closed saying, "I leave you, hoping that the lamp of liberty will burn in your bosoms until there shall no longer be a doubt that all men are created free and equal." Today, we have examined the problems and causes of slavery, and taken the first steps toward the eradication of this vile institution. In fact, in January of this year, the United Nations declared 2004 the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition, and just as Garrison, Lincoln and Douglas had their time, our generation's time has come. Now let us seize this opportunity, and issue forth an emancipation proclamation for all the world to hear.

**SUMMARY**

Persuasion—the act of moving someone, through communication, toward a belief, attitude, or behavior—can be both worthwhile and ethical. Ethical persuasion requires that the speaker be sincere and honest and avoid such behaviors as plagiarism. It also requires that the persuasion be in the best interest of the audience.

Persuasion can be categorized according to the type of proposition (fact, value, or policy), outcome (convincing or actuating), or approach (direct or indirect). A persuasive strategy is put into effect through the use of several techniques. These include setting a specific, clear persuasive purpose, structuring the message carefully, using solid evidence (including emotional evidence), using careful reasoning, adapting to the audience, and building credibility as a speaker.

A typical structure for a speech to convince requires you to explain what the problem is and then propose a solution. For a speech to actuate, you also have to ask for a desired audience response. The basic three-pronged structure can be adapted to more elaborate persuasive plans, but the basic components will remain a part of any persuasive strategy. For each of these components, you need to analyze the arguments your audience will have against accepting what you say and then answer those arguments.