

# Advanced English: The Power of Words - Analyzing Presidential Rhetoric in the Age of Trump

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**This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.**

## Course Objectives

This 12-week course offers a unique opportunity to explore the power of language in contemporary American politics by focusing on the rhetoric of Donald Trump. Through a stimulating mix of theory and practice, students will improve their advanced English skills while gaining key insights into how political communication shapes public opinion and democratic life.

The course has three main objectives:

- To introduce students to the techniques and stakes of presidential rhetoric, highlighting Trump's unprecedented communication style
- To equip students with analytical tools from rhetoric, sociolinguistics, political communication, and critical discourse analysis
- To foster critical thinking about how language can build myths, stir emotions, divide societies, and challenge democratic norms.

## Background

Whether you are interested in politics, language, media, or culture, this course will help you decode how words can be used as weapons in the battle for hearts and minds.

Presidential rhetoric is a cornerstone of American political life. From soaring inaugural addresses to intimate fireside chats, U.S. presidents have long used language to inspire, persuade, and govern. Yet Donald J. Trump's rise to power disrupted this tradition. His direct, combative, and often provocative style upended decades of presidential decorum. Trump bypassed traditional media, mobilized emotion over facts, and spoke in ways that both energized and polarized the nation.

Donald J. Trump's presidency marked a sharp departure from these traditions. His language shattered many of the norms associated with presidential communication—embracing disruption, transgression, and strategic ambiguity. Rather than unify, his rhetoric often divided. Rather than clarify, it obfuscated. Rather than respect institutional truth, it frequently undermined it. Trump's reliance on simplification, repetition,

emotional amplification, and combative posturing—especially through social media—gave rise to a communication style described by scholars as ‘demagogic,’ ‘authoritarian,’ or ‘post-truth.’

This course explores how Trump’s rhetoric operates not only at the level of style and register, but also as a discursive regime that transforms political communication. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Jennifer Mercieca, Adam Hodges, Ruth Wodak, John Ganz, and others, we will investigate how linguistic strategies (like hyperbole, anaphora, dog whistles, metaphor, or context collapse) function in building narratives of crisis, victimhood, heroism, and threat. We will also study the broader media ecology that amplifies these messages—from Twitter to cable news to parody and satire—and examine how language becomes a tool for polarization and political mobilization.

Ultimately, the course invites students to think critically about language and power in the 21st-century presidency.

## The course

The course follows a thematic structure. Each session will explore a central dimension of Trump’s rhetorical approach and its broader significance, using excerpts from speeches, interviews, debates, tweets, and media coverage, alongside theoretical and scholarly readings. The following themes will be addressed:

- “What the hell is going on?” – Tools for Analyzing Rhetoric and Trump’s Communication Style
- “I alone can fix it.” – Populist Leadership and the Hero vs. Antihero Myth
- “We will make America strong again.” – Masculinity, Power, and the Pornographic Style
- “They’re bringing drugs. They’re rapists.” – Nationalism, Immigration, and Exclusion
- “Very fine people on both sides.” – Race, White Supremacy, and the Charlottesville Controversy
- “My first favorite book: the Bible.” – Religious Rhetoric and Spiritual Legitimacy
- “Some people are saying...” – Conspiracy, Epistemic Chaos, and Post-Truth
- “Enemies of the People.” – Media Attacks, Lies, and Alternative Facts
- “American Carnage.” – Violence, Threat, and Rhetorical Extremism
- “We’re being ripped off!” – Economic Nationalism and Victimization
- “Canada was meant to be the 51<sup>st</sup> state.” – Expansion, mock diplomacy, and rhetorical destabilization
- “I’m the most honest human being that God ever created.” – Absurdity, Humor, Parody, Satire and Comedic Resistance.

## Organization

Activities will cover the four language skills. While in-class discussion will emphasize speaking—including oral presentations, debates, and rhetorical analysis—the course also requires preparation through reading and listening to primary and secondary materials. In addition, each week two students will work together to prepare a 10- to 15-minute oral presentation, offering a critical analysis of one of the week’s rhetorical themes, based on selected excerpts and theoretical readings. These presentations will serve as a springboard for class discussion and further inquiry.

Writing assignments will include summaries, response papers, and a final essay (week 10 or 11). Students will work with authentic political discourse and critical frameworks to sharpen both their linguistic fluency and their analytical acuity.