

## Geoffrey R. Stone's Argument in "Free Speech on Campus"

In a speech titled "Free Speech on Campus," Geoffrey R. Stone claims that academic freedom is, "...a hard-bought acquisition in a lengthy struggle for academic integrity" (86). He starts off by explaining the complex history of the term academic freedom. From the very beginning, he tries to gain an emotional response from his audience. Many examples of the unfair treatment students and faculty had to go through are brought up. This evidence is stated in a unique style that continuously profits from the organization of the speech. Stone concludes this history lesson with the problem he thinks is now stopping academic freedom from thriving. That is, the students and weak minded universities. He does this successfully by maintaining a consistent style throughout the speech, as well as having a steady pace. Stone also provides quantitative evidence and is able to gain the audience's trust. One fault would be Stone's targeted audience of university board members, which does not seem to contain the entire range that is needed.

Stone begins by making the audience feel for the struggles that students and faculty had to face throughout history. He recites many moments in history, whether it be at the cusp of the Civil War or in the midst of World War I, when having strong opinions on either matter was severely punished. This inspires an emotional response from the audience, causing them to pity the people Stone is referring to. His use of emphasis really helps this feeling grow in the audience. Stone states that, "Similar issues arose again, with a vengeance, during the age of McCarthy" (86). He did not have to add, "...with a vengeance..." (86), in the middle of that phrase, but he did. In doing so, that pause sits with the audience and allows them to understand how much worse things truly became. On the other hand, it is at this point that the audience might feel a sense of relief, knowing that modern day times are nothing like what Stone has been

describing. It is then that Stone jumps to the present day and claims that, "...students themselves demand censorship, and colleges and universities...to often surrender academic freedom to charges of offense" (87). He uses many different anecdotes as examples to paint a picture for the audience. Some of these examples include students rejecting invited speakers, students wanting "All Lives Matter" posters to be taken down, and other moments that students felt unsafe. Stone also provides quantitative evidence, stating that, "A recent survey revealed that 72% of current college students support disciplinary action against any student or faculty member who expresses views that they deem "racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise offensive" (88). This section not only informs the audience of the current climate present on many college campuses, but it also gives the audience data to think about. The audience is able to trust Stone's words more because of a well presented fact. With this information, the audience can now compare these circumstances to the prior ones brought up by Stone earlier. In doing so, it allows him to sufficiently prove his point by stating the similarities between the two. While society thought free speech was blossoming, Stone explains how modern times are eerily similar to those of the past.

After explaining those similarities, Stone moves on to state his argument as to why that is. This section's organization is very effective because Stone rarely leaves any loose ends. He tends to state the problem he has and then quickly provides ways he thinks these situations could be solved. This keeps him on topic, as well as the audience, who could struggle if the topic becomes lost. An example of this would be when Stone claims that the newer generation have not been raised with enough grit to successfully live in society. He uses the words, "...weak, fragile, and emotionally unstable" (88), when describing their mindset. Stone then immediately offers a solution to this, stating that universities can not protect students from hardship but,

“...enable them to be effective citizens of the world” (88). Stone states his argument and then assigns a corrective to that statement, just in time for him to state his counterargument. In this he states that maybe current college students are not weak and that, “...they have the courage to demand respect, equality, and safety” (88). After the counterargument, he makes sure to formally state what side of the argument he agrees with, being the former. Even this small detail helps avoid confusion and contributes to the speech. The section flows incredibly well as it hits all the necessary points needed for an argument. The organization is then complemented by the style Stone achieves. Using the previous examples stated, Stone tends to use multiple words to emphasize his meaning. When he described the student's mindset, he used a group of three words. He also used three words during his counterclaim. It gives these statements the sense that they are important and asks the audience to pay attention. It is a great way to highlight specific phrases.

Along with great organization, Stone manages to include small segments that boost his credibility significantly. During this segment, Stone speaks of a committee that he chaired in hopes of fixing this ongoing problem present on college campuses. Stone states that, “The Committee consisted of seven very distinguished faculty members from across the University” (89). From the report that this committee wrote, Stone lists key excerpts. During this, he is able to restate his argument with more detail and remind the audience. His credibility increases even more when he states that the report has gained national attention, being adopted by universities such as, “...Princeton, Purdue, Johns Hopkins, American University, the University of Wisconsin, and Louisiana State University” (90). Stone then ends this section by bringing the audience's attention back to the comparison of previous generations and now. He briefly explains the impact of social media, stating that, “...65% of all college students now say that it is

unsafe for them to express unpopular views...” (90). Moving towards the conclusion, there is still one aspect that pales in comparison to the rest of the speech. That is, the target audience. Stone seems to use this speech as a call to action, directed towards the board members of various universities. But what he is arguing involves the students as well. Throughout the speech, Stone has instructed colleges on what he thinks will help towards the betterment of society. On the other hand, he has regarded the current generation of college students as weak minded and fragile. There will be many students that simply do not agree and, therefore, less persuaded to change their minds.

Stone is largely successful in his speech claiming that academic freedom has remained elusive despite our difference in time. The movement of the speech is great, allowing for the audience to follow along. It is then only complimented by Stone’s use of emphasis. The entire speech is connected, the audience can easily recall these connections and Stone pieces them together nicely. Stone is able to touch on every aspect of a successful argument.

Works Cited

Stone, Geoffrey. "Free Speech on Campus." *READ, REASON, WRITE: AN ARGUMENT TEXT AND READER*. 12th ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2019, pp. 86-92.