In *Rhetoric* 3.12 1413b2ff. Aristotle completes his account of good style by considering the styles appropriate to the three genres of oratory. He distinguishes (1) *lexis graphikê*, the written style, which is linked to epideictic and has especial formal precision (it is *akribestatê*), and (2) *lexis agonistikê*, the performative style, a translation I have adopted to highlight the implication in Aristotle’s choice of terminology of a contrast between writing and oral performance. It is the style suited to speech in oral public debate, the *agon*, and is apt for deliberative and to a lesser extent forensic oratory. Aristotle also terms this style *hypokritikê*, i.e. it suits *hypokrisis*, the lively, dramatic oral delivery of an actor/performer.

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1 It is a particular pleasure to offer this piece to Bill Fortenbaugh. I am also grateful for comments from him and others at the Rutgers conference.

2 The chapter is well integrated into Aristotle’s analysis of style. Contrast Graff 2001 37: “Admittedly, its placement and its content give *Rhetoric* 3.12 the character of an afterthought in the context of the preceding chapters on style.” It is part of Aristotle’s concern with the appropriate, picking up, as we shall see, on previous points and aptly preceding the discussion of the structural parts (3.13–19), where what is appropriate for the three genres is a continuing concern, and again epideictic is linked to writing: see 1414b24–25 καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιδεικτικοῖς λόγοις δεὶ οὕτως γράφειν.

3 On these see Hinks 1936, Buchheit 1960, Mirhady 1994, and Bons 2001. Aristotle’s epideictic genre is speech concerned with praise and blame (1358b12–13). Contrast *epideixis* as a set speech for display, a term particularly associated with the sophists (e.g. Plato, *Gorgias* 447b–c): it often is encomiastic (hence the Aristotelian meaning) but it could include, for example, the deliberative speech of Lysias in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (cf. 235a ἐπιδεικτικοῖς λόγοις). Note that Isocrates both accepts and disassociates himself from that usage, approving only encomia that have a serious purpose and are not ἐπιδεικτικῶς of self-display (e.g. *Panegyricus* 17, *Philip* 25).


The distinction of speech and writing has stimulated a number of recent studies, but Aristotle’s analysis of the written and performative styles usually appears only marginally. Yet (a) it is itself a significant piece; (b) we can trace clear influence on Aristotle from previous and contemporary writers, notably Alcidamas and Isocrates; and (c) he influenced later theory in the emphasis on style and in the specific characterisation he gave to the two styles. In this paper I aim to explore ways in which the relationship between speech and text, the oral/performed and the written/read, underpins the distinctions Aristotle draws in terms of genre and style.

It is an immediate complication that the distinction of written text and oral speech is itself blurred. Texts, especially literary texts, were normally read aloud, and Aristotle assumes this at 1407b11–12: “what is written should in general be easy to read and easy to speak (εὐανάγνωστον ... καὶ εὔφωστον), which is the same thing.” What matters is an easy comprehension, and a good written style facilitates the good oral performance of that text. This link between writing and performance appears most clearly in Aristotle’s theory of the sentence. (a) Prose-rhythm is an acoustic effect, yet the reading of a written text is firmly evidenced when Aristotle advises us to make the end of the sentence clear “not through the copyist or punctuation marks but through the rhythm” (1409a20–21 μὴ διὰ τὸν γραφεία, μηδὲ διὰ τὴν παραγραφήν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὁφθημὸν). (b) The period is intended for oral performance since it should allow good breath-control (1409b14 εὐανάπνευστος), yet the principal source for examples of the period is Isocrates’ Panegyricus, a written epideictic speech; epideictic is thus the home of the written style but its periods suit oral performance. (c) Aristotle suggests a difficulty which would be found only in reading a written text when he condemns ambiguity in identifying when a sense-unit is complete (1409b8–12); compare the type of ambiguous punctuation illustrated by Heraclitus where Aristotle refers explicitly to the use of punctuation marks on a written text, διαστίξα (1407b13 and 14). I return to this demand for organic punctuation later, but it is no accident that these examples all involve sentence-structure. Aristotle’s distinction of the written

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7 On the vexed question of silent reading see e.g. Knox 1968, Gavrilov 1997, and Johnson 2000.

8 I return to this later. Note also the linked need for comprehensible size, μέγεθος εὐανάγνωστον (1409b1).