The rhetorical dimension

A scientist's elevator speech in 45 seconds: E.O. Wilson

Biologist E.O. Wilson was on The Diane Rehm Show on NPR on April 25, 2010. Toward the end of the hour, this email message came in from a scientist-listener:

> "I was asked recently by an acquaintance to give him an elevator speech as to why biodiversity is so important. He told me I had 45 seconds to convince him that he should care about this and that humans indeed have an impact on the Earth. I was dumbfounded by the request. I have asked a number of ecologists the same questions. I don't feel I've received a satisfactory answer. Can you help?"

Wilson was up for the challenge and offered this timed "elevator speech":

> "Because humanity is a biological species living in a biological environment. Because like all species we are exquisitely adapted in everything from our behavior to our genetics to our physiology to that particular environment in which we live. The Earth is our home. The rest of life is the critical part of that home. Unless we preserve the rest of life as a sacred duty we will be endangering ourselves by destroying a home in which we evolved and on which we completely depend."

Transcript: http://www.dontgetcaught.biz/2010/04/scientists-elevator-speech-in-45.html
Audio: http://thedianerehmshow.org/audio-player?nid=12429

Tasks:

1. This elevator speech is the answer. What was the question?

2. Mark short breaks / long breaks // and pauses for breathing ///. Practice reading.

3. Identify dimensions of rhetoric in the elevator speech:

   • repetition
   • rule of three
   • parallel structure
   • rhythm
   • expressions that surprise you in this context

4. How does the speaker's use of rhetoric work to his advantage/ disadvantage?

   • ethos: character and credibility
   • pathos: emotional appeal to alter the audience's judgment
   • logos: the use of logical reasoning to construct an argument

5. Transfer: Coin a phrase using repetition, parallel structure and rhythm for your project. When, how and why would you employ it?