Everyone has either seen or participated in military marches that are paced by a leader with either a call or a song. There was even a top forty record in the sixties that included a march accompanied by the song, “I don’t know but I believe, (repeated by the group), I’ll be home by Christmas Eve.”

You can even get apps for your mobile device that has these types of paced songs for your walk or run.

This activity is known as cadence. Webster’s defines cadence as a “rhythmic sequence or flow of sounds in language or the beat, time, or measure of rhythmical motion or activity or finally the falling inflection of the voice.”

Cadence can make an ordinary speech extraordinary. When a written formal speech is read in a normal fashion, it lacks the memorable sections that will make the speech stand out.

Remember that people will retain in memory only a portion of what they hear. Using cadence in your speech will highlight what you want them to remember.

Let’s look at a couple of very famous speeches from the sixties to see what cadence can do for you.

In John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961, he had this famous portion. “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.” A great and memorable phrase. But let’s look at it from the standpoint of cadence.

“And so, (pause) my fellow Americans: (longer pause) ask not what your country can do for you (pause) — ask what you can do for your country. (pause for emphasis). Notice the phrase has the familiar four beat cadence that everyone is familiar with.

Ask anyone about the Kennedy inauguration speech and invariably they will quote the above.

Martin Luther King, Jr. with his background in preaching was a master of cadence. In his famous “I have a dream,” speech, he used his voice as a wonderful instrument to make his words remembered. Look at this final portion of the speech. King has already spoken in cadence the statements of “I have a dream today”. Here, he soars toward a conclusion that makes this speech one of the greatest delivered by an American orator.

“This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim’s pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring." And if America is to be a great nation this must become true.

So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.
Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!
Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!
But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.”

Every one of these statements had a soaring cadence and a pause that allowed the crowd on the National Mall to erupt in roars of approval. The speech became a touchstone of the civil rights movement and is remembered still today.

So what you say is important. Using cadence in your speech makes how you say it more important still.