

Rhetorical Devices:

A HANDBOOK AND ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENT WRITERS



PRESTWICK HOUSE, INC.

"Everything for the English Classroom!"



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Senior Editor:

Paul Moliken

Editor:

Douglas Grudzina

Writer:

Brendan McGuigan

Reviewing Teachers:

*Sharon M. Ammon, English Department Chair
Memorial High School, Houston, TX*

Kathleen Carr

Peter Glaser

Cover and Text Design:

Maria J. Mendoza

Layout and Production:

Jerry Clark



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Pronunciation Guide

a—track	ô—port, fought
ā—mate	ōō—proof
ä—father	u—pun
â—care	ÿ—full
e—pet	ū— you
ē—be	û—purr
i—bit	ə—about, system, supper, circus
ī—bite	oi—toy
o—job	th—thin
ō—wrote	th—there
	zh—vision

Rhetorical Devices

<i>Allusion</i> (a loo' zhin)	<i>Hyperbole</i> (hī pər' bə lē)
<i>Amplification</i> (âmp li fi kâ' shun)	<i>Hypophora</i> (hī pă' fə rə)
<i>Anadiplosis</i> (an ə di plō' sis)	<i>Litotes</i> (lī tō' tēz)
<i>Analogy</i> (a nal' ə jē)	<i>Metabasis</i> (met ə bā' sis)
<i>Anaphora</i> (a naf' ə r ə)	<i>Metaphor</i> (met' ə for)
<i>Antanagoge</i> (an tan ə gō' jē)	<i>Metonymy</i> (mə tăn' i mē)
<i>Antithesis</i> (an tith' ə sis)	<i>Parallelism</i> (pə rə lel iz' m)
<i>Aporia</i> (ə pōr' ē ə)	<i>Parataxis</i> (pə rə tax' is)
<i>Apostrophe</i> (a pos' trə fē)	<i>Parenthesis</i> (pə ren' thə sis)
<i>Asyndeton</i> (ā sin'də tăn)	<i>Personification</i> (per son i fi kâ' shun)
<i>Chiasmus</i> (kī az' məs)	<i>Polysyndeton</i> (pă' lē sin də tăn)
<i>Climax</i> (klī' max)	<i>Procatalepsis</i> (prō kat ə lep' sis)
<i>Conduplicatio</i> (kän dōōp lə kat' ē ō)	<i>Rhetorical Question</i>
<i>Distinctio</i> (dis tink'shē ō)	<i>Sententia</i> (sen ten' shē ə)
<i>Enumeratio</i> (ē nōō mər ä' tē ō)	<i>Simile</i> (sim' i lē)
<i>Epistrophe</i> (ə pis' trə fē)	<i>Symploce</i> (sim' plə sē)
<i>Epithet</i> (ep' i thet)	<i>Synecdoche</i> (si nek' də kē)
<i>Eponym</i> (ep' ə nim)	<i>Understatement</i>
<i>Exemplum</i> (ex zem' plum)	<i>Zeugma</i> (zōōg' mə)
<i>Hyperbaton</i> (hī pər' bə tăn)	



INTRODUCTION

What Is Rhetoric?

In reading, speaking, or writing, rhetoric is a tool that enhances composition; its aim is to persuade, to inform, to express a personal thought, or simply to entertain the reader. What the formal study of rhetoric allows us to do is isolate exactly what it is we've done so that in the future we can do it again for a similar effect. Rather than haphazardly casting words on the page, letting our vague expectations guide us, we can carefully construct our writing, effectively using the rhetorical devices we have learned.

Although there are literally hundreds of figures of rhetoric, ranging from *anadiplosis* to *zeugma*, some are so rare that you are unlikely to run into them, while others, such as *hyperbole* and *metaphor*, are so common that it is rare to see a newspaper article or hear a speech in which they are not frequently used. For our purpose we will consider 33 of the most useful rhetorical devices.

Keep in mind, however, when using figures of rhetoric, it is important to make sure you are helping your cause, rather than hindering it. A misused form, or a form used in an inappropriate place, can act as an obstacle to your readers, breaking the flow of your argument or actively confusing them about your meaning.

Rhetorical Devices that Help with Strategy

As a writer, you'll want to use rhetorical devices to help strengthen the strategy of your paper. Some of these devices are meant as transitional tools, to help you move seamlessly from one portion of your essay to another, while others are meant to help you present your evidence or information as strongly as possible. Still others help link the entire essay together, making it cohesive and intentional—characteristics valued by the scorers of large-scale writing assessments.

Rhetorical Devices that Help with Style

Whereas strategy and organization are the walls and foundation of an essay, style is the decoration, much like the paint, the wallpaper, and the furniture one might place in a house. Your style will say a lot about your personality and will also reveal your attitude toward the subject and your attitude toward the reader. It can mean the difference between an essay that people read once and forget, or one you clip out of a magazine or newspaper and read over and over. Poor style might mean that no one will ever read the entire essay. It can also mean the difference between a clear, lucid argument, and one that is almost impossible for the reader to understand. Therefore, the stylistic devices that you choose will have a powerful effect, one way or another, on the reception that your writing receives.



EXAMPLES OF RHETORICAL PITFALLS

One of the most useful and versatile rhetorical devices is the *metaphor*. A *metaphor* connects one subject with another that may not be obviously related. When used correctly, it allows the writer to do this in a way that is both stylistically pleasing and concise.

The following quotation has been edited and altered so that it includes a misused *metaphor*. It is from Pope John Paul II, discussing the Nazi Holocaust and the long-lasting impact it has had on Europe:

Here, as at Auschwitz and many other places in Europe, we are overcome by the echo of the tears of so many. Men, women, and children cry out to us from the depths of the horror that they knew. How can we fail to heed their cry? No one can forget or ignore what happened. No one can diminish its scale.

Note that a *metaphor* is introduced in the first sentence—the idea of the past at Auschwitz and other death camps echoing down through the ages. However, it is then immediately connected with a subject—tears—that cannot echo. This problem is commonly referred to as mixing *metaphors*, and using *metaphors* in this way can cause your reader a great deal of confusion or hilarity, which does not serve the subject. At the very least, it can break the flow of a good *metaphor* by introducing an impossible image that your reader can't correctly visualize.

Another commonly used rhetorical device is *parallelism*. This device connects parts of a sentence, or longer pieces, by using the same structure throughout. *Parallelism* is often used to build force through repetition. It is commonly found in political speeches, as well as religious texts such as the Bible. The benefits of well-used *parallelism* can easily be lost, however, by failing to properly match the form between each element.

Look, for example, at the following quotation from former President George W. Bush, talking about his old friends from Texas and the importance they hold in his life:

I like my buddies from west Texas. I liked them when I was young, I liked them when I was middle-age, I liked them before I was president, and I like them during president, and I like them after president.

Clearly, President Bush switches forms between the first two listed items—having to do with age—and the last three—having to do with his serving as president. He also uses an incorrect verb tense later in the sentence, a result of trying to hold too strictly to the parallel form. Rather than building force, this incomplete *parallelism* seems to stumble over itself in the middle and finishes with a grammatically flawed phrase.

These examples illustrate how incorrectly applied rhetorical devices can confuse your readers or detract from the strength of your statement. When properly applied, however, both *metaphor* and *parallelism* can lend great power to your writing.

While Pope John Paul II's quotation about the Holocaust was altered to include a misused *metaphor*, the actual quotation makes excellent use of the *metaphor*.

Here, as at Auschwitz and many other places in Europe, we are overcome by the echo of the heart-rending laments of so many. Men, women, and children cry out to us from the depths of the horror that they knew. How can we fail to heed their cry? No one can forget or ignore what happened. No one can diminish its scale.

The Pope's *metaphor* evokes the heart-rending wails and cries of those who died during the Shoah, echoing down to us through the ages. By using the *metaphor* of an echo, John Paul II makes us see this pain as something that will continue for a long time to come. At the same time, he reminds us of real laments that real victims made. John Paul II continues his *metaphor* in the following sentences, having the victims "cry out" from the "depths," a placement that is both figurative of the darkness and horror they experienced and evocative of an echoing cry. He then finishes by stating the literal truth behind his *metaphor*: like an echo, it will continue to sound out in the future. Of course, John Paul II could have left out his *metaphor*, telling us simply that no one could forget or ignore the great horrors that occurred during WWII. However, by linking it to such strong imagery, he ensures we will hear what he has to say with the force and power it deserves.

We can easily change what President Bush said, to better convey his meaning and to strengthen the sound of his statement. There are two distinct *parallelisms* at work here, each of which would be better served by standing alone. One way of rewriting it would be:

I like my buddies from west Texas. I liked them when I was young, I liked them when I was middle-aged, and I'll like them when I'm old.

This option takes the first two listed items of the original quotation—both having to do with his age when he knew his friends—and rounds them out with a final item that keeps the same age-related pattern. It might be preferable to change the middle list item to “I like them now that I’m middle-aged,” as well, but we can give President Bush the benefit of the doubt here and leave his original words where possible. Another way of reforming the quotation would be to focus on the last three list items:

I like my buddies from west Texas. I liked them before I was president, I like them now that I am president, and I'll like them after I've been president.

Look at the different benefits each of these constructions offers. In the first example, by eliminating references to the presidency, we strengthen the effect of the *parallelism*. In the second example, we clarify that President Bush's position has not affected his friendships. Both make good use of the device of *parallelism*, and both accomplish President Bush's aim: to inform his listeners about his loyalty to his friends.



THE FOUR AIMS OF RHETORIC

To Persuade

Persuasion is one of the oldest, and perhaps the most recognized, uses of rhetoric. Because of the way in which many rhetorical devices affect readers, you are offered an opportunity to subtly guide their perspective in ways often barred in a direct approach. By arousing an emotional response, evoking powerful imagery, or calling upon reputable authorities, rhetoric gives you a great deal of power with which to communicate your message.

It is no coincidence that the two groups who use rhetoric the most are also the two groups the most interested in persuading others: politicians and lawyers. Look at almost any political speech written in the past few hundred years, and you'll find many clever uses of rhetoric, for a good lawyer or politician wields rhetoric like a surgeon wields a scalpel: with education, with confidence, and with precision.

Many of the rhetorical devices covered in this book are used to persuade a reader. Some, such as an *exemplum* (citing examples) come naturally when crafting an argument, while others, such as *sententia* (quoting wise sayings) build from this common-sense approach and help to bolster your credibility. In a larger sense, nearly every rhetorical device can be seen as a way of helping to persuade; by improving style, by entertaining the reader, and by organizing thoughts, rhetorical devices can make an argument stronger and more convincing.

To Inform

While rhetoric may not be as visible in its informative uses as it is when being used to persuade, it still serves a vital function. If you look at writing that has helped you learn about something, or if you focus on a specific teacher's methods during class, you will likely come across many of the devices outlined in this book. Similarly, you undoubtedly use tools of rhetoric when you're teaching others or trying to explain a concept to someone else. We have all used the *metaphor* to make a difficult concept a bit more accessible, and there are many other devices that come just as naturally when trying to inform.

To Express

Essays written to express tend to be much less formal than those meant to inform, although the goal is similar. You will often be asked to express your personal thoughts on something—in a college entrance essay, for example. Using rhetorical devices can ensure that your ideas shine.

While you don't need to actually convince your readers of your ideas when writing an essay to express, you do need to persuade them that your ideas are worth reading. Your style of writing will play a large part in doing this, and using rhetorical devices concerned with style will help draw in your reader. The way in which you structure your essay is also very important when writing to express yourself. Expressive essays run the risk of coming across as rambling and incoherent, but by using established rhetorical forms, you can build your ideas on a solid structure. A mastery of rhetoric can help turn expressive essays into gems of writing that others will be excited to read.

To Entertain

In addition to the three purposes already mentioned, you may write something with the primary intent of entertaining your reader.

Sweeping your reader away in your story or essay is often viewed as some sort of innate ability. We often talk about a "gift" when it comes to writing to entertain, even while accepting that other forms of essays can be taught. In truth, writing to entertain is no different. Good writers use rhetorical devices to pull their readers in, to make them laugh, and to make them cry. While it is undoubtedly true that some great writers use rhetoric without a conscious understanding of what they're doing, most writers have studied these forms and know quite well what they're writing.

Writing to entertain is fundamentally about taking your readers where you want them to go. For a well-trained writer, any subject should be able to provoke a predetermined response in a reader. The main difference between a tragedy about war (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*) and a dark comedy about war (*Catch-22*) is its presentation. By using a certain set of rhetorical devices in one way, a story can be dark and moving, but by using them in a different way, the same story can be transformed into a comedy. Told in a third way, the story might switch the reader's emotions back and forth between sadness and laughter.

Entertainment is a valuable weapon in your arsenal to educate, to persuade, or to express yourself. Rarely will you be called upon to write an essay or prose fiction where entertainment will not help your cause.



POPULAR RHETORICAL DEVICES

STRATEGY



Device #1

Hyperbole:

This is the most popular and commonly used rhetorical device in the entire world of rhetorical devices!

Hyperbole is a powerful rhetorical form when used properly, but a terrible distraction when used improperly. It consists of exaggerating some part of your statement in order to give it emphasis or focus. *Hyperbole* is never meant to be understood literally by the reader, and you should take great care to make sure its intent is apparent. There are few things more damaging to a writer's credibility than having *hyperbole* mistaken for fact, which destroys the point of the *hyperbole*. Consider these two examples of *hyperbole*: “*What is causing the biggest problem is that there are over three billion people on the planet,*” and “*The planet is getting so crowded we may have to take turns sitting down.*” The first may seem hyperbolic, but it merely states a fact; the second, on the other hand, is a fine example of *hyperbole*. It states the same basic idea in a way that is consciously exaggerated for effect.

Hyperbole is the single–most overused rhetorical form. People use it in everyday speech, in writing, and in any form of discourse they happen upon. We are a culture absorbed by exaggeration, and, left unchecked, it can weaken your writing immensely. If you find yourself using *hyperbole* as a way to avoid using actual figures, or to fill space, rethink your strategy.

There are three main uses of *hyperbole*. Each of our examples that follow will demonstrate one of these uses. The first example shows how to use it when you want to make a point strongly; for instance, apply *hyperbole* if you desire to energize your statement and drive it home with gusto.

Example #1: “There are more reasons for NASA to fund a trip to Jupiter than there are miles in the journey.”

The next example shows how to use *hyperbole* when you want your reader to snap to attention and focus on what you're writing. It can be used to break the trance your reader has fallen into—as a wake–up call, or a tap on the shoulder. Often *hyperbole*, through *metaphor*, accomplishes this purpose best, although many authors enjoy using tongue–in–cheek *hyperbole*.

Example #2: “At these words, the people became so silent you could hear a beating heart from across the room.”

The third example shows how to use it as a way of demonstrating the difference between two things. Note how hyperbole can be used to exaggerate differences.

Example #3: “Compared to the world during the last Ice Age, a Minnesota winter feels like spring in Hawaii.”

Exercise 1:

Write a statement using *hyperbole* about the following topics; consider the best and worst thing you could say about the topic, then exaggerate your statement. *The first one has been done for you as an example.*

1. My neighborhood

Statement: My neighborhood is so boring that when a cat walks across the street, it draws a crowd.

2. school in general

Statement:

3. a friend's athletic ability

Statement:

4. the weather

Statement:

5. your favorite or least favorite team

Statement:

6. a television show

Statement:

7. a musical group

Statement: