

Rhetorical Devices

Rhetoric is the art of discourse, or convincing conversation, and **rhetorical devices or strategies** are techniques that writers or speakers use to engage their audience in the argument at hand, enhancing their ability to relate to and motivate particular audiences in specific situations. The three main persuasive audience appeals are: logos, pathos, and ethos. **Logos** is about logic and factual information – appealing to the mind of the audience; **pathos** involves using emotional appeals to get to the heartstrings of the audience such as evoking concepts that people hold dear, using exaggeration and such; and, **ethos** is about the authority, credibility, relate-ability, and honesty of the writer/speaker, using quotes, examples, statistics, identifying expert credentials, and more. Convincing writers and speakers use all three rhetorical appeals.

Here is a list of rhetorical devices categorized by the main technique that they have in common.

Category 1: REPETITION

Anadiplosis: Repetition of words, especially located at the end of one phrase or clause and the beginning of the next: “I was at a loss for words, words that perhaps would have gotten me into even more trouble.”

Anaphora: Repetition of one or more words at the head of consecutive phrases, clauses, or sentences: “I came, I saw, I conquered.”

Antanaclasis: Repetition of a word in a sentence in which a different meaning is applied each time: “If you aren’t fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired, with enthusiasm.”

Antistrophe: Repetition of a word or phrase at the close of successive clauses: “You said he was late — true enough. You said he was not prepared — true enough. You said he did not defend his statements — true enough.”

Antimetabole: Reversal of repeated words or phrases for effect: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”.

Commoratio: Repetition of a point with different wording: “He’s passed on! This parrot is no more! He has ceased to be! He’s expired and gone to meet his maker!” (etc., ad absurdum)

Diacope: Repetition of one or more words after the interval of one or more other words: “People who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like.”

Epanalepsis: Starting and ending a phrase, clause, or a sentence, or a passage, with the same word or phrase: “Nothing is worse than doing nothing.”

Epistrophe: The repetition of a word at the end of each phrase or clause: “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Epizeuxis: also called palilogia, refers to nothing more than the repetition of words: “To my fifteen-year-old daughter, everything is ‘boring, boring, boring!’”

Polyptoton: Repetition of two or more forms of a word; also known as paregmenon: “You try to forget, and in the forgetting, you are yourself forgotten.”

Scesis Onomaton: Repetition of an idea using synonymous words or phrases: “We succeeded, won, and walked away victorious.”

Symploce: A combination of anaphora and epistrophe: “To think clearly and rationally should be a major goal for man; but to think clearly and rationally is always the greatest difficulty faced by man.”

Syllepsis: Divergent use of the same word in two phrases: “We must all hang together or assuredly we will all hang separately.”

Category 2: JUXTAPOSITION

Antithesis: Contrast within parallel phrases (not to be confused with the ordinary use of the word to mean “extreme opposite”): “Many are called, but few are chosen.” The term can also refer to literary characters who, though not necessarily antagonists, represent opposite personal characteristics or moral views.

Category 3: CONTRADICTION

Antanagoge: The contradiction of a negative comment with a positive one, as in “The car wouldn’t start this time, but at least it didn’t catch on fire.”

Category 4: IRONY

Antiphrasis: Ironic use of a single word: “It was a cool 100 degrees in the shade.”

Category 5: SYNTAX (types of sentences, word/phrase order inversions, rhythm)

Anastrophe: Inversion of word order to mark emphasis: “Enter the forest primeval.”

Anacoluthon: A sudden break in a sentence’s grammatical structure: “So, then I pulled up to her house — are you still with me here?”

Aporia: A statement of hesitation, also known as dubitatio, in which characters express to themselves an actual or feigned doubt or dilemma: “Should I strike now, or bide my time?”

Aposiopesis: Abrupt discontinuation of a statement: “If you say that one more time, I’m gonna —”

Asyndeton: Absence of conjunctions: “We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground.”

Brachyology: An abbreviated expression or telegraphic statement: “‘Morning,’ he mumbled as he stumbled out of bed”; “I have three words for you, buddy: pot, kettle, black.”

Chiasmus: reversal of grammatical order from one phrase to the next, exemplified in these two well-known quotes about evaluation: “Judge not, lest ye be judged” and “A heart is not judged by how much you love, but by how much you are loved by others.”

Distinctio: A definition or clarification of a term: “What we will be seeking . . . will be large, stable communities of like-minded people, which is to say relatives.”

Hendiadys: A conjunctive rather than a coordinate phrase: “I made it nice and hot, just the way you like it.”

Hyperbaton: Excursion from natural word order in various ways: “Theirs was a glory unsurpassed”; “It is a sad story but true.”

Hysteron-proteron: A reversal of logical order of elements in a phrase: “Sudden thunder and lightning drove them to shelter.”

Metanoia: The qualification of a statement to either diminish or strengthen its tone, as in “She was disturbed — make that appalled — by the spectacle.” Traditionally, *nay* is often a keyword that sets up the shift, but no replaces it in modern usage except in facetious or whimsical writing: “You are the fairest flower in the garden — nay, in the entire meadow.”

Polysyndeton: Insertion of conjunctions before each word in a list: “My fellow students read and studied and wrote and passed. I laughed and played and talked and failed.”

Synathroesmus: A series of adjectives, also known as *accumulatio*, compiled often in the service of criticism: “You’re the most arrogant, selfish, self-absorbed, insufferable narcissist I’ve ever met!”

Tapinosis: Invective: “Get out of my way, you mouth-breathing cretin.”

Tricolon: A series of three parallel words, phrases, clauses, or statements: “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

Category 6: HYPERBOLE (exaggeration or overstatement)

Auxesis: Exaggeration, often with sequential enhancement: “You found my purse? You are a hero, a prince, a god!”

Bdelygmia: A rant of abusive language: “Calling you an idiot would be an insult to stupid people. Are you always this stupid, or are you just making a special effort today?”

Bomphiology: Excessive braggadocio: “I am the very model of a modern major-general. I’ve information vegetable, animal, and mineral.” Also known as *verborum bombus*.

Catachresis: A hyperbolic metaphor, as in “Each word was a lightning bolt to his heart.”

Category 7: UNDERSTATEMENT

Litotes: This is the strategy of understatement often employed to provide subtle emphasis, frequently for ironic effect or to underline a passionate opinion: “The assassin was not unacquainted with danger.”

Meiosis: A dismissive epithet, such as *treehugger*, or a humorously dismissive understatement (also known as tapinosis), such as the *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* gem “It’s just a flesh wound!”

UNCATEGORIZED

Amplification: An expansion of detail to clarify a point: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers."

Apostrophe: Interruption of thought to directly address a person or a personification: "So, I ask you, dear reader, what would you have me do?"

Apophasis: Calling attention to something by dismissing it: "No one would suggest that those who are homeless elected to live on the streets willingly."

Pleonasm: Redundancy for emphasis: "We heard it with our own ears."

Paronomasia: Punning wordplay, including any of many types, including homophonic or homographic puns, both of which are included in this example: "You can tune a guitar, but you can't tuna fish. Unless of course, you play bass."

Sources:

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