**Rhetorical Devices**

**Rhetorical devices**(also known as stylistic devices, persuasive devices, or simply rhetoric) are techniques or language used to convey a point or convince an audience. And they're used by everyone: politicians, businesspeople, even novelists.

You may already know some of these devices, such as similes and metaphors. Others, maybe not (*bdelygmia*, we’re looking at you). But whether or not you realized it, you’ve probably run into all of these devices before, and maybe even used them yourself!

If you haven’t, don’t let their elaborate Greek names fool you — rhetorical devices are actually pretty easy to implement.

**Types of rhetorical devices**

Although there exists plenty of overlap between rhetorical and literary devices, there’s also one significant difference between the two. While literary devices express ideas artistically, rhetoric appeals to one’s sensibilities in four specific ways:

* **Logos,** an appeal to logic;
* **Pathos,** an appeal to emotion;
* **Ethos,** an appeal to ethics; or,
* **Kairos,** an appeal to time.(the right, critical or opportune moment)

These categories haven’t changed since the Ancient Greeks first identified them thousands of years ago. This makes sense, because how we make decisions haven’t changed, either: we still decide with our brain, our heart, our morals, or based on the feeling that we’re running out of time.!

**List of rhetorical devices**

1. **Accismus**is the rhetorical refusal of something one actually wants, to try and convince themselves or others of a different opinion.

This word comes from the Greek via Latin: accismus from akkismos- meaning prudery.

Like in one of Aesop’s Fables: *Driven by hunger, a fox tried to reach some grapes hanging high on the vine but was unable to, although he leaped with all his strength. As he went away, the fox remarked 'Oh, you aren't even ripe yet! I don't need any sour grapes.' People who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain would do well to apply this story to themselves.*

1. **Adnomination**is the use of words with the same root in the same sentence. Like many other rhetorical devices, this is a linguistic tricks to make statements sound more persuasive. It's sure to somehow work on someone, somewhere, someday. The word comes from Latin *Ad.* Meaning moreand *nom* Latin for name
2. **Alliteration**is the repetition of consonants across **s**uccessive, **s**tressed **s**yllables… get it? This most often means repeating consonants at the *beginning* of multiple words, as opposed to **consonance**, which is the repetition of consonants *anywhere* in consecutive words.

Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Raven* makes use of both alliteration and consonance: *“And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain.”* “Silken” and “sad” are alliterative, but the consonance continues into “uncertain” and “rustling.” And as a bonus, it contains **assonance** — the repetition of vowel sounds — across “p*u*rple c*u*rtain.”

1. **Allusion**is a reference to an event, place, or person. For example, you might say, "I can't get changed that quickly, I'm not Superman!" Referring to something well known allows the writer to make a point without elaborating in great detail
2. **Amplification** is a little similar to parallelism: by using repetition, a writer expands on an original statement and increases its intensity.

Take this example from Roald Dahl’s *The Twits*:

“If a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face. And when that person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, every year, the face gets uglier and uglier until you can hardly bear to look at it.  
  
A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts it will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely.”

In theory, we could have gotten the point with the first sentence. We don’t need to know that the more you think ugly thoughts, the uglier you become, nor that if you think good thoughts you won’t be ugly—all that can be contained within the first sentence. But Dahl’s expansion makes the point clearer, driving home the idea that ugly thoughts have consequences.

Amplification takes a single idea and blows it up bigger, giving the reader additional context and information to better understand your point. You don’t just have to restate the point—use amplification to expand and dive deeper into your argument to show readers and listeners how important it is!

From the Latin amplus- large and facere- to make do

### Anacoluthon is a misdirection that challenges listeners and/or readers to think deeply and question their assumptions. For example, the opening sentence of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* is a famous anacoluthon because it ends somewhere entirely different than where it started:

“When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.”

Note that anacoluthons are different from **non-sequiturs**, which are unintentional and incoherent — well, but can anything *really* be different from anything else?

1. **Anadiplosis** is the repetition of the word from the end of one sentence to the beginning of the next. It has been used by everyone from Shakespeare to Yeats to Yoda:

“Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”

Comes from the Greek word ana- back or renew plus diplous- double (same root as diploma or diplomat) double or folded paper like an official document.

1. An **analogy** explains one thing in terms of another to highlight the ways in which they are alike. "He's as flaky as a snowstorm" would be one example of an analogy.

Late Middle English (in the sense ‘appropriateness, correspondence’): from French analogie, Latin analogia ‘proportion’, from Greek, from analogos ‘proportionate’.

1. **Anaphora,** on the other hand,  is the repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of subsequent sentences. Like in Ginsberg’s *Howl* — no, not that famous opening line, but instead those that follow it:

“**Who**poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

**who** bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,

**who** passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war”

From the Greek prefix ana meaning back and pherein meaning to bear hence bear back, then to the Greek word anaphora meaning repetition

Another, similar rhetorical device is **epistrophe:** the repetition of words at the end of sentences. And, if you combine the two, you’ve got a **symploce**.

**10.Antanagoge**involves responding to an allegation with a counter-allegation. Antanagoge doesn't necessarily solve the initial problem, but it does provide an appealing alternative. The quintessential example is, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” 🍋

Someone might also use antanagoge to justify something to themselves: “Well, it's raining today, but that's fine — I wanted to stay inside anyway.”

**11.Anthimeria** is the intentional misuse of one word’s part of speech, such as using a noun for a verb. It’s been around for centuries, but is frequently used in the modern day, as “Facebooking” and “adulting” have seamlessly become part of the lexicon.

The word comes from the Greek word meaning one part for another.

**12. Antiphrasis** is a sentence or phrase that means the opposite of what it appears to say. Like how the idiom, “Tell me about it” generally means, “Don’t tell me about it — I already know.” It’s a subset of a much more common rhetorical device: irony.

You may have noticed by now that a lot of rhetorical devices stem from irony. **Apophasis** — also known as paralipsis, occupatio, praeteritio, preterition, or parasiopesis — is one of these: bringing up a subject by denying that it should be brought up. This is a classic if oft-maligned political tactic, and one frequently utilized by the 45th President of the United States, particularly in his colorful tweets. For example:

“Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me 'old,' when I would NEVER call him 'short and fat?'”

**13. Antithesis** makes a connection between two things. Neil Armstrong said, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." This pairs the idea of one man's individual action with the greater implication for humanity as a whole.

Late Middle English (originally denoting the substitution of one grammatical case for another): from late Latin, from Greek antitithenai ‘set against’, from anti ‘against’ + tithenai ‘to place’.

**14. Aporia** is the rhetorical expression of doubt — almost always insincerely. This is a common tool that businesses use to connect with a consumer base, typically in ads or presentations. For instance, take Steve Jobs’ introduction of touchscreen technology:

“Now, how are we gonna communicate this? We don’t wanna carry around a mouse, right? What are we gonna do?”

Greek, from *aporos* ‘impassable’, from *a-* ‘without’ + *poros* ‘passage’.

**15. Aposiopesis** is essentially the rhetorical version of trailing off at the end of your sentence, leaving your listener (or reader) hanging. Like the ending of Mercutio’s famous “Queen Mab” speech in *Romeo & Juliet*:

“This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,  
That presses them and learns them first to bear,  
Making them women of good carriage:  
This is she... ”

late 16th century: via Latin from Greek *aposiōpēsis*, from *aposiōpan* ‘be silent’.

### ****16. An Appositive**** places a noun or noun phrase next to another noun for descriptive purposes. An example would be, "Mary, queen of this land, hosted the ball." In this phrase, "queen of this land" is the appositive noun that describes Mary's role.

**17. Assonance and Alliteration.** Assonance adds an abundance of attractive accents to all your assertions. **That’s assonance—the practice repeating the same vowel sound in multiple words in a phrase or sentence, often at the beginning of a word, to add emphasis or musicality to your work.**

**Alliteration** is similar, but uses consonant sounds instead of vowel sounds.

Let’s use Romeo and Juliet as an example again:

“From forth the fatal loins of these two foes;  
A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life.”

Here, we have repetition of the sounds ‘f’ and ‘l’ in ‘from forth...fatal...foes,’ and ‘loins...lovers...life.’

Even if you don’t notice the repetition as you’re reading, you can hear the effects in how musical the language sounds. Shakespeare could easily have just written something like, “Two kids from families who hate one another fell in love and died by suicide,” but that’s hardly as evocative as the phrasing he chose.

**Both assonance and alliteration give your writing a lyrical sound, but they can do more than that, too.**These tools can mimic associated sounds, like using many ‘p’ sounds to sound like rain or something sizzling, or ‘s’ sounds to mimic the sounds of a snake. When you’re writing, think about what alternative meanings you can add by emphasizing certain sounds.

**18. Asterismos** is simply a phrase beginning with an exclamation. Like every other sentence in *Moby-Dick*: “Book! You lie there; the fact is, you books must know your places.” But if no sentence follows, it’s exclamatio: an emphatic expression like “My word!” that warrants no follow-up.

1590s, "a constellation, a group of stars," from Greek asterismos "a marking with stars," from aster "star" (from PIE root \*ster- (2) "star"). Originally any grouping of stars, whether a constellation or not; in modern use usually the latter.

**19. Asyndeton**is the removal of conjunctions like “or,” “and,” or “but” from your writing because the sentence flows better, or more poetically, without them. This is a favorite technique of Cormac McCarthy, as seen in this passage from *Outer Dark*: “A parson was laboring over the crest of the hill and coming toward them with one hand raised in blessing, greeting, fending flies.”

And like most of the enigmatic author’s preferred rhetoric, this asyndeton is almost intentionally confusing; whether the parson is blessing *or* greeting *or* swatting flies is never clarified. At other times, McCarthy uses **polysyndeton,**which is essentially asyndeton's opposite — the addition of *extra* conjunctions (“and then we walked and then we stopped and then we sat on the ground”).

From Greek *asundetos* ‘unconnected’, from *a-* ‘not’ + *sundetos* ‘bound together’.

**20. Bdelygmia** Befitting its ugly spelling, **bdelygmia** (or abominatio) is a rhetorical insult — the uglier and more elaborate, the better. It is often used to insult a character by a very abusive description. Like most rhetorical devices, Shakespeare was a big fan. So was Dr. Seuss:

"You're a foul one, Mr. Grinch, You're a nasty wasty skunk, Your heart is full of unwashed socks, your soul is full of gunk, Mr. Grinch. The three words that best describe you are as follows, and I quote, ‘Stink, stank, stunk!’"

From a Greek word meaning “filth”

**21. Cacophony** is simply the use of words that sound bad together. That may sound pretty random, until you remember that Lewis Carroll invented words for his poem “Jabberwocky” just to make it sound harsh and unmelodious:

“ ’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.”

Mid 17th century: from French *cacophonie*, from Greek *kakophōnia*, from *kakophōnos* ‘ill-sounding’, from *kakos* ‘bad’ + *phōnē* ‘sound’.

**22. Chiasmus** is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form; e.g. ‘Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.’.

Mid 17th century (in the sense ‘crosswise arrangement’): modern Latin, from Greek *khiasmos*, from *khiazein* ‘mark with the letter chi’, from *khi* ‘chi’.

**23. Climax:** Narrative arcs aren’t just for novels. Sentences can have a climax, too — the initial words and clauses build to a peak, saving the most important point for last.

We’ve been using climaxes rhetorically since at least Corinthians: “There are three things that will endure: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

**24. Dysphemism** is a description that is explicitly offensive to its subject and/or its audience. It stands in contrast to a **euphemism**, which strives to avoid outright offense, but nonetheless has unfortunate connotations. Most racial epithets started as the latter, but are recognized today as the former.

Substitution of a vulgar or derogatory word or expression for a dignified or normal one," 1873, from Greek *dys-* "bad, abnormal, difficult" + *pheme* "speech, voice, utterance, a speaking,"

### ****25.**** An Epithet is a descriptive word or phrase expressing a quality of the person or thing, such as calling King Richard I "Richard the Lionheart." Contemporary usage often denotes an abusive or derogatory term describing race, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics of a minority group.

Late 16th century from French épithète, or Greek ‘attributed’, from epitithenai ‘add’, from epi ‘upon’ + tithenai ‘to place’.

**26. Euphony** Words that are pleasing to the ear such as liquid sounds like m, b, l- mumble, bubble, love. Greek *euphonia* "sweetness of voice," related to *euphonos* "well-sounding," from *eu-* "good" (see **eu-**) + *phone* "sound, voice,"

### ****27. Hyperbole is**** an exaggerated word or claims not expected to be taken literally. ‘he vowed revenge with oaths and hyperboles’

Saying "I have done this a thousand times" to indicate that you're very familiar with a task is an example of hyperbole because it is unlikely you've really performed the task a thousand times

.

28. **Hypophora** You’ve probably used hypophora before without ever thinking about it. **Hypophora refers to a writer or speaker proposing a question and following it up with a clear answer.**This is different from a rhetorical question—another rhetorical device—because there is an expected answer, one that the writer or speaker will immediately give to you.

**Hypophora serves to ask a question the audience may have (even if they’re not entirely aware of it yet) and provide them with an answer.** This answer can be obvious, but it can also be a means of leading the audience toward a particular point.

Take this sample from John F. Kennedy’s speech on going to the moon:

But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?  
We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

In this speech, Kennedy outright states that he’s asking questions others have asked, and then goes on to answer them. This is Kennedy’s speech, so naturally it’s going to reflect his point of view, but he’s answering the questions and concerns others might have about going to the moon. In doing so, he’s reclaiming an ongoing conversation to make his own point. **This is how hypophora can be incredibly effective: you control the answer, leaving less room for argument!**

**29. Litotes is a deliberate understatement, often using double negatives, that serves to actually draw attention to the thing being remarked upon.**For example, saying something like, “It’s not pretty,” is a less harsh way to say “It’s ugly,” or “It’s bad,” that nonetheless draws attention to it being ugly or bad.

In Frederick Douglass’ Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave, he writes:

“Indeed, it is not uncommon for slaves even to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each contending for the superior goodness of his own over that of the others.”

Notice the use of “not uncommon.” Douglass, by using a double negative to make readers pay closer attention, points out that some slaves still sought superiority over others by speaking out in favor of their owners.

**Litotes** make an understatement by using a negative to emphasize a positive. In this rhetorical device, a double negative is often used for effect. So saying someone is "not a bad singer" actually means you enjoyed hearing them sing.

Litotes examples embrace colorful sentiments to express an otherwise bland statement. A litotes is a roundabout way of saying something, using the opposite of your intended meaning to illustrate what you're trying to say. The negative of one thing is used to express the positive of its opposite.

Litotes, the Greek word for "simple," Its closest relative is irony.

“Geoffrey, this is not rocket science.”

**30. Meiosis** If you’ve ever understated something before, that’s meiosis — like the assertion that Britain is simply “across the pond” from the Americas.

Mid 16th century modern Latin, from Greek *meiōsis*, from *meioun* ‘lessen’, from *meiōn* ‘less’.

**31. A** **metaphor** is a type of implied comparison that compares two things by stating one is the other. "Your eyes are the windows of your soul" means you "see" someone's emotional state by looking into their expressive eyes-eyes are not literally windows.

The English **metaphor** derived from the 16th-century Old French word métaphore, which comes from the Latin metaphora, "carrying over", in turn from the Greek μεταφορά (metaphorá), "transfer", from μεταφέρω (metapherō), "to carry over", "to transfer" and that from μετά (meta), "after, with, across"

### ****32. Metonymy**** is a type of metaphor where something being compared is referred to by something closely associated with it. For example, writers often refer to the "power of the pen" to convey the idea that the written word can inspire, educate, and inform.

### The pen is mightier than the sword. A pen has no power as an inanimate object, but the writer's words can impact more people than can the sword.

Mid 16th century: via Latin from Greek *metōnumia*, literally ‘change of name

**33. Onomatopoeia**Wham! Pow! Crunch! These are all examples of onomatopoeia, a word for a sound that phonetically resembles the sound itself. t We are all familiar with the "squeal" of tires as a vehicle stops abruptly or the "jingle" of car keys in your pocket.

Late 16th century: via late Latin from Greek  onomatopoiia ‘word-making’, from onoma, onomat- ‘name’ + -poios ‘making’ (from poiein ‘to make’).

### ****34. Oxymoron**** create a two-word paradox-such as "near miss" or "seriously funny” or “jumbo shrimp.” An oxymoron is sometimes called a contradiction in terms and is most often used for dramatic effect.

Mid 17th century: from Greek *oxumōron*, neuter (used as a noun) of *oxumōros* ‘pointedly foolish’, from *oxus* ‘sharp’ + *mōros* ‘foolish’.

### ****35. Parallelism**** uses words or phrases with a similar structure. "Like father, like son" is an example of a popular phrase demonstrating parallelism. This technique creates symmetry and balance in your writing.

**36. Personification** describes things and concepts using human characteristics. It's easier for humans to understand a concept when it’s directly related to them, which is why this is such an effective rhetorical device!

Personification appears in almost all forms of literature — even simple sentences like "the alarm screamed" or "the wind howled" would qualify as personification. **Anthropomorphism**, which actually *turns*non-humans into human-like forms, is less common, but frequently seen in children's stories and cartoons like *Peter Rabbit* and *Winnie-the-Pooh.*

**37. Rhetorical comparisons**

Some of the most prevalent rhetorical devices are figures of speech that compare one thing to another. Two of these, you surely know: the **simile** and the **metaphor.**But there is a third, **hypocatastasis**, that is just as common… and useful.

The distinctions between the three are pretty simple. A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*: “You are like a monster.” A metaphor compares them by asserting that they’re the same: “You're a monster.” And with hypocatastasis, the comparison itself is implied: “Monster!”

Middle English: from Old French *rethorique*, via Latin from Greek *rhētorikē (tekhnē)* ‘(art) of rhetoric’, from *rhētōr* ‘rhetor’. **Rhetoric** comes from the Greek **meaning** "speaker" and is used for the art of persuasive speaking or writing.

**38. Rhetorical question** You’ve probably heard of a **rhetorical question,** too: a question asked to make a point rather than to be answered. Technically, this figure of speech is called interrogatio, but plenty of other rhetorical devices take the form of questions.

If you pose a rhetorical question just to answer it yourself, that’s **hypophora**(“Am I hungry? Yes, I think I am”). And if your rhetorical question infers or asks for a large audience’s opinion (“Friends, Romans Countrymen/I come to bury Casear, not to praise him [...] Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?”) that’s **anacoenosis** — though it generally doesn’t warrant an answer, either.

**39. Synecdoche**is a rhetorical device wherein a *part* of one thing represents its whole. This differs slightly from metonymy, in which a single thing represents a larger institution. So if you referred to an old king as “greybeard,” that would be synecdoche. If you referred to him as “the crown,” it would be metonymy.

Late 15c. correction of synodoches (late 14c.), from Medieval Latin synodoche, alteration of Late Latin synecdoche, from Greek synekdokhe "the putting of a whole for a part; an understanding one with another," literally "a receiving together or jointly," Typically an attribute or adjunct substituted for the thing meant ("head" for "cattle," "hands" for "workmen," "wheels" for car

40. **Zeugma**, also called syllepsis, places two nouns with different meanings in a similar position in a sentence. This is a grammatical trick that can be used rhetorically as well. Mark Twain was a master at this: “They covered themselves with dust and glory.”

Another example might be: “He caught the train and a bad cold.” Though you'd “catch” these things in very different ways, the phrase still works because the same verb applies to both. Authors often use zeugma in clever wordplay, and sometimes it even enters everyday conversation. (My grandmother, for example, uses zeugma to describe staticky clothing: “This shirt attracts everything but a man.”)

**With help from**

**Banks, Melissa. The 20 Most Useful Rhetorical Devices.** <https://blog.prepscholar.com/rhetorical-devices-list-examples>. Retrieved Oct 3/ 2019

Google: etymology dictionary. Etymonline.com

.