

# Rhetorical Devices

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## Schemes of Construction

### 1. Schemes of Balance

**Parallelism- similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses.**

This basic principle of grammar and rhetoric demands that equivalent things be set forth in coordinate grammatical structures: nouns with nouns, infinitives with infinitives, and adverb clauses with adverb clauses.

- a. "...for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor"—The Declaration of Independence
- b. "...the love of liberty, jury trial, the writ of *habeus corpus*, and all the blessings of free government..."—John Randolph of Roanoke, "Speech on the Greek Cause."
- c. "So Janey waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time."—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- d. "It will be long before our larger life interprets itself in such imagination as Hawthorne's, such wisdom as Emerson's, such poetry as Longfellow's, such prophesy as Whittier's, such grace as Holmes's, such humor and humanity as Lowell's."—William Dean Howells

**Isocolon** is a scheme of parallel structure that occurs when the parallel elements are similar not only in grammatical structure but also in length (number of words or even number of syllables). This is very effective, but a little goes a long way.

- a. "His purpose was to impress the ignorant, to perplex the dubious, and to confound the scrupulous."
- b. "An envious heart makes a treacherous ear."—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

**Antithesis - the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure.** The contrast may be in words or in ideas or both. When used well, antithesis can be very effective, even witty.

- a. "What if I am rich, and another is poor—strong, and he is weak—intelligent, and he is benighted—elevated, and he is depraved? Have we not one Father? Hath not one God created us?"—William Lloyd Garrison, "No Compromise with Slavery"
- b. "Your forefathers crossed the great water and landed on this island. Their numbers were small. They found friends and not enemies. They told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and had come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat. We took pity on them, granted their request; and they sat down amongst us. We gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison in return."—Red Jacket, 1805

## 2. Schemes of unusual or inverted word order

**Anastrophe- inversion of the natural or usual word order.** This deviation can emphasize a point or it can just sound awkward. It is most effective if the author rarely writes awkwardly, because when set among well-structured sentences it emphasizes the inverted phrase.

- a. “As the saint of old sweetly sang, ‘I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord;’ so ought we to be glad when any opportunity of doing good is presented to us.” --Cotton Mather “The Reward of Well-Doing”
- b. “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” --John F. Kennedy, Inaugural speech

**Parenthesis- insertion of some verbal unit in a position that interrupts the normal syntactical flow of the sentence.** One obvious way to use parenthesis is to use the punctuation mark (parentheses). However, there are other ways to insert a comment into a sentence. One might use commas, or dashes, for example. The parenthetical remark, however, is off on a tangent, cut off from the thrust of the sentence and grammatically unrelated to the sentence.

- a. “Those two spots are among the darkest of our whole civilization—pardon me, our whole *culture* (an important distinction, I’ve heard), which might sound like a hoax, or a contradiction, but that (by contradiction, I mean) is how the world moves: not like an arrow, but a boomerang.” --Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- b. “And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one’s friends were attached to one’s body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which (as she dozed there) became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider’s thread is blotted with rain-drops, and burdened, sags down. So she slept.”—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

**Expletive** – similar to parenthesis, a single word or short phrase, usually interrupting normal syntax, used to lend emphasis to the words immediately proximate to the expletive. (We emphasize the words on each side of a pause or interruption in order to maintain continuity of the thought.) Compare:

- But the lake was not drained before April.
  - But the lake was not, in fact, drained before April.
- a. The Bradys, clearly a happy family, live in an old house with squeaky floors.
  - b. In short, the cobbler had neglected his soul.

**Apposition - placing side by side two coordinate elements, the second of which serves as an explanation or modification of the first. In grammar, this is the appositive or verbal cluster.**

- a. “The mountain was the earth, *her home*.”—Rudolfo Anaya, *Albuquerque*
- b. “Here was the source of the mistaken strategy –the reason why activists could so easily ignore class and could consider race alone a sufficient measure of social oppression.”—Richard Rodriguez, *The Hunger for Memory*

**Zeugma** - a number of items in a sentence are linked together by a shared word. Zeugma can encompass subjects linked together by a verb, pronouns by nouns, direct objects by verbs, or adjectival phrases by verbs. Probably the most common and stylistic use is to eliminate the repetition of a verb.

- a. As he walked from the hostile crowd, **the man picked up his hat and his pace.**
- b. The would-be candidate **spent his life's savings and his wife's patience.**
- c. The teenage sweethearts, the elderly couple, and the flickering candles all danced late into the night.

## 2. Schemes of Omission

**Ellipsis - deliberate omission of a word or of words that are readily implied by the context.**

While this can make clear, economical sentences, if the understood words are grammatically incompatible, the resulting sentence may be awkward.

- a. "So singularly clear was the water that when it was only twenty or thirty feet deep the bottom seemed floating on the air! Yes, where it was even *eighty* feet deep. Every little pebble was distinct, every speckled trout, every hand's breadth of sand." -- Mark Twain, *Roughing It*
- b. "And he to England shall along with you." --Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III,iii

**Asyndeton - deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses.** The effects of this device are to emphasize each clause and to produce a punctuated rhythm in the sentence.

- a. "I came, I saw, I conquered."—Julius Caesar
- b. "They may have it in well doing, they have it in learning, they may have it even in criticism." -- Matthew Arnold
- c. "...that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty. " -- John F. Kennedy

**Polysyndeton - deliberate use of many conjunctions (does not involve omission, but is grouped with its opposite).** The effect of polysyndeton is to speed up or add a frenetic quality to the rhythm of the sentence.

- a. "I said, 'Who killed him?' and he said, 'I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right,' and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water."—Ernest Hemingway, "After the Storm"
- b. "On and on she went, across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street, ahead of him, her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the windows to make the spirit of finery and whimsy which dwindled out of the shops on to the pavement, as the light of a lamp goes wavering at night over hedges in the darkness."— Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

#### 4. Schemes of Repetition

**Alliteration - repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words.**

Used sparingly, alliteration provides emphasis. Overused, it sounds silly.

- a. "Already American vessels have been searched, seized, and sunk."—John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*
- b. "It was the meanest moment of eternity".—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- c. "Her 'No Deals for Drug Dealers' campaign helped rally the different constituencies around her."—Rudolfo Anaya, *Albuquerque*

**Assonance - the repetition of similar vowel sounds, preceded and followed by different consonants, in the stressed syllables of adjacent words.**

- a. "Whales in the wake like capes and Alps/ Quaked the sick sea and snouted deep."  
--Dylan Thomas, "Ballad of the Long Legged Bait"
- b. "Refresh your zest for living."—advertisement for French Line Ships

**Anaphora - repetition of the same word or groups of words at the beginnings of successive clauses.** This device produces a strong emotional effect, especially in speech. It also establishes a marked change in rhythm.

- a. "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills."—Winston Churchill, speech in the House of Commons, June 4, 1940
- b. "Why should white people be running all the stores in our community? Why should white people be running the banks of our community? Why should the economy of our community be in the hands of the white man? Why?"—Malcolm X

**Epistrophe - repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses.** Like anaphora, epistrophe produces a strong rhythm and emphasis.

- a. "But to all of those who would be tempted by weakness, let us leave no doubt that we will be as strong as we need to be for as long as we need to be."—Richard Nixon, First Inaugural Address
- b. "When we first came we were very many and you were very few. Now you are many and we are getting very few."—Red Cloud

**Epanalepsis - repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause.** Like other schemes of repetition, epanalepsis often produces or expresses strong emotion.

- a. "Blood hath bought blood, and blows have answer'd blows:/ Strength match'd with strength, and power confronted power."—William Shakespeare, *King John*

**Anadiplosis - repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause.**

- a. "The crime was common, common be the pain".—Alexander Pope, "Eloise to Abelard"
- b. "Aboard my ship, excellent performance is standard. Standard performance is sub-standard. Sub-standard performance is not permitted to exist."—Captain Queeg, Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*
- c. "Trees and buildings rose and fell against a pale-blue clouded sky, beech changed to elm, and elm to fir, and fir to stone; a world like lead upon a hot fire, bubbled into varying shapes now like a flame, now like a leaf of clover." --Graham Greene, *Orient Express*

**Antimetabole - repetition of words, in successive clauses, in reverse grammatical order.**

- a. "One should eat to live, not live to eat."—Moliere, *L'Avare*
- b. "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."—John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address
- c. "The Negro needs the white man to free him from his fears. The white man needs the Negro to free him from his guilt."—Martin Luther King, Jr., from a speech delivered in 1966
- d. "The truth is the light and light is the truth." --Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

**Chiasmus (the "criss-cross") - reversal of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses.** Chiasmus is similar to antimetabole in that it too involves a reversal of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses, but it is unlike antimetabole in that it does not involve a repetition of words. Both chiasmus and antimetabole can be used to reinforce antithesis.

- a. Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys.—John Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel"
- b. What is learned unwillingly is gladly forgotten.
- c. If you come to them, they are not asleep; if you ask and inquire of them, they do not withdraw themselves; they do not chide if you make mistakes; they do not laugh at you if you are ignorant. --Richard de Bury

**Polyptoton - repetition of words derived from the same root.**

- a. "But in this desert country they may see the land being rendered useless by overuse"--Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Voice of the Desert*
- b. "We would like to contain the uncontainable future in a glass."—Loren Eiseley, from an article in *Harper's*, March 1964

## 5. Other Schemes

**Climax - arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of increasing importance.**

"More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to use."—St. Paul, Romans

**Amplification** - involves repeating a word or expression while adding more detail to it, in order to emphasize what might otherwise be passed over.

- a. In my hunger after ten days of rigorous dieting I saw visions of ice cream--mountains of creamy, luscious ice cream, dripping with gooey syrup and calories.
- b. This orchard, this lovely, shady orchard, is the main reason I bought this property.
- c. He showed a rather simple taste, a taste for good art, good food, and good friends.

## Tropes

**Antanacsis** – repetition of a word in two different senses

- a. “Your argument is sound, nothing but sound.” –Benjamin Franklin
- b. “If we don’t hang together, we’ll hang separately.” --Benjamin Franklin

**Anthimeria** - the substitution of one part of speech for another

- a. “I’ll unhair thy head.” –William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*
- b. “Me, dictionarying heavily, ‘Where was the one they were watching?’” –Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa*

**Epithet** - an adjective or adjective phrase appropriately qualifying a subject (noun) by naming a key or important characteristic of the subject, as in "laughing happiness," "sneering contempt," "untroubled sleep," "peaceful dawn," and "lifegiving water."

- a. At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth of thieves and murderers . . . . --George Herbert
- b. Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold / A sheep hook . . . . --John Milton

**Hyperbole** - the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect.

- a. “It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days.” —Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
- b. “We walked along a road in Cumberland and stooped, because the sky hung so low.” —Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*

**Hypophora** - raising one or more questions and then proceeding to answer them.

- a. What behavior, then, is uniquely human? My theory is this . . . . --H. J. Campbell
- b. But what was the result of this move on the steel industry? The annual reports for that year clearly indicate. . .

**Irony** - use of a word in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word

- a. “This plan means that one generation pays for another. Now that’s just dandy.” --Huey P. Long
- b. “By Spring, if God was good, all the proud privileges of trench lice, mustard gas, spattered brains, punctured lungs, ripped guts, asphyxiation, mud and gangrene might be his.” --Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward Angel*

**Litotes - deliberate use of understatement**

- a. "Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her appearance for the worse."—Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*

**Metaphor - implied comparison between two things of unlike nature**

- a. "The symbol of all our aspirations, one of the student leaders called her: the fruit of our struggle." —John Simpson, "Tianamen Square"
- b. "A breeze blew through the room, blue curtains in at one end and out the other...twisting them up toward the frosted wedding-cake of a ceiling, and the rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it.... —F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

**Metonymy – substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant.**

- a. The British crown has been plagued by scandal.
- b. There is no word from the Pentagon on the new rumors from Afghanistan.

**Onomatopoeia - use of words whose sound echoes the sense**

- a. "Snap, crackle, pop!" --Commercial
- b. "...From the clamor and the clangor of the bells!" —Edgar Allan Poe, "The Bells"

**Oxymoron - the yoking of two terms which are ordinarily contradictory**

- a. "The unheard sounds came through, each melodic line existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece, and waiting patiently for the other voices to speak." --Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- b. "Still waking sleep, that is not what it is!/ This love I feel, that feel no love is this." --William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

**Paradox - an apparently contradictory statement that nevertheless contains a measure of truth**

- a. "And yet, it was a strangely satisfying experience for an invisible man to hear the silence of sound."—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- b. "Art is a form of lying in order to tell the truth." --Pablo Picasso

**Paronomasia - use of words alike in sound but different in meaning**

- a. "Ask for me tomorrow and you will find me a grave man." —William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*
- b. "The Bustle: A Deceitful Seatful." --Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

**Periphrasis (autonomasia) - substitution of a descriptive word or phrase for a proper name or of a proper name for a quality associated with the name**

- a. "They do not escape Jim Crow; they merely encounter another, not less deadly variety." --James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*
- b. "In his later years, he became in fact the most scarifying of his own creatures: a Quixote of the Cotswolds..." *Time*, referring to Evelyn Waugh
- c. He's no Fabio to look at; but then, he's no Woody Allen, either.

**Personification (prosopesis) - investing abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities**

- a. "The night comes crawling in on all fours." --David Lowery
- b. "And indeed there will be time/ For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,/Rubbings its back upon the window panes." --T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

**Procatalepsis - anticipating an objection and answering it; permits an argument to continue moving forward while taking into account points or reasons opposing either the train of thought or its final conclusions.**

- a. It is usually argued at this point that if the government gets out of the mail delivery business, small towns like Podunk will not have any mail service. The answer to this can be found in the history of the Pony Express . . .
- b. But someone might say that this battle really had no effect on history. Such a statement could arise only from ignoring the effect the battle had on the career of General Bombast, who was later a principal figure at the Battle of the Bulge.

**Rhetorical question - asking a question, not for the purpose of eliciting an answer but for the purpose of asserting or denying something obliquely**

- a. "Isn't it interesting that this person to whom you set on your knees in your most private sessions at night and you pray, doesn't even look like you?" --Malcolm X
- b. "Wasn't the cult of James a revealing symbol and symbol of an age and society which wanted to dwell like him in some false world or false art and false culture?" --Maxwell Geismar, *Henry James and His Cult*
- c. "You say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it?" --Red Jacket, 1805 speech

**Simile - explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature**

- a. "The night is bleeding like a cut." --Bono
- b. "Ah my!" said Eustacia, with a laugh which unclosed her lips so that the sun shone into her mouth as into a tulip and lent it a similar scarlet fire."--Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*

**Syllepsis - use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs**

- a. "There is a certain type of woman who'd rather press grapes than clothes." --Advertisement for Peck & Peck
- b. "The ink, like our pig, keeps running out of the pen." --Student paper

**Synecdoche - figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole**

- a. "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat." --Winston Churchill, 1940
- b. "In Europe, we gave the cold shoulder to De Gaulle, and now he gives the warm hand to Mao Tse-tung." --Richard Nixon, 1960