

Rhetorical Devices

What are Rhetorical Devices?

A rhetorical device is a way of phrasing some words or sentences so that it evokes a specific kind of emotion. It is a great way to get your opinion across and make people believe what you say is a clear absolute truth.

Throughout history, the best and most prolific writers and speakers have used and developed a plethora of rhetorical devices. People such as Cicero and Demosthenes come to mind or Abraham Lincoln. The last great orator who excelled at using rhetorical devices was the late, great Martin Luther King.

Knowing rhetorical devices is good.
Detecting them is better. Using them is MasterCard.”

1. Alliteration

Another name for alliteration is tongue twisters. You might remember them from your youth. Any time you notice that a few words, one after the other share the first few, initial consonant sounds you have yourself an example of alliteration. But alliteration isn't only used in children's tongue twisters, such as "*she sells seashells*", they are also used by brands to make their names much more memorable, for example, "*Krispy Kreme*".

Veni, vidi, vici. Cesar | Suddenly, tragedy traveled through our trivial life.

2. Allusion

Every time you make a reference to some places, events, or a person you are making an allusion. For example, one could say, "*I'm not Sherlock Holmes to figure that out*". It is helpful when one tries to get a point across because you can reference something well known and not explain something at great length.

If only Leonidas and his 300 were here. | And then I faced my personal Waterloo.

3. Amplification

Repeating the same word one after the other, combined with an adjective or two makes it seem stronger, more significant. That is the rhetorical device called amplification. For example, "*his face is red, so so red*". It could indicate that the colour in somebody's face is of an extraordinary shade of red, to a worrying degree.

Adventure. My life is an adventure. My life is an adventure similar to the one of Tom Sawyer.

4. Anacoluthon

Every time there is a sudden break, usually mid-sentence, an anacoluthon is formed. The first part of anacoluthon is never finished because the second part exceeds it in importance. For example "*I was cleaning my garden with -She screamed*"

5. Anadiplosis

This rhetorical device is when you repeat a word or multiple words that have ended one sentence or grammatical structure at the beginning of your next sentence. For example “*I was driving the car. The car that I bought with my own money*”

6. Analogy

Sometimes the easiest way to explain things is to strike a parallel with some other thing that is quite similar to it. But one has to be careful with analogies, not every analogy is true. One of the most basic logical fallacies is the Conclusion from Analogy. An analogy would be, “*She is as pale as a ghost*”.

7. Anaphora

This is one of the rhetorical devices that Shakespeare loved. Anaphora is defined as repeating a single word or a phrase in successive phrases. For example, “*some glory in their birth, some in their skill, some in their wealth*”. The repetition of the word some in our examples gives the quote its rhythm, playfulness, and power. It does not come as a surprise that anaphora is a staple device for many famous poets. But poets aren’t the only ones who can benefit from this device, any learned orator can.

Love is the question. Love is the answer. Love is everything.

8. Anastrophe

Anastrophe is the willing inverse of the natural word order in a sentence. This is because you want to put what is most important at the end of your thought. One popular user of this rhetorical device is the fictional, but widely beloved Jedi Master Yoda. He uses multiple rhetorical devices, but anastrophe is certainly his favorite. Some of the most known Yoda quotes are indeed anastrophes. For example, “*Persuade you, I shall*” or “*The path to the dark side, fear is*”

9. Antanaclasis

When you repeat the same word again and again in a few sentences that follow each other, but the repeated word changes meaning in each new sentence or part of a grammatical structure. Probably the most known example of this rhetorical device comes from one of the greatest citizens the USA has ever had, Benjamin Franklin. While debating an opponent once Franklin reportedly said: “*Your argument is sound... all sound*”. A wonderful piece of wit combined with the right kind of rhetorical device. He is playing with the meanings of the word sound, which could be something stable and correct and also just noise.

10. Antanagoge

Sometimes referred to as a backhand compliment, an antanagoge is when you combined a positive and a negative statement together. For example, “*this summer season was dry, but not as dry as the one back in 2012.*”

11. Antimetabole

Repeating words in verse order is what antimetabole is all about. One of the most famous examples comes from the father of philosophy, Socrates. he said, *“eat to live, not live to eat”*.
When you doubt your power, you give power to your doubt. - Honore de Balzac

12. Antiphrasis

This device is used for ironic, sarcastic and humoristic effect. One of the biggest proponents of this rhetorical device was the French nobleman, and maxim writer, Baron De Rouchefoult. It usually makes fun of opposites. So you can call a really ugly painting, such a Mona Lisa, or a very slow person, Usain Bolt.

13. Antithesis

Any time you make a connection between two events, people or things you are using this rhetorical device. The most celebrated and repeated example of antithesis was Neil Armstrong’s speech after he set foot on the moon. Another example would be a quote from the famous German writer Goethe, who said, *“love, is ideal, marriage real”*. It means that it is one thing to love someone, but *spending your entire life with a person is something completely different, real without illusions.*

That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. Neil Armstrong.
I was the right fish in the wrong pond.

14. Apophasis

Apophasis comes from the Greek phrase and it means *“To say no”*. It is the closest rhetorical device to irony and it is accomplished when a speaker brings something up by denying it. For example *“I’m not saying that this article is not a great work of art”*.

15. Aporia

Every clear, rhetorical expression of doubt is an aporia. Aporia comes in many forms but the most celebrated example is a quote from Shakespeare that almost everyone who went to school as quoted at least once. This example is from Hamlet and it says *“To be or not to be, that is the question.”*

16. Apostrophe

Every time a speaker goes from addressing one individual and abruptly switches his attention to another person or an item is called apostrophe. This other person or item doesn’t even need to be present. Apostrophes can be quite common in an internal monologue a character has in a movie or a novel. For example *“My dear Sun you torture me, What power this heavenly body possesses over us, oh Lord”*.

17. Appositive

If you want to describe a noun better, with another noun, you are using appositive. For example, Alexander of Macedonia, master general. In this example, the master general is the appositive and describes something noteworthy about this historical figure.

18. Asyndeton

One of the more common and simple rhetorical devices. Many famous sayings and quotes belong to the asyndeton family of rhetorical devices. Asyndeton is the removal of conjunctions between grammatical structures, sentences, words, phrases, or clauses. Probably the most notable example is the quote by Julius Caesar after he usurped his own city. The quote reads “*I came, I saw, I conquered*”. Quite poetic for such a mass-murdering, genocidal maniac.

Public speaking is all about self-confidence, message, impact.

19. Auxesis

Many writers, of both serious and imaginative books, are thought to use Auxesis. The word is greek and it means growth. It is the gradual increase in power and emphasis from one word to the next, erupting at the end of the sentence with its most powerful phrase or word. An example of auxesis would be “*The metal felt warm, then hot, then burning*” or “*I looked, I smiled, I laughed, I died from laughter*”.

20. Bdelygmia

One of the rare examples of rude or abusive language in the whole field of rhetorical devices. A bdelygmia is a rant full of abuses. Nowadays, you are most likely to encounter them at sporting events, especially if the reporter interview a player that has just lost an important game or derby. For example “*If I was raised any differently I might call our coach a complete imbecile incapable of calling the simplest of plays at the right time. Yeah, a total no show, waste of time of a human being*”.

21. Cacophony

This rhetorical device is when you use harsh words to add some effect to your statement or to grab the attention of the person you are addressing. For example, a frustrated lover might say “*Every breath that I take without you close to me feels like a thousand daggers taring my insides apart*”. It might sound cruel, manipulative or harsh, but that is the point. Others might see it as a guilt trip, but one lover has the intention to show the other just how painful every moment that they spend apart really is for him or her.

22. Chiasmus

In this rhetorical device, you reverse the order of words, whole grammatical structures or concepts and repeat them in reverse order. One of the most notable examples comes from the Christian savior, half man half God, Jesus Christ. He said to his twelve apostles one time “*Don't judge unless you want others to judge you*”.

23. Climax

A good-better-best structure.

The good thing about Paris is the food. What's even better is the flair. The best, by far, is the art.

24. Commoratio

Every time you are repeating yourself with different words you are using commoratio. Or in other words, whenever you want to say the same thing, but with different words over and over again you are using commoratio. For some reason, British comedy troupes are fond of this rhetorical device. Most notably Monty Python. One such example would be *“He is crazy, nuts, off his rocker, goofy, silly, gone, gonzo, totally gone, whipped like a bat”*

25. Diacope

Borrowing its name from the Greek phrase which means to cut in two, this rhetorical device is the repeating of one word or a whole grammatical construction separated by another word. For example *“In times like these, it is always good to remember that, there were always times like these”* In this example times like these are the grammatical structure that keeps repeating, and the middle part is the divider.

26. Dehortatio

This rhetorical device comes from the Latin word and means dissuasion. It is used when you want to give someone a piece of strong advice on what not to do. It has an opposite brother or sister, whatever you want to call it in the family of rhetorical devices called adhortatio. One of the most known examples came from the famous Nazi fighter and British prime minister, Winston Churchill, when he in a speech to the nation, during Nazi air raids said *“Never, never, never give in. No matter how small and insignificant the thing might seem. Never, never give in”*

27. Diatyposis

This rhetorical device comes from Greek. It was probably developed by some of Socrate’s famed sophist opponents. If you want to use an elegant rhetorical device that will help you dictate rules to your audience, this device might be ideal. As in this example from the great eastern philosophical work, Tao Te Ching *“When you rule, don’t try to control. When you think, keep it simple”*

28. Distinctio

Coming from the Latin word that means differentiation. When a speaker wants to leave all ambiguity about a certain word a said and precisely and clearly let his audience know what he is saying by a particular word. This rhetorical device comes up often in political speeches, for example, *“By enemies I mean all of those who didn’t join our cause during the Second World War”*.

29. Enumeratio

Enumeratio is when you try to make some sort of point by numbering things one after the other. Salespeople often use this when they want to sell you something. They will list every feature the item has in an attempt to make you agree with them. They hope to spark your interest in purchasing this item that way.

30. Epanorthosis

Coming from the Greek phrase meaning self-correction. One uses it when one tries to take something back that was earlier said. Or, when one wants to clarify something one has said earlier. This is most often done because the speaker realizes that the thing that he has said previously didn't have the desired effect. By applying epanorthosis, the speaker adds more emphasis and power to the things he has previously said to his audience. For example, a speaker might say "*All of, thousands no tens of thousands here today.*"

31. Epistrophe

Repeats at the end of successive phrases, clauses or sentences.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. The Apostle Paul

32. Epithet

An epithet is a word that summarises the most important thing in a person or event. Throughout history, this has been used for propaganda purposes. There are a lot of racially and sexually charged epithets that have brought a lot of pain and suffering to a lot of minorities.

33. Epizeuxis

You can hear this rhetorical device out of the mouths of children, more often than adults. When you repeat the same word, again and again, to add emphasis to an emotion or state of mind you got an epizeuxis. For example, a child might say this when it sees a plate full of vegetables, "*this plate is yucky, yucky, yucky.*"

O horror, horror, horror. — Macbeth

34. Eponym

Substitutes for a particular attribute the name of a famous person recognized for that attribute.

Is she smart? That girl is an Einstein.

35. Hendiadys

This rhetorical device entails the use of a conjunction between two words that grammatical isn't really all that necessary. One such example would be "*I'm starting to feel sick and tired of all your rambling*"

36. Hyperbaton

This rhetorical device has many cousins. It is of the family of rhetorical devices that inverse the order of words in a sentence or any other grammatical structure, to add strength and emphasis to the most important part of said structure. Yoda, one of the most popular fictional characters of all time, likes to use this device, as well as many romantic poets. An example of this device would be "*One swallow does not a summer make.*"

37. Hyperbole

Another term of phrase for hyperbole is an exaggeration. For examples, when you are bored and don't want to do a specific task you might say, "*This will take forever.*"

The bag weighed a ton. | I can give you a thousand reasons!

38. Litotes

This rhetorical device is used to state something positive with the use of a word or phrase usually reserved for a negative context. For example, one could say "*I'm not unfamiliar with it*". Or to translate, I know a lot about the thing that you are talking about. "*You are not average player, aren't you?*" which means you are nothing but average. Or one could say "*This is not my first rodeo*" which means, trust me I have a lot more experience than you give me credit for.

39. Meiosis

It comes from Greek and it means to make smaller. The use is similar to its Greek origins. It denotes any form of description that is designed to lessen the value or importance of a thing. It can seem similar to litotes but while litotes is more sarcastic, meiosis is far more direct. An example of meiosis might be "*It is only a scratch*". In the case mentioned, the wound the speaker suffered is probably a serious or grave one, but he isn't discouraged by it or doesn't want to let his opponents know just how much damage he took. That is why he or she used meiosis to both encourage himself and discourage his or her opponents.

40. Metanoia

To make the statement more powerful, you correct the phrase you just used with another one to add emphasis. For example, one could say "*This is the best burger in town, even in the whole state.*"

41. Metaphor

Metaphor is used to compare to things that don't immediately spring to mind to give one of those things an added quality. For example "*Brevity is the soul of wit*". By this, we mean that saying as much as we can with as little words as we can is a mark of true intelligence.

All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players. Shakespeare, As You Like It

42. Oxymoron

Combines contradictory terms.

Black milk. Dark light. Likeable lawyer.

43. Paradox

Anomalous juxtaposition on incongruous ideas.

I can resist anything except temptation. Oscar Wilde | We spend the time we don't have.

44. Parallelism

Gives two or more parts of the sentences a similar form

What you see is what you get.

45. Paralipsis

Asserts or emphasizes something by pointedly seeming to ignore, or deny it.

If you were not my father, I would say you were perverse. - Antigone

46. Paronomasia

The closest thing to an explanation for this rhetorical device is to claim that it is indeed a sort of ancient word for a pun. Paronomasia that emphasizes the phonic similarities between two words. It can be very prevalent among wordplay, for both adults and children. Some examples are “meet” and “meat”, or “old lord”. It is a great device to use when one wants his words to be ambiguous. One can find this device in many epic poets as well as Shakespeare. They usually use it in the mouth of one of the villains, to mask his true intents.

47. Personification

Gives an inanimate (non-living) object human traits and qualities.

The stars danced playfully in the moonlit sky. | The book cried; everyone ignored it.

48. Pleonasm

As we have seen in earlier examples, word repetition and especially its rhythm capture our attention ever so easily. Pleonasm is another rhetorical device that capitulates on this mysterious habit of the human mind and ears. While others repeated words themselves, pleonasm is focused on repeating the same ideal, through multiple grammatical structures, but always trying to express it through different words or phrases. Naturally, and logically, Pleonasm comes from the Greek and it means to be excessive. An example of a pleonasm would be “*Our Czar, our ruler, our leader, would like to be brief on the western campaign*”.

49. Polyptoton

Coming from, you guessed it, Greek it means many fallings. It is a device where you repeat words that share an origin, like judge and judging or beat and beaten. Repeating those words of equal origin gives the sentence or phrase its signature strength. Some of the most known examples of polyptoton come from religious texts and are really easy to memorize because of their rhythmical setup. The most known example to most people on the western Hemisphere would probably come out of the New Testament, from Matthew’s gospel “*Don’t judge, or you will be judged yourselves.*”

50. Polysyndeton

This rhetorical device comes from Greek and roughly translating it, it would mean bound many together. It is accomplished with one conjunction, that is repeated a number of times to combine many phrases or grammatical structures together. The most used conjunction used is probably – and. We find numerous examples of polysyndeton in children when they start to enumerate things. For example *“My mom has beauty, and courage and strength and brains and knows how to cook and is fast”*

51. Procatalepsis

Anticipates an objection and answers it.

In the past, I faced objections at this point. What convinced them was the fact that...

52. Pysma

Coming from the Greek word for question, this device is used by a speaker when we want to discredit someone with a series of aggressive questions that the opponent can't answer all at once. It is like a torrent of question marks that devours him or her wholly. An example would be *“Who did your party support in 45? On which side of the war were you back then? Were you intending to defend our freedom? The freedom of the world?”*

53. Rhetorical Question

Asking a question as a way of asserting something.

Don't we all work too much? | Have you never lied in your life?

54. Scesis Onomaton

Any sentence that is made out of exclusively nouns and adjectives is a scesis onomaton. Sometimes prepositions are added, but verbs are always excluded in the scesis onomaton. An example would be *“That is an opportunity, a chance, a shot”*

55. Sententia

The majority of moral sayings, be it a proverb maxim or aphorism is a form of this rhetorical device. Or in other words, any expression of conventional wisdom. But it has to be expressed in a brief, short sentence, with the most important point expressed at the end. It comes from the Latin word that means sentence. An example of this rhetorical device would be *“War is superior to a bad peace”* or *“Only a man who thinks himself miserable is indeed miserable”*

56. Sentential Adverbs

This rhetorical device is used when we want to give, power or emphasis to an adverb. It is either a single word or a quick and easy phrase that breaks the syntax of the sentence or grammatical construction. So with the help of this word or phrase, we add emphasis on both the word before the break and after the break. An example of sentential adverb would be *“She did not, in fact, divorce her husband”* or *“He won't, surely, give away his inheritance”*

57. Simile

Directly compares two things through some connective.

They fought like lions. Cute as a kitten. I feel happier than a bee on a spring flower field.

58. Syllepsis

This rhetorical device comes to use from Greek and it means – a taking. You use this device when you want to give a one-word different meaning than it usually has in relation to other words in the sentence or grammatical structure. A lot of people and even the most astute rhetoricians confuse it with Zeugma. But we won't get into details here. They can be and usually are used interchangeably. An example of this rhetorical device might be "*His voice reaches so high, and goes way over his smug head*"

59. Symploce

There are many examples of rhetorical devices that use repetition as a means of getting a point across. We all, for some evolutionary reason, like melody and rhythm and rhetoricians know that. One of the most rhythmical and repetitive devices is symploce. To use this device you have to repeat the same word or phrase at the beginning of a couple of continues sentences. But that isn't all. You also have to repeat a word at the end of each fo those continuous sentences. But it can't be any word: The word has to have a similar sound to the one you are using at the beginning of those sentences. In other words, you can call symploce a fusion of two devices we have previously mentioned, anaphora and epistrophe. One of the most notable examples come from the famous wit of CK Chesterton. He said "*The lunatic is not the person who lost his mind. The lunatic is the person who lost everything, but his mind*"

60. Synathroesmus

Coming from the Greek word for collection this entry in our list of rhetorical devices is similar to the device accumulatio. But while some devices use the accumulation of words to praise a person or event, this rhetorical device is used to put someone down or to put it harshly, verbally mutilate them. A lot of people who are prone to rants (and let's face it, Youtube is full of fanboys, and fangirls, who love to rant about every single detail that they like about a certain intellectual property that they allegedly adore) use this device unknowingly. An example of this device would be "*The movie is a soulless, schlocky, amalgamation of everything that is wrong with pop culture*" or "*He is a no-good, clumsy awkward, disease-stricken ape of a man*"

61. Synecdoche

This rhetorical device might have a complicated-sounding name, but it is anything but. Every time you use a part of a sentence or grammatical structure to refer or represent the whole, you are using synecdoche. The same goes for things, people or events. So when people refer to America as a country, they could mean both the US and the two continents. But experience teaches us that they are probably referring to the nation. It is just easier to say one word than the whole structure, The United States of America. It is easy to confuse this device with a metonymy. But remember, metonymy addresses something with a term that is

similar, while synecdoche uses a part of something to refer to the whole thing. Like boots to soldiers or wheels for cars.

Four wheels on fire. | All these brains in the room, and no answer to the problem.

62. Tapinosis

Another on our growing list of rhetorical devices that are often used, but most often by those that don't know what they are in fact doing. Another phrase for this rhetorical device would be calling somebody names. It denotes vulgar, or derogatory language. You can hear examples of Tapinosis in children when they fight or call each other all kinds of silly names. Another name for it is humiliatio. But that doesn't mean it is just a device you use one on one. It can be delivered in speeches as well. There is plenty of tapinosis in every fiery or mad general who addresses his novice recruits. Like in the movie Full Metal Jacket. An example of such a device would be "*Listen up you maggots. You are nothing but momma's boys, good or nothing, disgraces of manhood, pieces of dog crap*".

63. Tricolon

Even if the name implies it, this device is not just three colons stacked next to each other. It is indeed, three similar words or phrases, expressed one after the other. This is done to give the description of a thing or person its sort of sense of completeness. A lot of writers use this to give the things they re describing more layers or dimensions, like a word for sight, smell, and hearing. It comes from Greek and it means three units. An example of this rhetorical device would be "*I need three things in a woman. Beauty, jealousy, and no brain*"

64. Topographia

In rhetorics, topographia refers to a lavish or even poetic description of a place. So every time you encounter a detailed description of something in a book you know you are reading an example of topographia.