

Analyzing Rhetoric and Rhetorical Devices

Below is a very short list of some of the more common rhetorical devices, their definitions, and a brief example of the device in use.

- **alliteration:** repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words ex. "**P**eter **P**iper picked a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers.
- **anaphora:** repetition of a word or phrase at the *beginning* of successive phrases, clauses or lines, ex. "Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!" (*King John*, II, i)
- **antithesis:** opposition or juxtaposition of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction, ex. "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more." (*Julius Caesar*, III, ii)
- **aporia:** questioning oneself (or rhetorically asking the audience), often pretending to be in doubt, ex. "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?" (Matthew 21:25)
- **aposiopesis:** a sudden pause or interruption in the middle of a sentence (often for dramatic effect) ex. "I will have revenges on you both / That all the world shall— I will do such things — What they are yet, I know not; but they shall be / The terrors of the earth!" (*King Lear* II, iv)
- **apostrophe:** a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person, either absent or present, real or imagined, ex. "Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55)
- **asyndeton:** the absence of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words, ex. "Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, / Shrunk to this little measure?" (*Julius Caesar*, III, i)
- **conduplicatio:** repetition of a key word over successive phrases or clauses "We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future." Robert F. Kennedy's Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968)
- **euphemism:** a substitution of a more pleasant expression for one whose meaning may come across as rude or offensive, ex. "He passed away," rather than "He died."
- **hyperbole:** exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect, ex. "I died laughing."
- **irony:** (verbal) expression in which words mean something contrary to what is actually said, ex. Looking into your wallet full of nothing but a few pennies, and exclaiming, "Lunch is on me, guys— I am rich!"
- **metonymy:** a reference to an object or person by naming only a part of the object or person, ex. "She stood in the driveway watching as the bears moved her furniture into her new house."
- **paralipsis:** pretending to omit something by drawing attention to it, ex. A politician saying: "I will not even mention the fact that my opponent was a poor student."

- **parallelism:** repetition of a key word over successive phrases or clauses, “We will have difficult times. We’ve had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future.” Robert F. Kennedy’s Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968)
- **personification:** giving human characteristics to non-human objects ex. The pen danced across the author’s page.
- **polysyndeton:** using conjunctions to emphasize rhythm, and therefore emphasize a certain point ex. “In years gone by, there were in every community men and women who spoke the language of duty and morality and loyalty and obligation.” *William F. Buckley*
- **rhetorical question:** a question that is posed for emphasis, not requiring an answer, ex. “Art thou mad? Is not the truth the truth?” (*Henry IV, Part 1, II, iv*)
- **synecdoche:** a part or quality of something which is used in substitution of the larger whole, or vice versa, ex. “The hospital worked for hours to revive him,” (referring to the doctors and nurses inside the hospital) OR “She took us outside to look at her new set of wheels,” (referring to her new car)
- **understatement:** deliberately de-emphasizing something in order to downplay its importance, ex. “The Internet has contributed somewhat to improving communication,” is an understatement.