

Mini Lessons

RHETORICAL DEVICES

Device #1 - **Hyperbole**

- Consists of exaggerating some part of a statement in order to give it emphasis or focus
- Single-most overused rhetorical form
- We are a culture absorbed by exaggeration, and left, unchecked, it can weaken writing immensely.
- Three main uses -
 1. to make a point strongly; for instance, apply hyperbole if you want to energize your statement and drive it home with gusto
 - "There are more reasons for NASA to fund a trip to Jupiter than there are miles in the journey."
 2. to make your reader snap to attention and focus
 - "At these words, the people became so silent you could hear a beating heart from across the room."
 3. to demonstrate the difference between two things
 - "Compared to the world during the last Ice Age, a Minnesota winter feels like spring in Hawaii."

Exercise - Write a statement using hyperbole about the following topics; consider the best and worst thing you could say about the topic, then exaggerate your statement. Pick three from the list.

Example - My neighborhood

My neighborhood is so boring that when a cat walks across the street, it draws a crowd.

1. School, in general
2. A friend's athletic ability
3. The weather
4. Your favorite or least favorite team
5. Summer
6. A musical group or performer

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Device #2 - **Understatement**

- When the force of a descriptive statement is less than what one would normally expect
- Can be used either to highlight the extreme nature of an event or idea (the hurricane was "a bit of weather") or for ironic effect ("Benjamin Franklin had a good idea or two.")
- Used properly, understatement can strengthen your case in an argumentative essay

Examples -

- "Whatever his faults, Sir Isaac Newton did have a fairly good mind for science."
- "The Middle East is currently having some political squabbles."
- "To the uninitiated, neurophysiology can be a bit of a challenge."

Exercise 1 - Write five satiric comments that include understatements by completing the following sentences.

Example - Our school

Our school spirit is, shall we say, less than overwhelmingly enthusiastic.

1. The meal was
2. Our team
3. That television show

Exercise 2 - in book pgs. 17-18

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Device #3 - **Litotes**

- Similar to understatement, litotes emphasizes its point by using a word opposite to the condition
- For example, rather than say, "The trip across the mountain was a hard journey," we may say, "the trip was no easy journey."
- Due to the unexpectedness of the latter sentence, it can have more force and power than the former.
- Litotes is often combined with understatement to further emphasize something. To describe the Louisiana Purchase, one could say, "It wasn't a bad deal."
- Often speakers will use litotes as understatement in describing their own achievements, so as not to seem arrogant. Graduating from Harvard was "no small accomplishment."
- Litotes allows the writer to say what isn't true, without committing as strongly to what is true.

Examples -

"A cup of coffee would not be unwelcome."

"It's not the smartest idea I've ever heard."

"That store is not in the most convenient location."

Exercise - Write five original statements that use litotes to emphasize a point or startle a reader into paying attention.

Example - *The former CEO's lifestyle was not shabby, which may explain why the company went bankrupt.*

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Device #4 - **Antithesis**

- Makes use of a contrast in language to bring out a contrast in ideas
- One of the most attractive and powerful tools in speech and writing
- Organizes ideas in a way that is both evocative (reminiscent, suggestive) and powerful

Antithesis can be built by contrasting any of the different parts of a statement:

- Keep the structure of sentences identical, but use two opposing words - "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind"

The sound of a sentence built on antithesis can also be used to great effect:

- Use alliteration to highlight the opposition - "Life can be kind and cruel, full of hope and heartache"

Antithesis can also help to point out fine distinctions in an issue by presenting them together. By contrasting legality and morality, wisdom and learning, or success and happiness, you make your reader think about the subtle difference between the concepts.

- Join ideas in antithesis - "we live within our limits, for we are men, not gods" & "war is not fought to achieve joy, but rather to avoid pain"

Exercise 1 - write three original statements that use antithesis to emphasize a point or startle a reader into paying attention.

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Device #5 - **Hypophora**

- The technique of asking a question, then proceeding to answer it
- One of the most useful strategic devices when writing essays to inform or persuade
- The most common use of hypophora is in a standard-format essay, to introduce a paragraph. A writer will begin the paragraph with a question, and then use the remaining space to answer that question. For example, "Why should you vote for me? I'll give you five good reasons..."
- Can also be used as a way to anticipate questions or concerns you think your reader might raise. By addressing these concerns directly, you help strengthen your case. By phrasing them first in the form of questions, you make it clear that you understand your reader's thought process, as in this example: "So what is the answer to our rising crime problem?"
- If you suspect your readers might know too little about your topic to know which pertinent questions to ask, hypophora can help introduce them to important information without making it seem as if you're forcing it upon them.

Examples -

- "How do we know this to be true? We have observed it in the lab."
- "What then of the future? Let come what may, and we shall meet it without fear."
- "Do we then submit to our oppressor? No. No. A thousand times, no."

Exercise 1 - pages 27-28

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Device #6 - Rhetorical Question

- Asks a question in which the answer is only implied
- Gives the writer an opportunity to highlight something readers do know, while hypophora offers the writer an opportunity to tell readers something they don't know
- Used most effectively to conclude a point
- The rhetorical question is best kept to emphasize your argument's most crucial points
- Be careful never to use this strategy unless you are absolutely certain that the answer your readers will supply is the one you want them to supply

Examples -

- "In this age of modernity, can we truly condone such horrific acts?"
- "How can we expect a man to give more than we ourselves are willing to give?"
- "Do you want a world in which those dearest to you can know peace and safety or a world in which every moment carries with it the constant fear of death?"
- "Why should we *not* protest the selling of our natural resources to the highest bidder?"

Exercise - write 3 original rhetorical questions to help your readers arrive at - and agree with - the point to which you have been leading them.

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Device #7 - **Procatalepsis**

- Similar to hypophora. However, procatalepsis deals specifically with objections, and it usually does so without even asking the question.
- Example - "Many other experts want to classify Sanskrit as an extinct language, but I do not."
- By directly addressing objections, procatalepsis lets the writer further his or her argument and satisfy readers at the same time.
- Shows your readers that you have anticipated their concerns, and have already thought them through
- Especially effective in argumentative essays

Examples -

- "This is an objection one often hears raised by certain people - usually liberal to a fault, frightened of their own shadow, and worried about doing anything that may be interpreted as aggressive. We can respect their concerns, but at the same time, must recognize that they are not our own."
- "It may be pointed out that the proposed tax plan adds a burden to a small number of families in the upper brackets. While this may be true, the benefits offered to those who are most in need must surely outweigh a small bit of hardship to those who are not."

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Device #8 - **Simile**

- One of the more easily recognized rhetorical devices. Consists of one noun being compared to another noun.
- Not all similes are linked by "as" or "like" - in some circumstances other words might link them, and in others the "like" or "as" will be implied. Keep your eyes open for these key words, but also be on a more general lookout for sentences in which an object is compared in a somewhat abstract way to something else.
- The basic form has the key subject first, and the noun that fleshes it out listed second.

Examples -

- 1. "The shower room, steamy like a Louisiana summer, rang with the athletes' jubilant laughter."
- You could also flip this order around, with the primary noun coming last. In this case the word "so" is usually used instead of "like."
 - 2. "The night is gentle and quiet; so, too, is my love for her."
- A simile can also compare two entire phrases, or compare two verbs, in which case the word "as" is used to link them.
 - 3. "You should sing tonight as a bird in spring, calling for its mate."

- As well as being linked to each other because one thing is like the other, a simile can also connect two things that are barely similar to one another.
- By pointing out that something is not like, or is unlike, something else, you can tell your reader a great deal about it.
- You can also use a negative simile to connect two things that are actually nothing alike - and keep your credibility by pointing out they are nothing alike; this technique will still link the items in your reader's mind.

Examples -

- 4. "The workday of an Emergency Medical Technician is not at all like the day of a nine-to-five office-dweller."
 - 5. "The Chicago Cubs have less chance of winning a World Series than a plow horse has of winning the Kentucky Derby."
 - 6. "Certainly, we know that high school is not like prison, and a principal is not a warden."
 - 7. "The man's joy at finding his wallet was no less than a lottery winner's claiming her prize."
- This last example forces the reader to focus on the similarities between a jail and a school, rather than on the differences between them.
 - Similes are common enough that they don't break the flow of your essay, but have enough flexibility that you can make them do virtually anything you need them to do.

Exercise 1 - Create three sentences with similes linking the two parts with the word "so," as we did in example 2.

Exercise 2 - Using the word "as," create three sentences as done in example 3.

Exercise 3 - Follow the directions for each of the following scenarios. Use at least one simile for each answer, and underline them.

1. Imagine you are on the beach during a tropical storm. Describe the movement of the waves as they come ashore.
2. Think of your favorite meal. Describe the appearance, taste, texture, and/or smell of the dish in at least three sentences.
3. Imagine you are visiting a farm. Think of the animals, crops, and other items that might surround you. Describe your vision of the farm in four sentences.

Exercise 4 - Write two similes for each of the following topics.

1. a chain-link fence
2. the cries of an infant
3. a credit card

Exercise 5 - For each group of sentences, identify the letter of the one that is not a simile.

1. A. The horse galloped a million miles an hour.
B. The horse galloped as swift as a jet plane flies.
C. The horse galloped like a Triple Crown winner.
2. A. This computer is as useless as a headless hammer.
B. Our computer is not less than two years old.
C. That computer functions no better than a typewriter.

3.
 - A. Her hair, as golden as the sun, blew into her face.
 - B. Her hair was as tangled as a rat's nest.
 - C. Her hair, a dirty mop, covered her eyes.

4.
 - A. Ocean water tastes like salt.
 - B. We rode the waves as the day went on.
 - C. The waves rolled to shore like a slinky - back and forth, back and forth.

5.
 - A. Gazpacho, a tomato-based soup, is served ice cold.
 - B. Gazpacho is not like Campbell's tomato soup.
 - C. Some varieties of gazpacho resemble salsa.

6.
 - A. The dancer moved like a flower in a springtime breeze.
 - B. The graceful dancer, a butterfly in flight, captivated the audience.
 - C. The dancer was as flexible as a rubber band.

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Device #9 - **Metaphor**

- While a simile compares something to another thing by pointing out how they are alike, a metaphor speaks of one thing as though it actually were another.
- Here are two sentences on the same topic, the first is a simile, but the second is a metaphor. Note the difference: "The new boss swaggered into the office like a gunfighter in the Old West, looking for a fight"; "The new boss was Jesse James in the office looking for a fight."
- A metaphor speaks poetically, but it should not be viewed solely as a stylistic device. It can help your readers see something as you want them to see it - to convey not just the literal truths of a thing, but the emotional or psychological truths of it as well.
- Metaphors are used to state one thing actually *is* another by using a form of the verb to be - is, was, are, am, be, etc.

Examples -

- 1. "Dr. King was truly a king among men."
- Don't feel obligated to use *to be*, however, if you don't think it's necessary. If it's obvious that what you are doing is using a metaphor, you can skip the verb altogether and simply describe the noun:
- 2. "The report was released yesterday, a beacon of hope in these troubled times."

- Make sure to choose your metaphor carefully, being aware that the images you use could have all sorts of implications. The same general concept can be expressed in a number of ways. Let's take the sentence, "She had a nice smile." We could say it as,

- "She had the smile of an angel,"

which gives it a supernatural quality and also hints at great beauty.

We could also say it as,

- "She had the smile of a supermodel,"

which also hints at great beauty, but in a more jaded, perhaps distanced, way. We could say it as,

- "She had the smile of a Cheshire Cat,"

which has an aura of mystery about it. Before committing to a metaphor, make sure you've thought through the different ways it will affect your reader.

- By speaking of one thing as though it were something else, we not only serve a strategic end, we also break down visual barriers in the minds of our readers.
- A strong metaphor has transformative power; it can pull a reader fully into the paper, engaging him or her on the deepest levels.
- As when creating a simile, try to stay away from clichés.

Exercise 1 - For each of the following nouns, write two different metaphors. One metaphor should have a positive connotation while the other should have a negative connotation. Underline the metaphor.

1. light

2. eye

3. freedom

Exercise 2 - Here is a list of concepts, moods, or attitudes. Draw from your own background and experience, and develop a metaphor for each word.

1. solitude

2. anticipation

3. impatience

4. contempt

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Device # 10 - **Allusion**

- An allusion is a reference to some fairly well-known event, place, or person: "This new war was Vietnam all over again."
- This new war, according to the analogy, must be a drawn-out, difficult one that involves protests by Americans and many soldiers' deaths.
- Allusions can be used to help your reader see a broader picture, to evoke a negative or positive feeling, or to add credibility to your writing.
- While anything sufficiently well known can be alluded to, there are a number of sources that work particularly well. Shakespeare, classical mythology, and the Bible are all virtually limitless repositories of wonderful ideas that can be used for allusion.
- When using allusions, keep your target audience in mind. While referencing popular culture may now seem like a good idea, it will tie your essay to a limited era and may not be understood by those out of touch with contemporary television or media.
- In areas where your writing seems to be lagging a bit, allusions can make things more pertinent.
- In the middle of a list that is beginning to feel boring, you can throw in an allusion to an exciting event or person, which will change the mood right away.
- Think of allusions not only as strategic devices to help explain something to your reader, but also as an easily accessible spice you can shake in wherever it's needed.

Examples -

- "He delivered the line as if he were playing Hamlet for Shakespeare himself."
- "The meeting seemed never to end; it was Zeus' eagle nibbling away forever at my liver."
- She scored a header as if Alex Morgan had personally coached her."

Exercise - Write a sentence that alludes to each of the following people. Be sure that readers would be able to identify the allusion. Choose one aspect of the figure to focus on.

1. Pocahontas

2. Scrooge

3. Kim Kardashian

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Device # 11 - **Parallelism**

- One of the most important organizational devices at a writer's or speaker's disposal
- It consists of using the same general structure for multiple parts of a sentence, or for multiple sentences, in order to link them all, as in this famous one from Winston Churchill: "*The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessing; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries.*"
- Parallelism gives your writing a sense of overall cohesion, keeping it balanced and intentional throughout.
- By matching the cadence, the form, or the subjects, you'll be able to make your essay easier to read and digest.
- Parallelism is particularly useful for keeping long lists understandable or for making long parenthetical comments less cumbersome (note the parallelism: "useful for keeping...or for making...").

Examples -

- "The manor - designed for beauty and grace, built for durability and strength, and located for privacy and safety - was the ideal home for those three children."
- "The burglar shinnied up the drainpipe, delicately opened the window that had conveniently been left unlocked, stealthily forced his body through, and crashed down loudly on the kitchen floor."
- In this second example, we see parallelism that uses differing syntax. Linking the overall feel of each clause, however, still allows the units to seem tied together.

- While good parallelism will likely not be noticeable, as it produces an evenly toned, flowing narrative, if the parallelism is off, readers will be jarred and disconcerted, almost as if an alarm bell has sounded.

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Device # 12 - **Anadiplosis**

- Anadiplosis takes the last word of a sentence or phrase and repeats it near the beginning of the next sentence or phrase. Words used this way end up near one another, so their repetition becomes very apparent.
- Used well, this form can have a beautiful sound and can be an effective way of putting focus on a key word.

Examples -

- "In education we find the measure of our own ignorance; in ignorance we find the beginning of wisdom."
 - "Only guards and the warden experienced any type of freedom. For prisoners, freedom was only at the end of their sentences."
 - Aboard my ship, excellent performance is standard. Standard performance is sub-standard. Sub-standard performance is not permitted to exist."
 - "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." - Yoda
-
- While this device helps emphasize a certain word, it also can build a hypnotic rhythm through its repetition.

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Device # 13 - **Apostrophe**

- A forceful, emotional device where the writer breaks out of the flow of the writing to directly address a person or personified object.
- The feeling it evokes is that the writer has become so caught up in what he or she is writing that it is no longer possible to respect the bounds of the narrative. Instead, the text must break free and speak directly to something or someone.
- The apostrophe lets the writer demonstrate this fervor in a way that helps reinforce the central point.
- Creative writing and persuasive essays that lean heavily on emotional strength are ideal places for apostrophe.
- In formal persuasive and informative essays, using apostrophe might seem a bit melodramatic and distracting. When you do use it, you will probably be directing your speech directly at the reader, rather than personifying a thing or concept as in the first example.

Examples -

- "Liberty, O glorious triumph of man,
O mighty force that ends all tyranny!
Wherever man shakes off his shackles,
there you dwell!"
- "Critics, beware! There's a new film maker in town."
- "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

- "So we near our conclusion, and I must ask you, my wise reader, to bear with me for one more small digression."

Exercise - The following includes a few apostrophes, which have been underlined. What is the emotional impact of each apostrophe? To whom is Antony speaking?

ANTONY

O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?

Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,

Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.

I know not, gentlemen, what you intend,

Who else must be let blood, who else is rank:

If I myself, there is no hour so fit

As Caesar's death hour, nor no instrument

Of half that worth as those your swords, made rich

With the most noble blood of all this world.

I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,

Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,

Fulfill your pleasure. Live a thousand years,

I shall not find myself so apt to die:

No place will please me so, no mean of death,

As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,

The choice and master spirits of this age.

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Device # 14 - **Asyndeton/Polysyndeton**

- Two forms that add stylistic force to your writing by handling conjunctions in non-standard ways
- **Asyndeton** leaves out conjunctions in a list or between clauses: "He was tall, dark, handsome."
- **Polysyndeton** puts a conjunction between every item: "We have an army and soldiers and tanks and planes."
- **Asyndeton** can be used for a number of different reasons -
 - When there are only two items, such as, "It was a great prize, a reward for years of service," asyndeton defines the second term as a clarification of the first. It can give the impression that the list you have created was spontaneous, rather than being thought out beforehand and structured in a traditional way.
 - It also may suggest that the list isn't quite finished, and thus leaves your readers to come up with additional items on their own. Most importantly, it gives the feeling of fast movement to your writing, rather than a list that drags out. For example, "They sat under one roof, princes, dukes, barons, earls, kings."
- **Polysyndeton** is the stylistic opposite of asyndeton, although its effect is not necessarily the reverse.
- The general feel of polysyndeton is one of an increasing urgency and power, with an almost hypnotic rhythm forming quite quickly -

"The runner passed the ten-mile mark and the fifteen and the twenty, and the finish line loomed in front of him."

- Polysyndeton is widely used in the Bible and other religious texts
 - The conjunctions being used in polysyndeton become punctuated beats making a steady cadence that carries on throughout the list: "We listen to hear screams, and cries, and howls of rage."
 - Polysyndeton is also a sure way to give an important list of attributes or ideas immediate force: "The banquet table was a riot of beef and pork and lamb and fish and fresh vegetables and candied fruits and all sorts of wonderful dainties."
-
- Both are powerful rhetorical devices when used sparingly. If you overuse either one, it will quickly lose its power and may even come across simply as grammatical mistakes on your part.
 - Save these devices for the moments when they can best make a list jump off the page or resonate with extra power or pull your reader even further under your spell.

Exercise - Make a list of objects in your bedroom, gameroom, or any place else that is very familiar to you. Imagine two different people describing this space from two different points of view. Write two different descriptions of this space. In one, use asyndeton; in the other, use polysyndeton. Explain your purpose and intended effect in each instance.