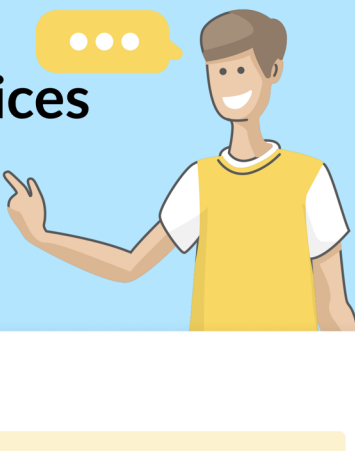


# 35 Rhetorical Devices

Looking to persuade people with the power of your words? Check out the most common rhetorical devices used today.



## Accismus

The rhetorical refusal of something you actually want. **Example:** In Aesop's fable, the fox can't reach the grapes as they are high on the vine. "Oh, you aren't even ripe yet! I don't need any sour grapes."

## Adnomination

A persuasive linguistic trick, using words with the same root in the same sentence. **Example:** "Tune in next week, same time, same channel."

## Adynaton

A purposefully hyperbolic metaphor to suggest that something is impossible. **Example:** "I'll come over... when pigs fly."

## Alliteration

The repetition of the same letter or sound at the start of successive (or closely connected) words. **Example:** Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

## Anacoluthon

Where the expected grammatical or syntactical construction changes part of the way through a sentence. From the Greek for 'inconsistent,' it is often used to mimic real speech or to jar the reader. **Example:** "I don't want you to – please, don't do that."

## Anadiplosis

The repetition of the word (or words) from the end of one sentence to the beginning of the next. **Example:** from *Romeo and Juliet* – "I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave. A grave? O no, a lantern, slaughtered youth."

## Anaphora

The repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of subsequent sentences or statements. **Example:** "It was the best of times, it was the worst of time, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..."

## Antanagoge

Reframing an argument instead of refuting it. Often, this involves putting a positive spin on something usually seen as negative.

**Example:** If someone spills red wine on your carpet, "Nevermind, I was looking to replace that anyway."

## Anthimeria

Using one part of speech as another part of speech. Most commonly, a noun might be used as a verb. **Examples:** "Facebooking my ex" and "Hoovering the carpet."

## Antiphrasis

A sentence or phrase that means the opposite of what it appears to say. **Example:** "Tell me about it" suggests the speaker already knows something and doesn't need to hear more.

## Antonomasia

The use of a title or an epithet in place of a name. **Examples:** The Big Apple (New York City), The Boss (Bruce Springsteen).

## Apophysis

A close relative of irony where a speaker brings up a topic by denying it (or denying that it should even be brought up). **Example:** "Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me 'old,' when I would NEVER call him 'short and fat?'"

## Aporia

A puzzled statement designed to express doubt, where the speaker usually pretends to be at a loss for answers – often followed up with a definitive answer. **Example:** "Where can you get a new suit at a great price? I don't know... Wait! I own a discount suit store!"

## Aposiopesis

The rhetorical effect of trailing off – or breaking off – before the end of a statement, leaving your listener (or reader) hanging. Often used to indicate that the speaker is at a loss for words. **Example:** "When my brother comes back from the pub, I'm gonna..."

## Asterismos

A phrase beginning with an exclamation. **Example:** Hark! Who Goes There?"

## Asyndeton

The removal of conjunctions like "or," "and," or "but" from a sentence – often in the aid of brevity. **Example:** "I came, I saw, I conquered" instead of "I came and I saw, then I conquered."

## Bdelygmia

Bdelygmia (or abominatio) is a rhetorical insult – from the greek for "filth." The nastier, the better. **Example:** "Away, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's-tongue, bull's-pizzle, you stock-fish!" – Henry IV Part I

## Cacophony

The use of words that sound bad together, often to unsettle the reader/listener. The opposite of *Euphony*. **Example:** "Twas jabberlog, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe" – *The Jabberwocky*

## Chiasmus

The repetition of words or phrases in reverse grammatical order to suggest logical truth... even if it's not logical or true. **Example:** "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

## Climax

A set of clauses or statements that build to a peak – saving the most important point for last. **Example:** "If you win this game, you could go home with a microwave, a washing machine, or a brand new Mercedes-Benz!"

## Dysphemism

A description that is explicitly offensive to its subject and the audience. In contrast to euphemism, which is *implicitly* offensive or suggestive. **Example:** "Climate change denier" is dysphemistic, while "climate change skeptic" is more euphemistic.

## Epizeuxis

Where a word is repeated for emphasis. **Example:** "the three most important things in real estate are location, location, location."

## Eutrepismus

Stating your points in the form of a list. **Example:** "Why should I be class president? First, I'm qualified; second, I'm hardworking; and third, I'm the only person running."

## Expediatio

Where you list possible solutions and then knock them down, explaining why they're the wrong choice. Use this to pre-emptively eliminate counter-arguments. **Example:** "Where to go on our date: Theatre? Too expensive. Picnic? Too cold. Bowling? Perfect!"

## Onomatopoeia

Amusingly, this difficult-to-pronounce word refers to words that sound like the thing they're referring to. **Examples:** whiz, buzz, snap, grunt, etc.

## Hyperbole

An exaggerated statement conveying heightened emotions – almost never intended to be taken literally. **Examples:** "I'm the luckiest guy in the world" and "this is the worst day ever."

## Meiosis

An understatement that implies something is less significant than it really is. **Example:** when the Black Knight has a limb cut off in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, he says, "tis but a scratch".

## Onomatopoeia

Where the word phonetically resembles the sound that it describes. **Examples:** Bang, Fizz, Whiff

## Personification

Assigning human characteristics to an abstract concept or non-living object. **Examples:** "That delicious cake is calling my name" or "The camera really loves her."

## Pleonasm

The use of redundant words for persuasive purposes. Most writers are taught to avoid tautologies (using two words that mean the same thing), but they can be used to add emphasis or to create greater meaning. **Example:** "I've seen it with my own eyes"

## Rhetorical comparisons

Comparing one thing to another, for example with a simile or a metaphor.

## Rhetorical question

A question that's asked to make a point – and not intended to be answered. **Example:** "Am I excited about my vacation? Is the Pope Catholic?"

## Synecdoche

Using a part of something to refer to the whole. **Example:** calling workers "hired hands" or telling people to "check out the wheels," meaning your car.

## Tmesis

Separating a word in two and adding another word within it, usually for emphasis. **Example:** Fan-bloody-tastic.

## Zeugma

A figure of speech in which one word is applied to two other words but in different ways. The result can often be humorous. **Example:** "They covered themselves with dust and glory" – covered is first used literally ("covered in dust") and then figuratively ("covered in glory").

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