

RHETORICAL DEVICES STUDENT LIST

- 1. rhetoric** – the specific features of texts, written or spoken, that cause them to be meaningful, purposeful, and effective for the audience
- 2. rhetorical situation** -- a set of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential need which can be completely or partially removed if discourse can so compel human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the need
- 3. tone** – the author or speaker’s attitude toward the subject
- 4. point of View** – the angle of considering things; in literature, it is the narrator’s position in relation to the story being told
- 5. allegory** – the device of using character and/or story elements symbolically to represent an abstraction in addition to the literal meaning
- 6. allusion** – a direct or indirect reference to something which is presumably commonly known, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art
- 7. anecdote** – a short narrative detailing particulars of an interesting episode or event
- 8. paradox** – a statement that appears to be self-contradictory or opposed to common sense but upon closer inspection contains some degree of truth
- 9. ethos** – appealing to a reader through the speaker’s credibility
- 10. pathos** – appealing to a reader/audience by eliciting an emotional response from the audience
- 11. logos** – appealing to a reader/audience through presentation of logic
- 12. diction** – the writer’s word choices, especially with regard to their correctness, clarity, or effectiveness
- 13. denotation** – the strict, literal, dictionary definition of a word, devoid of any emotion, attitude, or color
- 14. connotation** – the nonliteral, associative meaning of a word; the implied, suggested meaning
- 15. metaphor** – a comparison between two unlike things that does NOT use the words *like* or *as*: the ladder of success (i.e, success is a ladder). EX: "Carthage was a beehive of buzzing workers." Or, "This is your brain on drugs."
- 16. simile** – when something is *like* something else:
"Her skin was like alabaster."
- 17. metonymy** – using a vaguely suggestive, physical object to embody a more general idea: CROWN for royalty; the PEN is mightier than the SWORD. "If we cannot strike offenders in the heart, let us strike them in the wallet." We use metonymy in everyday speech when we refer to the entire movie-making industry as a mere suburb of L.A., "Hollywood," or when we refer to the collective decisions of the United States government as "Washington," or the "White House."
- 18. synecdoche** – using a part of a physical object to represent the whole object: "Twenty eyes watched our every move" (i.e., ten people watched our every move). "A hungry stomach has no ears" (La Fontaine).
- 19. pun** – A pun twists the meaning of words. Homonymic Puns -- "Johnny B. Good" is a pun for "Johnny be good." Sound similarities -- "Casting perils before swains" (instead of "pearls before swine").
- 20. zeugma** – one verb using different objects. If this changes the verb's initial meaning, the zeugma is sometimes called syllipsis:
"If we don't hang together, we shall hang separately" (Ben Franklin).
"The queen of England sometimes takes advice in that chamber, and sometimes tea."
". . . losing her heart or her necklace at the ball" (Alexander Pope).
"She exhausted both her audience and her repertoire."

- 21. personification** – giving human qualities to inanimate objects: "The ground thirsts for rain; the wind whispered secrets to us."
- 22. apostrophe** – (not to be confused with the punctuation mark): addressing someone or some abstraction that is not physically present: "Oh, Death, be not proud" (John Donne). "Ah, Mr. Newton, you would be pleased to see how far we have progressed in physics."
- 23. erotema** – asking a rhetorical question to the reader: "What should honest citizens do?"
- 24. onomatopoeia** – echoic words or words that create an auditory effect similar to the sound they represent: Buzz; Click; Rattle; Clatter; Squish; Grunt.
- 25. hyperbole** – exaggeration: "His thundering shout could split rocks." Or, "Yo' mama's so fat..."
- 26. meiosis** – understatement (opposite of exaggeration): "I was somewhat worried when the psychopath ran toward me with a chainsaw." (i.e., I was terrified). Litotes (especially popular in Old English) is a type of meiosis in which the writer uses a statement in the negative to create the effect: "You know, Einstein is not a bad mathematician." (i.e., Einstein is a good mathematician.)
- 27. catachresis** – A completely impossible figure of speech, especially one breaking the limits of realism or grammar. For example, many figures of speech describe something biologically or physically impossible: "Joe will kittens when he hears this!" "I will sing victories for you." Or as Milton so elegantly phrased it, catachresis is all about "blind mouths."
For a more recent example, consider the disturbingly cheerful pop song by Foster the People, "Pumped Up Kicks," which deals with a school shooting. Here, the shooter/narrator states, "I've waited for a long time. Yeah, the sleight of my hand is now a quick-pull trigger. / I reason with my cigarette." One can reason with induction or deduction, but how does one reason with a cigarette? Here, the catachresis might evoke the idea of the "cool" kid using personal style instead of a persuasive argument, or it might evoke the imagery of torture--burning victims with a cigarette-butt to make one's point. This sort of evocative, almost nonsensical language is the heart of good catachresis.
Catachresis is closely related to hyperbole and synaesthesia.
- 28. synaesthesia** – Mixing one type of sensory input with another in an impossible way, such as speaking of how a color sounds, or how a smell looks: "The scent of the rose rang like a bell through the garden." "I caressed the darkness with cool fingers."
- 29. aposiopesis** – Breaking off as if unable to continue: "The fire surrounds them while – I cannot go on."
- 30. oxymoron** (plural *oxymora* also called Paradox)-- Using contradiction in a manner that oddly makes sense. Examples of oxymora include *jumbo shrimp*, *sophisticated rednecks*, and *military intelligence*. The best oxymora seem to reveal a deeper truth through their contradictions. For instance, "without laws, we can have no freedom." Shakespeare's Julius Caesar also makes use of a famous oxymoron: "Cowards die many times before their deaths" (2.2.32).
- 31. ambiguity** – the multiple meanings, either intentional or unintentional, of a word, phrase, sentence, or passage
- 32. colloquial/colloquialism** – the use of slang or informalities in speech or writing that gives the work a conversational, familiar tone; not generally acceptable for formal writing
- 33. euphemism** – a more agreeable or less offensive substitute for a generally unpleasant word or concept
- 34. homily** – any serious talk, speech, or lecture involving moral or spiritual advice
- 35. juxtaposition** – when two words, phrases, images, or ideas are placed close together or side by-side for comparison or contrast
- 36. litotes** – a special form of understatement in which a point is affirmed by negating its opposite. EX: "He's no fool."
- 37. pedantic** – used to describe words, phrases, or a general tone that is overly scholarly, academic, or bookish

38. periodic sentence – a sentence that presents its central meaning in a main clause at the end and is preceded by a dependent clause.

EX: "Ecstatic with my AP score, I let out a loud, joyful shout!"

Cumulative sentences or loose sentences, on the other hand, begin with the independent clause and then finish with a flurry of modifying constructions.

39. syllogism – a deductive system of formal logic that presents two premises (first called "major" and the second called "minor") that inevitably lead to a sound conclusion.

EX: Major premise: *All men are mortal.*

Minor premise: *Socrates is a man.*

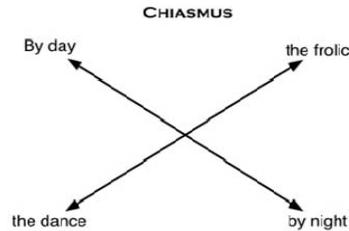
Conclusion: *Therefore, Socrates is mortal.*

40. syntax – the way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences

41. parallelism – when the writer establishes similar patterns of grammatical structure and length. For instance, "King Alfred tried to make the law clear, precise, and equitable." The previous sentence has parallel structure in use of adjectives. However, the following sentence does *not* use parallelism: "King Alfred tried to make clear laws that had precision and were equitable."

42. antithesis (plural *antitheses*) -- contrary ideas expressed in a balanced sentence. It can be a contrast of opposites: "Evil men fear authority; good men cherish it." Or it can be a contrast of degree: "One small step for a man, one giant leap for all mankind."

43. chiasmus (from Greek, "cross" or "x"): A literary scheme involving a specific inversion of word order. It involves taking parallelism and deliberately turning it inside out, creating a "crisscross" pattern. For example, consider the chiasmus that follows: "By day the frolic, and the dance by night." If we draw the words as a chart, the words form an "x" (hence the word's Greek etymology):



The sequence is typically *a b b a*. Examples: "I *lead* the life I *love*; I *love* the life I *lead*."

"Naked I rose from the earth; to the grave I fall clothed." Chiasmus often overlaps with [*antimetabole*](#).

44. alliosis – presenting alternatives: "You can eat well or you can sleep well." While such a structure often results in the logical fallacy of the false dichotomy or the either/or fallacy, it can create a cleverly balanced and artistic sentence.

45. ellipsis – omitting a word implied by the previous clause: "The European soldiers killed six of the remaining villagers, the American soldiers, eight."

46. asyndeton – using no conjunctions to create an effect of speed or simplicity: *Veni. Vidi. Vici.* "I came. I saw. I conquered." (As opposed to "I came, and then I saw, and then I conquered.") Been there. Done that. Bought the t-shirt.

47. polysyndeton – using many conjunctions to achieve an overwhelming effect: "This term, I am taking biology and English and history and math and music and physics and sociology." All those *ands* make the student sound like she is completely overwhelmed!

48. enallage – intentionally misusing grammar to characterize a speaker or to create a memorable phrase. Boxing manager Joe Jacobs, for instance, became immortal with the phrase, "We was robbed!" Or, the editors of *Punch* magazine might tell their British readers, "You pays your money, and you takes your chances."

49. neologism – creating a new or imaginary word. For example, Lewis Carroll writes: "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / did gyre and gimble in the wabe; / All mimsy were the borogoves, / and the mome raths outgrabe." His lines here contain numerous imaginary words--though these might be excessive in a rhetorical writing rather than a literary one like his poem. Many neologisms result from metaplasmus, as discussed and subdivided below.

- 50. metaplasmus** – a type of neologism in which misspelling a word creates a rhetorical effect. To emphasize dialect, one might spell *dog* as "dawg." To emphasize that something is unimportant, we might add *-let* or *-ling* at the end of the word, referring to a deity as a "godlet", or a prince as a "princeling." To emphasize the feminine nature of something normally considered masculine, try adding *-ette* to the end of the word, creating a *smurfette* or a *corvette*. To modernize something old, the writer might turn the Greek god Hermes into the *Hermenator*. Likewise, Austin Powers renders all things *shagedelic*. The categories following this entry are subdivisions of metaplasmus:
- 51. alliteration** – repetition of a sound in multiple words: *buckets of big blue berries*. If we want to be super-technical, alliteration comes in two forms. Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds: *many more merry men*. If the first letters are the consonants that alliterate, the technique is often called head rhyme. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds: *refresh your zest for living*. Often assonance can lead to outright rhymes.
- 52. anaphora** – repetition of beginning clauses. For instance, Churchill declared, "We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost shall be."
- 53. epistrophe (also called antistrophe)** – repetition of a concluding word or endings: "He's learning fast; are you earning fast?" When the epistrophe focuses on sounds rather than entire words, we normally call it rhyme.
- 54. epanalepsis** – repeating a word from the beginning of a clause at the end of the clause: "Year chases year." Or "Man's inhumanity to man." As Voltaire reminds us, "Common sense is not so common." As Shakespeare chillingly phrases it, "Blood will have blood." Under Biblical *lex talionis* one might demand "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life."
- 55. satire** – a work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule
- 56. parody** – a work that closely imitates the style or content of another with specific aim of comic effect and/or ridicule
- 57. sarcasm** – bitter, caustic language that is meant to hurt or ridicule someone or something
- 58. invective** – an emotionally violent, verbal denunciation or attack using strong, abusive language

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