

10 Rhetorical Strategies

rhet·o·ric

noun \ 're-tə-rik \

Definition of RHETORIC

1: the art of speaking or writing effectively; as in.....

a: the study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient times

b: the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion

2 a: skill in the effective use of speech, **b:** a type or mode of language or speech;

1. Parallelism – Align Structure to Content.

Parallelism - Use similar structure for similar content. The single most important rhetorical device for essay writing. When ideas are parallel in their content, they must be parallel in structure. This holds for short phrases, as in the example below, or in long sentences.

"It is by logic we prove, but by intuition we discover."

(Leonardo da Vinci)

"Humanity has advanced, when it has advanced, not because it has been sober, responsible, and cautious, but because it has been playful, rebellious, and immature."

(Tom Robbins, *Still Life with Woodpecker*, 1980)

"Those who write clearly have readers; those who write obscurely have commentators."

(Albert Camus)

2. Alliteration: The repetition of a sound in the first syllable of each phrase. In the first example below, you will see one string of three words beginning with "f," and another with three words beginning with "d." In the second example, you will see Dr. King's riff on the letter "t."

"They are part of the finest fighting force that the world has ever known. They have served tour after tour of duty in distant, different, and difficult places." – President Barack Obama

"With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day." – Martin Luther King, Jr. (also an example of parallel structure)

3. Anadiplosis: The last word or phrase is repeated to begin the next.

"Suffering breeds character; character breeds faith." – Rev. Jesse Jackson

"Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." – Yoda

4. Antimetabole: The repetition of words or phrases in successive clauses, but in reverse order.

“Not all schooling is education nor all education, schooling.” – Economist Milton Friedman

“Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” – Scientist Carl Sagan

5. Antithesis: A word, phrase, or sentence opposes the original proposition -deliberately juxtaposing contrasted ideas through parallel grammatical structure.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” – Neil Armstrong

“We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom — symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning — signifying renewal, as well as change.” – JFK, “Inaugural Address,” 20 January 1961.

6. Asyndeton: Omits conjunctions, which helps to increase the tempo and highlight a specific idea.

“...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” – Abraham Lincoln

“He was a bag of bones, a floppy doll, a broken stick, a maniac.” – Jack Kerouac

7. Litotes: You’ve probably heard this if a friend ever told you her first date was “not bad.” Litotes is essentially a double negative, expressed by denying an opposite idea; often used ironically. (verbal irony)

“She’s no dummy” (she’s smart)

“This is no small problem” (this is a big problem)

“He was living in Bithynia, holding an office of no small importance from the Emperor, viz., the stewardship of his revenue, and care of the exchequer: for this had been assigned to him by the Emperor as a prelude to the highest offices.” – Gregory of Nazianzus, *Panegyric on his Brother Caesarius*.

“Her motives may not have been entirely trustworthy.”

8. Isocolon – Make Important Clauses Stand Out.

(from Greek *isókolon*, same elements) – Use two or more clauses with an equal number of syllables. This has the effect of highlighting the importance of the clauses, and is subtle enough that the reader might not actually figure out how you’re doing it!

“Veni, vidi, vici.” – Julius Caesar.

“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” – JFK, Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961.

9. Metaphor: An analogy that compares one thing or idea to another, using a term or phrase it literally isn't to suggest similarity.

"Homeowners are the innocent bystanders in a drive-by shooting by Wall Street and Washington." – Sen. John McCain

10. Apposition – Develop your Descriptions.

Apposition – Technically coming from grammar, apposition is stringing together two units of the same grammatical form (in Greek, they're usually nouns or noun clauses), when one serves to further explain the other. Use apposition to build up descriptions of important people, places, or things in your essay.

"This was not Aunt Dahlia, *my good and kindly aunt*, but my Aunt Agatha, the one who chews broken bottles and kills rats with her teeth."

(P.G. Wodehouse)

"He said, 'Take now your son, *your only son*, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.' – Genesis 22.2, NASB

"This is a valley of ashes--*a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air.*"

(F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 1925)