

Rhetoric: Situations, Choices, Effects

From the Greek for *orator* or *speaker*, **rhetoric** refers to the principles governing the art of using language effectively, eloquently, persuasively. You face **rhetorical situations** every day. A rhetorical situation occurs whenever you have **choices** to make about how you are going to communicate with another person or group of people. Whether consciously or not, you make choices about the kind of language you use, about the medium of the communication (e.g., text, email, snail mail, phone call), and about the genre that will best communicate what you want to say (e.g., note, poetry, journal entry, business letter). We make these choices based on a few essential factors: our **audience**, what we want to say (our **subject**), and the **effects** we want to have on our audience (our **purpose**).

A Menu of Rhetorical Choices: Strategy

Patterns of Development (or **Modes of Composition**): the general approach (or *strategy*) a writer may take to the organization and presentation of ideas and information.

1. **narration**: tells a story by presenting events in an orderly, logical sequence.
2. **description**: tells readers about the qualities/characteristics of a person, place, or thing.
3. **exemplification**: uses one or more particular cases—or examples—to illustrate or explain a general point or an abstract concept.
4. **process**: explains *how* to do something or *how* something occurs.
5. **cause and effect**: analyzes *why* something happens.
6. **comparison and contrast**: focuses on similarities and differences between two or more subjects.
7. **classification and division**: the processes of sorting individual items into categories and of breaking a whole into parts.
8. **definition**: tells what a term means and how it differs from other terms in its class.
9. **argumentation**: a process of reasoning that asserts the soundness of a debatable position, belief, or conclusion.

Aristotle's rhetorical appeals: The Greek philosopher Aristotle is generally credited with developing the basics of the art of persuasion. After analyzing the relationships among speaker, subject, and audience, a writer is ready to make some strategic choices. One is how to persuade the audience by appealing to *ethos*, *pathos*, and/or *logos*.

1. **ethos**: appeal to character, i.e., demonstrating credibility and trustworthiness through expertise, experience, training, sincerity, or a combination of these.
2. **pathos**: appeal to emotion, i.e., choosing language (such as *figurative language* or personal *anecdotes*) that engages the emotions of the audience.
3. **logos**: appeal to reason, i.e., having a clear main idea, or thesis, with specific details, examples, facts, statistical data, or expert testimony; acknowledging *counterarguments*.

A Menu of Rhetorical Choices: Tactics

Voice: the color and texture of communication.

1. **diction** (word choice): the foundation of voice and contributes to all of its elements. The *connotation* of words – as opposed to their *denotation* – is an essential feature of diction.
2. **detail** (facts, observations, and incidents): used to develop a topic, shaping and seasoning voice.
3. **imagery** (verbal representation of sense experience): brings the immediacy of sensory experience to writing and gives voice a distinctive quality. The *pattern* of images in a text – especially in fiction – is an essential consideration.
4. **syntax** (grammatical sentence structure): controls verbal pacing and focus. The *length* and *variety* of sentences are essential considerations, as are *repetition* and *punctuation*. (see #1 under “Other rhetorical elements”)
5. **tone** (expression of attitude): gives voice its distinctive personality; created by selection (*diction*) and arrangement (*syntax*) of words, and by purposeful use of *details* and *images*.

Figures of Speech: the various uses of language that depart from customary construction, order, or significance/meaning.

1. **rhetorical figures:** departures from customary usage to achieve special effects without a change in the radical meaning of the words.
 - a. **apostrophe:** a direct address to some person (living or dead) or abstract quality as if s/he or it were present.
 - b. **rhetorical question:** a question propounded for its rhetorical effect and not requiring a reply or intended to induce a reply.
 - c. **anaphora:** one of the devices of *repetition*, in which the same expression (word or words) is repeated at the beginning of two or more lines, clauses, or sentences.
 - d. **epistrophe:** the opposite of *anaphora*, i.e., *repetition* of the closing word or phrase at the end of several clauses.
 - e. **asyndeton:** omission of the conjunctions that ordinarily join coordinate words or clauses (e.g., “I came, I saw, I conquered.”).
 - f. **polysyndeton:** the opposite of asyndeton, i.e., repetition of conjunctions in close succession (e.g., “We have ships and men and money and stores.”).
 - g. **chiasmus:** a pattern in which the second part is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed (e.g., “One should eat to live, not live to eat.”).
 - h. **zeugma:** a construction in which one word (usually a verb) modifies or governs – often in different, sometimes incongruous ways – two or more words in a sentence (e.g., “John lost his coat and his temper.”)
2. **tropes** (“figures of thought” or “figurative language”): uses of language that involve a “turn” or basic change in the meaning of words; the use of a word in a sense other than the literal.
 - a. **analogy:** a comparison of two things that are fundamentally different yet alike in certain ways; often used to explain something unfamiliar by comparing it to something more familiar.
 - b. **metaphor:** an indirect (implicit) analogy that pretends that the two things being compared are identical.
 - c. **simile:** a direct (explicit) analogy, usually signaled by *like* or *as*.

- d. **metonymy**: the representation of a thing, concept, person, or group by something closely associated with it (e.g., referring to the US presidency as the Oval Office).
- e. **synecdoche**: a particular form of *metonymy*; the use of a part of something to represent the whole – or vice versa (e.g., referring to a car as wheels).
- f. **symbol**: a person, place, thing, or event that figuratively represents or stands for something else; often the thing or idea represented is more abstract and general, and the symbol is more concrete and particular.
- g. **personification**: the attribution of human characteristics or feelings to nonhuman organisms, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas.
- h. **ambiguity**: a word, statement, or situation with two or more possible meanings is said to be *ambiguous*.
- i. **irony**: as a literary device, irony implies a distance between what is said and what is meant. Based on the context, the reader is able to see the implied meaning in spite of the contradiction.
- j. **paradox**: a seemingly self-contradictory phrase or concept that illuminates a truth.
- k. **oxymoron**: the bringing together of contradictory words for effect.
- l. **hyperbole**: deliberate and bold exaggeration/overstatement
- m. **caricature**: writing that exaggerates certain individual qualities of a person and produces a ridiculous effect.
- n. **understatement**: the opposite of *hyperbole*.
- o. **litotes**: a form of *understatement* in which a thing is affirmed by stating the negative of its opposite (e.g., saying “not bad” to mean “good”).
- p. **euphemism**: an inoffensive expression used in place of a blunt one that is felt to be disagreeable or embarrassing (e.g., “pass away” instead “die”).
- q. **parody**: the imitation of a (usually serious) text for the purpose of ridiculing it or its author.
- r. **satire**: a work or manner that blends a censorious attitude with humor and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity.
- s. **sarcasm**: a caustic and bitter expression of strong disapproval that is intended to hurt or ridicule someone or something.
- t. **pun**: a play on words based on the similarity of sound between two words with different meanings.

Other rhetorical elements: common features of everyday language that can be used to achieve special effects.

1. **syntax**:

- a. **parallelism**: similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses; also called *parallel structure*.
- b. **antithesis**: a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous words, phrases, or clauses that manifest *parallelism* in their *syntax*.
- c. **juxtaposition**: the placement of elements – either similar or contrasting – close together, positioning them side by side in order to illuminate the subject.
- d. **enumeration**: identifying one thing after another in a list.
- e. **inversion**: the reversal of the normal order of words in a sentence.
- f. **periodic sentence**: a sentence that builds toward and ends with the main clause.
- g. **cumulative (or loose) sentence**: an independent clause followed by subordinate clauses or phrases that supply additional detail.
- h. **varying sentence length**

2. **sound:**

- a. **rhyme:** the repetition of syllables, typically at the end of a verse line. Rhymed words conventionally share all sounds following the word's last stressed syllable.
- b. **alliteration:** the repetition of initial, stressed consonant sounds in a series of words within a phrase or verse line.
- c. **assonance:** the repetition of vowel sounds without repeating consonants; sometimes called *vowel rhyme*.
- d. **consonance:** a resemblance in sound between two words, or an initial rhyme (see *alliteration*)
- e. **onomatopoeia:** a figure of speech in which the sound of a word imitates its sense (for example, "choo-choo," "hiss," or "buzz").

3. **reference:**

- a. **allusion:** a brief, often implicit and indirect reference within a literary text to something outside the text, whether another text (e.g., the Bible, a myth, another literary work, a painting, or a piece of music) or any imaginary or historical person, place, or thing.
- b. **aphorism:** a compact statement that concisely expresses a principle or common experience.
- c. **anecdote:** a short narrative detailing particulars of an interesting episode or event.
- d. **flashback:** the presentation of material that occurred prior to the opening scene of a work.
- e. **foreshadowing:** the presentation of material in a work in such a way that later events are prepared for.
- f. **shift in person/pronoun:** a purposeful change in person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and corresponding pronouns.
- g. **register:** any of the varieties of a language that a speaker uses in a particular social context
- h. **jargon:** the language belonging to a profession or avocation.
- i. **slang:** non-standard language of a regional or local character, used very informally by a particular group of people.
- j. **dialect:** a variety of a language systematically different from other varieties of the same language in structural (morphological, syntactic) or lexical features.
- k. **colloquialism:** a word or phrase that is used mostly in informal speech.
- l. **vernacular:** the language of ordinary speech rather than formal writing.

4. **general elements:** can be realized in several ways

- a. **mood:** the emotional and/or intellectual attitude of an author toward the subject of a text (as opposed to its audience).
- b. **motif:** a recognizable repeating unit (e.g., an image, metaphor, symbol, phrase, sound, scene, character) in a text or other work of art.
- c. **repetition:** reiteration of a word, phrase, clause, idea, image, or sound.