

Rhetorical Devices in Public Speaking

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The following are the most commonly used rhetorical techniques (also known as rhetorical devices) in public speaking:

ALLITERATION repeats the same sound or letter at the beginning of several words in sequence.

- *Let us go forth to lead the land we love . . .* - J. F. Kennedy
- *My style is public negotiations for parity, rather than private negotiations for position . . .* - Jesse Jackson
- *We want no parlay with you and your grisly gang who work your wicked will . . .* - Sir Winston Churchill

ALLUSION is a short reference to a familiar person, place, thing, or event (the best sources for allusions are literature, history, Greek myth, and the Bible, as they must be easily understood). It is also important that the allusion explains, or enhances the subject under discussion without sidetracking the listener.

- *You must borrow me Gargantua's mouth first. 'Tis a word too great for any mouth of this age's size* - Shakespeare
- *If you take his parking place, you can expect World War II all over again.*

AMPLIFICATION repeats a word or expression while adding more detail to it, in order to emphasize something.

- *I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England, too.* - Queen Elizabeth I

ANADIPLOSIS repeats one or several words that end one clause and begin another.

- *Men in great place are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state; servants of fame; and servants of business.* - Francis Bacon
- *They call for you: the general who became a slave; the slave who became a gladiator; the gladiator who defied an Emperor.* - from the movie *Gladiator*

ANALOGY is a kind of extended **METAPHOR** or long **SIMILE** in which a comparison is made between two things in order to develop a line of reasoning. While it is similar to simile, similes are generally more artistic and brief, while an analogy is longer and explains a thought process.

- *Knowledge always desires increase: it is like fire, which must first be kindled by some external agent, but which will afterwards propagate itself.* - Samuel Johnson

ANAPHORA repeats the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, or sentences, often alongside **CLIMAX** and **PARALLELISM** and using a **TRICOLON**.

- *But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.* - Martin Luther King, Jr.
- *But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground . . .* - Abraham Lincoln
- *I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun.* - from *Farewell, My Lovely*

ANASTROPHE is a departure from normal word order for the sake of emphasis

- *Four score and seven years ago . . .* - Abraham Lincoln
- *This much we pledge, and more . . .* - John F. Kennedy

ANTISTROPHE (also called EPISTROPHE) repeats the same word or phrase at the end of successive clauses.

- *In 1931, ten years ago, Japan invaded Manchukuo -- without warning . In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia -- without warning . In 1938, Hitler occupied Austria -- without warning . In 1939, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia -- without warning. Later in 1939, Hitler invaded Poland -- without warning . And now Japan has attacked Malaya and Thailand -- and the United States -- without warning. - Franklin D. Roosevelt*
- *It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can. It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can. It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness: Yes, we can. - Barack Obama*

ANTITHESIS is a figure of balance in which two contrasting ideas are deliberately used in consecutive phrases or sentences.

- *We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools. - Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- *Reasonable men adapt to the world. Unreasonable men adapt the world to themselves. That's why all progress depends on unreasonable men. - George Bernard Shaw*
- *No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor bastard die for his country. - General George Patton*
- *That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. --Neil Armstrong*

ASSONANCE is the successive use of syllables with the same or similar vowel sounds in words with different consonants. It is similar to rhyme, but can be used with similar sounding words, as in the Churchill example.

- *I feel the need , the need for speed. -- from the movie Top Gun*
- *The odious apparatus of Nazi rule. – Sir Winston Churchill*

ASYNDETON is a lack of conjunctions (e.g. 'and') between successive phrases or words.

- *We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty. – John F. Kennedy*
- *Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint. - Barack Obama*

CHIASMUS is a very commonly used and effective technique where the words in one phrase or clause are reversed in the next.

- *But just because you're born in the slum does not mean the slum is born in you, and you can rise above it if your mind is made up. - Jesse Jackson*
- *It's not the men in my life that counts: it's the life in my men. - Mae West*
- *Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. - George W. Bush*
- *The true test is not the speeches the president delivers; it's if the president delivers on the speeches. - Hilary Clinton*
- *Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good. - Samuel Johnson*

CLIMAX (also called gradatio) is the arrangement of words or phrases in order of increasing importance or emphasis. It is often used with PARALLELISM because it offers a sense of continuity, order, and movement-up the ladder of importance.

- *And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a merry Christmas, and God bless all of you, all of you on the good earth. - Frank Borman, Apollo 8 astronaut*
- *And now I ask you ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, for the good of all of us, for the love of this great nation, for the family of America, for the love of God; please make this nation remember how futures are built. - Mario Cuomo, Governor of New York*

DIACOPE repeats a word or phrase after an intervening word or phrase.

- *Free at last, free at last; thank God almighty, free at last!* - Martin Luther King
- *The people everywhere, not just here in Britain, everywhere -- they kept faith with Princess Diana.* - Tony Blair

DISTINCTIO is an elaboration on a particular meaning of a word in order to prevent any misunderstanding or ambiguity:

- *In modern times (and here I am referring to the post-World War Two era) . . .*
- *The task could be described as difficult, if by difficult we mean that it will entail hardship.*

EPONYM substitutes the name of a famous person for an attribute. By their nature they often border on the cliché, but many times they can be useful without seeming too obviously trite. While finding new or infrequently used ones is best, it is also more difficult, because the name-and-attribute relationship needs to be well established:

- *You don't need to be Einstein to see that.*
- *That little Hitler is fooling nobody.*

EXPLETIVE is a word or short phrase, that interrupts normal speech in order to lend emphasis to the words immediately next to it:

- *And this city -- this Golden City which is both ancient and youthful -- stands as a living monument to your unconquerable spirit.* - Barack Obama

HYPERBOLE is the deliberate exaggeration for emphasis or effect, i.e. the opposite of MEIOSIS. It must be clearly intended as an exaggeration, and should be used sparingly to be effective. That is, do not exaggerate everything, but treat hyperbole like an exclamation point, to be used only occasionally.

- *My parents will kill me if I don't get home before midnight.*
- *This steak isn't rare; I've seen cows hurt worse than this get up and get well.*

HYPOPHORA is a figure of reasoning in which one or more questions or objections is asked or stated and then answered by the speaker, reasoning aloud (the original 'rhetorical question').

- *When the enemy struck on that June day of 1950, what did America do? It did what it always has done in all its times of peril. It appealed to the heroism of its youth.* – General Dwight D. Eisenhower
- *'But there are only three hundred of us,' you object. Three hundred, yes, but men, but armed, but Spartans, but at Thermopylae: I have never seen three hundred so numerous.* - Seneca

LITOTES is a particular form of understatement, which denies the opposite of the word which otherwise would be used.

- *I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations.* - Martin Luther King, Jr.

MEIOSIS is a deliberate understatement, i.e. the opposite of HYPERBOLE.

- *The situation has developed, not necessarily to our advantage.* - Emperor Hirohito, announcing to the Japanese people that atomic bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

METABASIS is a brief statement of what has been said and what will follow; a kind of transitional summary:

- *So far I have concentrated only on the costs of the proposal. I now want to turn to the benefits.*
- *So much for the achievements of last year. Let's look at the objectives for this one.*

METANOIA (also called correctio) qualifies a statement by recalling it (or part of it) and expressing it in a better, milder, or stronger way. A negative, such as 'nay' (though this would be a little theatrical in a business speech or presentation), is often used to do the recalling:

- *Fido was the friendliest of all St. Bernards, nay of all dogs.*

- *Even a blind man can see, as the saying is, that poetic language gives a certain grandeur to prose, except that some writers imitate the poets quite openly, or rather they do not so much imitate them as transpose their words into their own work, as Herodotus does.* -Demetrius

METAPHOR is the comparison of two different things by speaking of one in terms of the other. Unlike a SIMILE or ANALOGY, a metaphor asserts that one thing actually is another thing, not just like it.

- *From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.* - Sir Winston Churchill
- *The torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.* – John F, Kennedy

PARALLELISM is a figure of balance identified by successive words or phrases with the same or very similar grammatical structure.

- *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 to assure the survival and the success of liberty.* - John F. Kennedy
- *We have seen the state of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. We've seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers -- in English, Hebrew, and Arabic.* - George W. Bush
- *Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn.* - Benjamin Franklin

POLYSYNDETON is the repetitive use of a conjunction between each word, phrase, or clause, and therefore the opposite of ASYNDETON.

- *Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.* --Isaiah 24:1-2
- *Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.* - Barack Obama

PRAETERITIO (also called paraleipsis) is a pretended omission for rhetorical effect.

- *That part of our history detailing the military achievements which gave us our several possessions ... is a theme too familiar to my listeners for me to dilate on, and I shall therefore pass it by.* - Thucydides
- *Let us make no judgment on the events of Chappaquiddick, since the facts are not yet all in.* - a political opponent of Senator Edward Kennedy

Sometimes it is used to draw attention to something in the very act of pretending to pass it over:

- *It would be unseemly for me to dwell on the honourable member's drinking problem, and too many have already sensationalized his womanizing.*

SCESIS ONOMATON emphasizes something by expressing it in a string of generally synonymous phrases or statements. While it should be used carefully, this deliberate and obvious restatement can be quite effective. Although it can use more than three, it tends to be most effective when used in conjunction with a TRICOLON:

- *We succeeded, we were victorious, we accomplished the feat!*
- *But there is one thing these glassy-eyed idealists forget: such a scheme would be extremely costly, horrendously expensive, and require a ton of money.*

SENTENTIA is a figure of argument in which a wise, witty, or well-known saying is used to sum up the preceding material.

- *So, I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. 'Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord' -- Martin Luther King, Jr,*

SIMILE is a comparison between two different things that have something in common, using like, as or seems.

- *My love is like a red, red rose* - Robert Burns
- *We're going to go through them like crap through a goose.* - General George Patton

SYMPLOCE repeats the first and last word or words in one phrase or sentence in one or more successive ones, thereby combining ANAPHORA and EPISTROPHE

- *Much of what I say might sound bitter, but it's the truth. Much of what I say might sound like it's stirring up trouble, but it's the truth. Much of what I say might sound like it is hate, but it's the truth.* - Malcolm X
- *Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island. And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.* - Franklin D Roosevelt

TRICOLON is the use of words, phrases, examples, or the beginnings or endings of phrases or sentences in threes.

- *Government of the people, by the people, for the people . . .* President Abraham Lincoln
- *Never in the history of human endeavour has so much been owed by so many to so few.* Sir Winston Churchill

I Have a Dream

Martin Luther King, Jr.

(Rhetorical techniques are shown in bold, with the name following it in capital letters in brackets)

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope (METAPHOR) to millions of Negro slaves, who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice (METAPHOR). It came as a joyous daybreak (METAPHOR) to end the long night of their captivity (METAPHOR).

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination (METAPHOR). One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity (METAPHOR). One hundred years later the Negro (ANAPHORA) is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check (METAPHOR). When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note (METAPHOR) to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, (AMPLIFICATION) would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check (METAPHOR), a check which has come back (AMPLIFICATION) marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice (METAPHOR) is bankrupt. We refuse to believe (ANAPHORA) that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity (METAPHOR) of this nation. And so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us (AMPLIFICATION) upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism (METAPHOR). Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate (ALLITERATION) valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice (METAPHOR). Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood (METAPHOR). Now is the time (ANAPHORA) to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer (ALLITERATION) of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning.

Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt (METAPHOR) will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice (METAPHOR) emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice (METAPHOR). In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred (METAPHOR).

We must ever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline (METAPHOR). We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must (ANAPHORA) rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy (ALLITERATION) which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom (PARALLELISM). We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" (HYPOPHORA)

We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied (CONDUPLICATIO) until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream (SIMILE).

I am not unmindful (LITOTES) that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations (ALLITERATION). Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you (ANAPHORA) have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecutions and staggered by the winds of police brutality (METAPHOR). You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities (ASYNDETON), knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair (METAPHOR), I say to you today, my friends. And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal (EPITHET).

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners (CONDUPLICATIO) will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood (METAPHOR).

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression (METAPHOR), will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice (METAPHOR).

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 (ANTITHESIS). I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls (CONDUPLICATIO) as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today (ANAPHORA)!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted , and every hill and mountain shall be made low , the rough places will be made plain , and the crooked places will be made straight , and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together (PARALLELISM).

This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope (METAPHOR). With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood (METAPHOR) . With this faith (ANAPHORA) we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together (PARALLELISM) knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day, this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, " My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring !" (EPITHET) And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring -- from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring -- from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring -- from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring -- from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring -- from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that.

Let freedom ring -- from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring -- from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring -- from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring ! (ANAPHORA)

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city (ANAPHORA), we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles (ALLITERATION), Protestants and Catholics (PARALLELISM) , will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual,

" Free at last, free at last.

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last." " (DIACOPE)