

30 Essential Rhetorical Devices — Definitions & Examples

Metaphor: A direct comparison between two unrelated things. Example: “Time is a thief.”

Simile: A comparison using 'like' or 'as'. Example: “Her smile was as bright as the sun.”

Alliteration: Repetition of initial consonant sounds. Example: “Wild winds whipped wildly.”

Assonance: Repetition of vowel sounds. Example: “The mellow wedding bells.”

Consonance: Repetition of consonant sounds. Example: “The lumpy, bumpy road.”

Hyperbole: Exaggeration. Example: “I’ve told you a million times.”

Understatement: Presenting something as less significant. Example: “It rained a little today.”

Irony: Meaning opposite of literal words. Example: “Great job” after a mistake.

Sarcasm: Mocking verbal irony. Example: “Oh, brilliant, you broke it again.”

Paradox: Contradictory but true statement. Example: “Less is more.”

Oxymoron: Contradictory terms together. Example: “Deafening silence.”

Personification: Giving human traits to non-human things. Example: “The wind whispered.”

Euphemism: Mild term replacing harsh one. Example: “Passed away.”

Dysphemism: Harsh term instead of mild. Example: “Junk food.”

Allusion: Reference to known person/event. Example: “He’s a real Einstein.”

Analogy: Comparison for explanation. Example: “Life is like a box of chocolates.”

Rhetorical question: Question asked for effect. Example: “Who wouldn’t want success?”

Antithesis: Contrasting ideas in parallel. Example: “Speech is silver, silence is golden.”

Anaphora: Repetition at beginnings. Example: “We shall fight... We shall stand...”

Epiphora: Repetition at ends. Example: “See no evil, hear no evil...”

Anadiplosis: Ending word repeated at start. Example: “Strength through unity. Unity through faith.”

Polysyndeton: Excessive conjunctions. Example: “He ran and jumped and laughed.”

Asyndeton: Omitting conjunctions. Example: "I came, I saw, I conquered."

Chiasmus: Reversed structures. Example: "Ask not what your country can do..."

Litotes: Negative understatement. Example: "Not bad at all."

Metonymy: Associated word substitution. Example: "The White House said..."

Synecdoche: Part representing whole. Example: "All hands on deck."

Parallelism: Similar grammatical structures. Example: "Easy to learn, easy to use."

Climax: Increasing intensity. Example: "His city, his country, the world."

Anticlimax: Drop from serious to trivial. Example: "He lost his family... and his pen."