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CCSS Writing Standards	W1d, Language 3, L3a
Argument Type	All arguments

Advanced Syntax: Using Rhetorical Devices to Enhance Your Writing

Students practice using a selection of fun and unusual rhetorical devices to further develop style.

Understanding the Expectations

Strong argument writing not only makes a clear case—it also makes a memorable impact on the reader. This is where your writing style comes into play. Certain “tricks of the trade” when it comes to writing style—referred to as “rhetorical devices”—have been identified and defined below. In a moment, you’ll read through the list and choose a few to experiment with.

Before you begin, though, a heads up: don’t worry too much about the weird names. There’s no vocabulary test on these. Instead, think about how you can have some fun playing with these strategies in your writing. Their usefulness in argument is that they will help to make your writing memorable. Sometimes the right rhetorical device can shed unique light on a subject. Other times, your exceptionally clever use of one can greatly endear you to your audience.

Rhetorical Devices

Anadiplosis

This term literally means “to double back” and involves a repetition of the last word of one phrase, clause, or sentence at or near the beginning of the next. When written in a series, it gives a sense of logical progression and is used for emphasis of the repeated word or idea.

“Aboard my ship, excellent performance is standard. Standard performance is sub-standard. Sub-standard performance is not permitted to exist.”

– Herman Wouk, *The Caine Mutiny*

“Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”

– Yoda, *Star Wars*

Anaphora

The device literally means “carrying back” and employs the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences typically combined with climax and parallelism. The device creates strong emphasis and produces continuity between rhetorical points.

“We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.”

– Winston Churchill

Antithesis

This term’s literal meaning is “setting opposite.” The device creates a clear, contrasting relationship between two ideas by linking or juxtaposing them, frequently with parallel structure. The device is effective in drawing distinctions or for clarifying differences which may not be obvious.

“To err is human; to forgive, divine.”

– Alexander Pope

Asyndeton

The device uses a deliberate omission of conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses. This speeds up rhythm and makes what is said more memorable.

“I came, I saw, I conquered.”

– Julius Caesar

Chiasmus

This device is named after the Greek letter “chi,” which is represented by X, or a “crisscross,” and uses AB-BA structure. This creates a reversal in the order of terms in the second of two parallel clauses. An idea is therefore expressed through complement or contrast in order to provoke thought in the reader.

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

– John F. Kennedy

Climax

This device is named from the Greek word for “ladder” and refers to the arrangement of words, clauses, or sentences in the order of increasing importance, weight, or emphasis. Parallelism is typically used with climax and helps to affect a sense of tension or grandeur, with an emphasis on the final word, phrase, or clause.

“I think we’ve reached a point of great decision, not just for our nation, not only for all humanity, but for life upon the earth.”

– George Wald

Epanalepsis

This device uses repetition of the first word of a clause or sentence at the end to generate rhetorical emphasis.

“In the world, ye shall have trials, but be of good cheer—I have overcome the world.”

– John 16:33

Polysyndeton

Structurally the opposite of asyndeton, this device uses a conjunction between each word, phrase, or clause to create a tone of growing intensity.

“And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.”

– Genesis 7:22-24

Zeugma

The device uses a grammatically correct relationship of two or more parts of speech by another part of speech. Examples include one subject with two (or more) verbs, a verb with two (or more) direct objects, two (or more) subjects with one verb, and so forth. The rhetorical effect shows relationships between ideas and actions more clearly.

“You held your breath and the door for me.”

– *Alanis Morissette*

Using rhetorical devices like these—at the right time—will distinguish you as a writer. If used correctly, you might evoke emotion (or pathos) in your audience, which will help them connect more deeply to what you are arguing. You also may compel your audience to see things from a different perspective more effectively if you use the right device at the right time in the right way. On that note, never force the use of any of the devices discussed here. Avoid overuse of these devices in general. Moderate or spare use of rhetorical devices makes them more effective and distinct.

Trying it Out

Select several devices above and work with a partner to create your own. You may choose to write about anything that interests you. Be creative and try to have fun with using language differently. See how many examples you and your partner can compose. Share your favorite with the class. Clarify any questions you may have about the devices. Be patient when attempting to use them. New things take time to learn.

After a bit of practice, complete the following:

1. Select a written work in progress.
2. Designate areas of your paper where you would like to have a greater impact. This may be in your introduction, or conclusion, or with a particularly essential piece of evidence of which you want to intensify the impact.
3. Work at crafting some of the above devices into your paper at these points. Don't force things. Instead, experiment with your options and see what works.
4. Working with a writing partner, seek editing advice and feedback.

Writing it Up

Continue to apply the approaches you have been practicing here to the rest of your paper. If you are still in the early stages of drafting, experiment with where things may work best. Get input from a writing partner or your instructor to determine what devices you have used work best and where. As always, be daring and creative. Take risks, but don't overdo you use of these devices. Keep them special.