

A Glossary of Rhetorical Terms with Examples

Alliteration: repetition of the same sound beginning several words in sequence.

*Let us go forth to lead the land we love. J. F. Kennedy, Inaugural

Anaphora: the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or lines.

*We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, 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. We shall never surrender. Churchill.

Antistrophe: repetition of 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

Antithesis: opposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction.

*Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. Barry Goldwater

*Brutus: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

Apostrophe: a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person or personified abstraction absent or present.

*For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.

Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

Assonance: repetition of the same vowel sound in words close to each other.

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

Asyndeton: lack of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words.

*But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

Cacophony: harsh joining of sounds.

*We want no parlay with you and your grisly gang who work your wicked will. W. Churchill

Chiasmus: two corresponding pairs arranged not in parallels (a-b-a-b) but in inverted order (a-b-b-a); from shape of the Greek letter chi (X).

*Those gallant men will remain often in my thoughts and in my prayers always. MacArthur

Euphemism: substitution of an agreeable or at least non-offensive expression for one whose plainer meaning might be harsh or unpleasant.

*The King has gone to the Great Beyond.

Hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect.

*My vegetable love should grow

Vaster than empires, and more slow;

An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes and on thine forehead gaze;

Two hundred to adore each breast,

But thirty thousand to the rest. Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress"

Irony: expression of something which is contrary to the intended meaning; the words say one thing but mean another.

*Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;

And Brutus is an honourable man. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

Litotes: understatement, for intensification, by denying the contrary of the thing being affirmed. (Sometimes used synonymously with meiosis.)

*A few unannounced quizzes are not inconceivable.

*War is not healthy for children and other living things.

*One nuclear bomb can ruin your whole day. (meiosis)

Metaphor: implied comparison achieved through a figurative use of words; the word is used not in its literal sense, but in one analogous to it.

*Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage. Shakespeare, Macbeth

Metonymy: substitution of one word for another which it suggests.

*He is a man of the cloth.

*The pen is mightier than the sword.

Onomatopoeia: use of words to imitate natural sounds; accommodation of sound to sense.

*The bullet whizzed through the air and clanged as it hit the shovel.

Oxymoron: apparent paradox achieved by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict one another.

*He didn't believe in military intelligence.

Paradox: an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it.

*What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young. George Bernard Shaw

Personification: attribution of personality to an impersonal thing.

*England expects every man to do his duty. Lord Nelson

Polysyndeton: the repetition of conjunctions in a series of coordinate words, phrases, or clauses.

*I said, "Who killed him?" and he said, "I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right," and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Bay and she was all right only she was full of water. Hemingway, After the Storm

Prolepsis: the anticipation, in adjectives or nouns, of the result of the action of a verb; also, the positioning of a relative clause before its antecedent.

*Consider the lilies of the field how they grow.

Simile: an explicit comparison between two things using 'like' or 'as.'

*My love is as a fever, longing still

For that which longer nurseth the disease, Shakespeare, Sonnet CXLVII

Syllepsis: use of a word with two others, with each of which it is understood differently.

*We must all hang together or assuredly we will all hang separately. Benjamin Franklin

Synecdoche: understanding one thing with another; the use of a part for the whole, or the whole for the part. (A form of metonymy.)

*All hands on deck!

Zeugma: two different words linked to a verb or an adjective which is strictly appropriate to only one of them.

"She looked at the object with suspicion and a magnifying glass." (Charles Dickens)