**31 Useful Rhetorical Devices**

**What Is a Rhetorical Device and Why are They Used?**

As with all fields of serious and complicated human endeavor (that can be considered variously as an art, a science, a profession, or a hobby), there is a technical vocabulary associated with writing. [*Rhetoric*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric) is the name for the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion, and though a writer doesn’t need to know the specific labels for certain writing techniques in order to use them effectively, it is sometimes helpful to have a handy [taxonomy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/taxonomy) for the ways in which words and ideas are arranged. This can help to discuss and isolate ideas that might otherwise become abstract and confusing. As with the word *rhetoric* itself, many of these *rhetorical devices* come from Greek.

**List of Rhetorical Devices and Examples**

— [Alliteration](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alliteration): the repetition of usually initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables

*wild and woolly, threatening throngs*

— [Anacoluthon](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anacoluthon): syntactical inconsistency or incoherence within a sentence *especially* : a shift in an unfinished sentence from one syntactic construction to another

*you really should have—well, what do you expect?*

— [Anadiplosis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anadiplosis): repetition of a prominent and usually the last word in one phrase or clause at the beginning of the next

*rely on his honor—honor such as his?*

— [Analepsis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/analepsis): a literary technique that involves interruption of the chronological sequence of events by interjection of events or scenes of earlier occurrence : flashback

— [Anaphora](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anaphora): repetition of a word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or verses especially for rhetorical or poetic effect

*we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground*

— [Antanaclasis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antanaclasis): the repetition of a word within a phrase or sentence in which the second occurrence utilizes a different and sometimes contrary meaning from the first

*we must all hang together or most assuredly we shall all hang separately*

— [Antiphrasis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antiphrasis): the usually ironic or humorous use of words in senses opposite to the generally accepted meanings

*this giant of 3 feet 4 inches*

— [Antonomasia](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antonomasia): the use of a proper name to designate a member of a class (such as a *Solomon* for a wise ruler)

*also* : the use of an epithet or title in place of a proper name (such as *the Bard* for Shakespeare)

— [Apophasis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apophasis): the raising of an issue by claiming not to mention it

*we won't discuss his past crimes*

— [Aporia](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aporia): an expression of real or pretended doubt or uncertainty especially for rhetorical effect

*to be, or not to be: that is the question*

— [Cacophony](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cacophony): harshness in the sound of words or phrases

— [Chiasmus](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chiasmus): an inverted relationship between the syntactic elements of parallel phrases

*working hard, or hardly working?*

— [Dialogism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dialogism): a disjunctive conclusion inferred from a single premise

*gravitation may act without contact; therefore, either some force may act without contact or gravitation is not a force*

— [Dysphemism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dysphemism): the substitution of a disagreeable, offensive, or disparaging expression for an agreeable or inoffensive one

*greasy spoon* is a dysphemism for the word *diner*

— [Epistrophe](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epistrophe): repetition of a word or expression at the end of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or verses especially for rhetorical or poetic effect

*of the people, by the people, for the people*

— Epizeuxis *noun* : emphatic repetition [*this definition is taken from the 1934 edition of Webster's Unabridged dictionary*]

— [Hypallage](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hypallage): an interchange of two elements in a phrase or sentence from a more logical to a less logical relationship

*you are lost to joy” for “joy is lost to you*

— [Hyperbaton](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hyperbaton): a transposition or inversion of idiomatic word order

*judge me by my size, do you?*

— [Hyperbole](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hyperbole): extravagant exaggeration

*mile-high ice-cream cones*

— Hypophora *noun* : the putting or answering of an objection or argument against the speaker's contention [*this definition is taken from the 1934 edition of Webster's Unabridged dictionary*]

— [Litotes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/litotes): understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary

*not a bad singer*

— [Meiosis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meiosis): the presentation of a thing with underemphasis especially in order to achieve a greater effect : UNDERSTATEMENT

— [Metaphor](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor): a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them

*drowning in money*

— [Metonymy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metonymy): a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated

*crown* as used in *lands belonging to the crown*

— [Onomatopoeia](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/onomatopoeia): the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it

*buzz*

— [Oxymoron](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oxymoron): a combination of contradictory or incongruous words

*cruel kindness*

— [Pleonasm](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pleonasm): the use of more words than those necessary to denote mere sense : REDUNDANCY

*I saw it with my own eyes*

— [Simile](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simile): a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by like or as

*cheeks like roses*

— [Syllepsis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syllepsis): the use of a word in the same grammatical relation to two adjacent words in the context with one literal and the other metaphorical in sense

*she blew my nose and then she blew my mind*

— [Synecdoche](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synecdoche): a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole (such as *fifty sail* for *fifty ships*), the whole for a part (such as *society* for *high society*), the species for the genus (such as *cutthroat* for *assassin*), the genus for the species (such as a *creature* for *a man*), or the name of the material for the thing made (such as *boards* for *stage*)

— [Zeugma](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zeugma): the use of a word to modify or govern two or more words usually in such a manner that it applies to each in a different sense or makes sense with only one

*opened the door and her heart to the homeless boy*