

Wolverhampton Speakers Club

Aspects of Speaking - What Rhetoric Can Do For Us

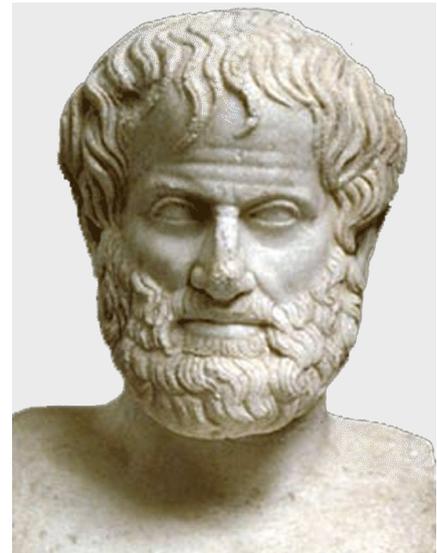
Don't Be Afraid Of Rhetoric!

Rhetoric often has a bad press - it's either thought of as a way others (*politicians, salesmen etc*) try to fool you into doing something by using 'fancy' language, or some stuffy old Greek art that means nothing to us today.

In fact, 'rhetoric' is just a fancy word for some very good techniques that we can all use in our speeches to make them more effective and ear-catching to our audience.

So we will simply look at rhetoric as the skill of using language effectively; rhetoric, for us, is one of the tools we can use to enhance our speaking and marshalling our language to convey our meaning in an eloquent and satisfying way.

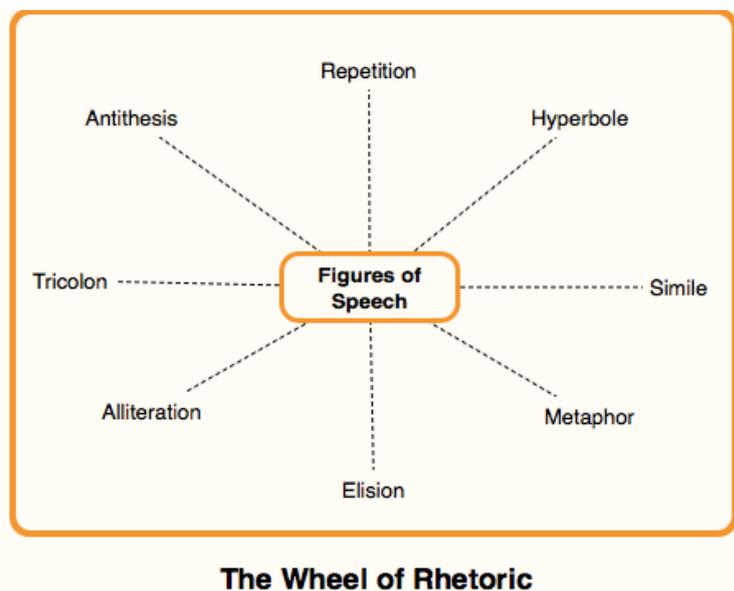
For us Rhetoric simply means using **figures of speech** to make what we speak more ear-catching and effective - we will draw attention to what we say by the words that we use and how we use them.



Figures of speech

A figure of speech is simply one of a number of techniques we use when speaking - unfortunately they are often given off-putting names, but we use a lot of them in everyday speech without worrying about that!

We will look at a number of these figures one at a time, demystify their meaning, and see how we can use them in speeches.



Explore Rhetoric with Jasmine and Dave



Repetition, Repetition, Repetition

Repetition is a widely used technique in public speaking – and a very useful one to all of us.

Repetition of the main points of your speech is one way of keeping those main points in the audience’s mind, but here we are looking at something more specific: we’re looking at how you can use repetition of words or phrases to enhance your speech and make more of an impact.

Why use repetition?

- Drive a point home using emphasis and power
- Increase understanding
- Create rhythm and momentum and so move the speech forward
- Bring a speech to life
- Help a point stand out and remain in the memory



OK - but how do I do it?

I'll tell you about it!



Anaphora - Repetition at the beginning

This is also known as 'starting echo'.

Here a word or short phrase is repeated at the beginning of each statement.

Here are some examples:

'We shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight them on the landing grounds, we shall fight them in the field and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender'.

Winston Churchill



'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."

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 will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

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, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

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 (sic) of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today'.

Martin Luther King

Epiphora - Repetition at the end

This is also known as 'ending echo'..

Here a word or short phrase is repeated at the end of each statement. Here is an example:

When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child ... when I became a man

New Testament: 1 Corinthians 13

Occasionally both types can be combined:

'For want of a nail the shoe was lost. For want of the shoe, the horse was lost. For want of the horse, the rider was lost. For want of the rider, the battle was lost. For want of the battle, the kingdom was lost'

Traditional rhyme

Hyperbole



Hyperbole will make you the greatest orator in the history of the world!

I know I am, Dave - but it's just a speaking technique!

Oh Jasmine - don't exaggerate!



Hyperbole is simply the use of extreme or ridiculous exaggeration in your speech so as to make a point or create an effect - it is a deliberate exaggeration that is not meant to be taken literally, for example: 'I could eat a horse' simply uses exaggeration to emphasise how hungry you are.

Why do we use it?



We can use it

For emphasis or feeling

To create a strong effect

To enhance a description, or just

To gain attention

It can lift your descriptions above the mundane, so you could say, for example, 'He had a brain the size of a planet' instead of 'He was clever'. A potentially boring passage can come to life if you use hyperbole.

You probably use hyperbole in your everyday language and you will see it in poetry and other literature, and frequently when an organisation tries to 'talk things up' such as in advertising (in advertising the strict truth is often exaggerated by hyperbole to make the target audience feel a certain way). You won't normally find it in scientific, medical or technical writing, though!

Ok - let me try! ...

I've told you a million times!

I've got tons of work to do.

You could have knocked me down with a feather.

Jasmine, when I heard your voice the whole universe began to sing.

Nothing can go wrong with this speech!

Her granddaughter said 'I love you as big as the sky'.



How to use hyperbole

Using hyperbole is straightforward - just use your imagination. You might follow this route:

- When writing your speech you get to a place where you want to enhance it or heighten the drama, feeling, description or humour.
- What is the characteristic of the thing you want to exaggerate? (Size, beauty, ludicrousness etc).
- Try out a few different ways of being creative with exaggeration.
- Select the one you think works best.
- Practise it - hyperbole spoken flatly won't work.

Simile



Sounds a bit like 'similar'

Yes, you're right Dave - it's about comparing things



'Simile' is very close to our word 'similar' and that's what this figure of speech is all about: we add depth and impact to our words by comparing them to something else that may or (usually) not be similar in some way so as to highlight and make memorable what we want to get across by the comparison we use.

By using a simile we paint an attention-grabbing picture in the mind of our audience. They can be serious, funny, devastating, but are (or should be) always creative. You will be familiar with similes because they can be found anywhere where language is used, and we use them in everyday life.

The essential thing about a simile is that we use either the word '**like**' or the word '**as**' and the format of a simile is:

(something) is **like** (something else) or

(something) is **as** (feature) **as a** (something else)



I've got it - let me show you!

'My love is like a red, red rose'

'Her room was as clean as a whistle'

'He's as dotty as a box of frogs'

'I slept like a log last night'

'As tall as a giraffe'

Nice one Dave!



Metaphor



Not sure about this one, Jasmine

It's just another comparison!



A Metaphor is related to a simile because we again use a comparison, but a metaphor is far more subtle and powerful because here we do not say that something is **LIKE** something else - we imply that it **IS** something else, however strange that might be. This gives us the opportunity to use some exciting, powerful and compelling phraseology. You do, though, have to use your imagination to come up with a good metaphor.

With a metaphor we do not use the words 'like' or 'as', so we would say '*all the world's a stage*' rather than '*all the world is like a stage*' - you can easily see which one makes the most impact.

Metaphors are meant to create a vivid picture in the minds of your audience (often by exaggeration) and so have greater impact. See the difference between the simple '*he was sad*' and the much more vivid '*he was wallowing in a sea of grief*'. Metaphors add more force to an otherwise plain statement and so make your point more effective.



Here's some metaphors ...

'She was sitting on a rollercoaster of emotions'

'It's raining cats and dogs'

'Her voice on the telephone was music to his ears'

'My son's room is a disaster area'

'The galaxy is a glowing garden of beauty'

Cool!



Elision And Contraction

These two terms are very similar and each involves omitting an unstressed letter or syllable, often to make a word or words easier to pronounce.

Elision is the term for leaving out letters to form a shorter word - to make fewer syllables or to maintain the metre in poetry. The omitted sounds are replaced with an apostrophe, e.g. *never* becomes *ne'er*, *cannot* becomes *can't*, and so on.

Contraction is a specific form of elision where two words are combined together and a syllable is left out. Again the omitted sounds are replaced with an apostrophe e.g. *it is* becomes *it's*, *shall not* becomes *shan't*, *could have* becomes *could've* (NEVER could of!), and so on.

These things are common in our everyday speech; they are usually unintentional and we just don't (contraction) think about them when we speak.



I know it's great for poetry, but should we use it in our speeches?

Good point Dave!



Using elision and contraction in speeches

Unless we are delivering a formal paper there is no reason why we shouldn't use these in our speeches. The question is, how formal is your speech?

There is no reason to shun common elision/contraction - it can make your speech flow and can help to gain audience rapport. On the other hand you might want to use a longer form for more dramatic or emphatic effect e.g. *cannot* is stronger than *can't* and has more emphasis.

The choice is yours depending upon what effect you want to make.

Alliteration



I know about this one ...
You used it when you said 'The galaxy is a glowing garden of beauty'

You're catching on Dave!



Alliteration is the repetition of sounds or letters in the same sentence or phrase, for example '*She sells seashells on the seashore*' - although that tongue twister is a fairly extreme example!

Why use alliteration?

Alliteration is a bold and noticeable technique. Because of the repetition of sounds alliteration captures the audience's attention. This means that you can use alliteration to:

- Draw attention to certain important phrases
- Make a phrase easy to remember
- Provide rhythm and musicality in an otherwise plain phrase
- Create moods
- Emphasise parts of your arguments
- Craft a catchphrase

Again, don't expect to see alliteration in technical texts.

Creating moods using alliteration

You can create moods in your speech using alliteration. You do this by using the sounds of certain letters, for example:

'S' can give a soft, smooth sound (notice the alliteration?) but, depending on how it is used, it could also give a sinister sibilant sound

'L' and 'F' can also add a hushed or peaceful mood

'K', 'B', 'P' and 'T' are harsh sounds and can create tense or excited moods

How to use alliteration

In a similar way to using hyperbole:

- Identify important phrases where you want to make something memorable or create a certain mood
- Pick on an important subject word in your phrase and think of other words that begin with the same sound and are related to your key word
- Rewrite the phrase or sentence including your chosen words
- Read it through to check the fluency, rhythm and impact
- Modify and retry if you are not satisfied
- When you are satisfied, practise

Other places you will hear alliteration

Alliteration is used a lot in literature and especially with poetry. You will also see a lot in advertising and in company names.



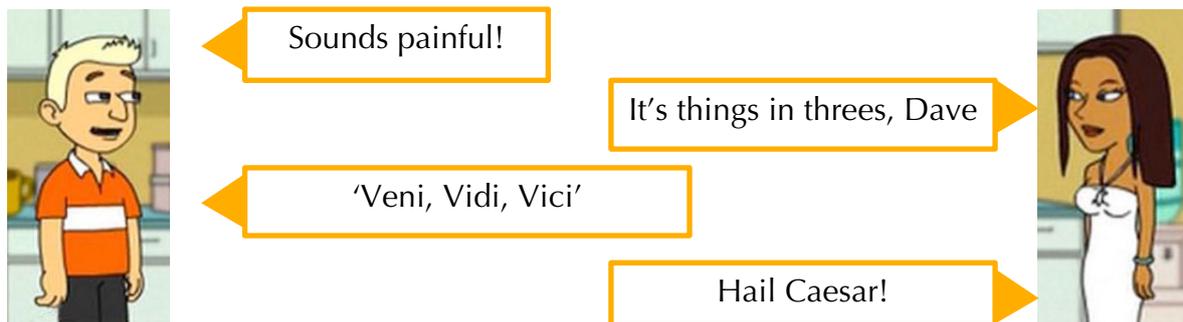
Artistic alliteration affects your audience to your advantage.

Now you're just showing off!



I know!
Bring on the next one ..

Tricolon



'Veni; Vidi; Vici' - 'I came; I saw; I conquered' is an example of a Tricolon. So is 'Eat, drink and be merry' - and we're sure that Julius Caesar did both!

A Tricolon employs three words or phrases in quick succession without anything interrupting them. The three parts of a tricolon bring a sense of completeness to emphasise what you are saying. Sometimes the three parts can build to a climax (or even an anticlimax) by increasing or decreasing the tension ('Ready, Steady, Go!'), and the third part can be used (if you wish) to break the pattern for effect or for humour.

Sometimes the three parts are identical: 'Location, Location, Location' or they may use alliteration - 'sun, sex and sangria'.

Sometimes the rhythm of three equal parts makes what you are saying more memorable to your audience, but sometimes the third part is longer, to good effect.

The main purpose of Tricolon is to make things more memorable.

Antithesis

Antithesis does what it says on the tin: two opposite ideas are put together to create a contrasting effect and can convey meaning more effectively than everyday speech. You can also use it to highlight the pros and cons of a particular idea - 'speech is silver but silence is gold'.

Antithesis can, however, just degenerate into epigrams so beloved of Oscar Wilde - 'Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear'.

