**12 Common Rhetorical Devices**

**ALLITERATION**

**Definition:** The repetition of sounds, especially initial consonant sounds, in two or more neighboring words.

**Example:** “a **t**wenty **t**on **t**error on **t**op of **T**okyo **t**owers with **t**wo **t**itanium **t**entacles”—NoCanDo

**Why Writers Use it:**It can help connect ideas, make sentences memorable or sound musical. When overused, it can be cloying or irritating.

### ALLUSION

**Definition:** A direct or indirect reference to something historical, literary, religious, or mythical. The author usually uses references that will be understood by his or her audience, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art. You can also make allusions to pop culture.

**Example:** Don’t act like a **Romeo** in front of her.

The rise in poverty will unlock the **Pandora’s box** of crime.

**Why Writers Use It:** Allusions can help people see unique connections between two ideas. The reference can help the audience better understand a subject. They can also be surprising or funny.

**ANAPHORA**

**Definition**: The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses, or paragraphs

**Example:** *"*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 S. Churchill

**Why Writers User It:** It is memorable and gets people fired up.

### ANTITHESIS

**Definition:** The juxtaposing of contrasting ideas (opposites) in balanced phrases or clauses

**Examples:** “Love is an ideal thing, marriage a real thing”—Goethe

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools”—Martin Luther King Jr.

**Why Writers Use it:** It can create a sense of balance and order. It highlights differences and distinctions.

### ASSONANCE

**Definition:** The repetition of vowel sounds in words that are close together.  
**Example:** “I b**o**mb at**o**micall**y**—S**o**crat**e**s’ phil**o**s**o**ph**ie**s and hyp**o**thes**e**s can’t define how I b**e** dr**o**ppin’ th**e**se m**o**cker**ie**s.”—Inspectah Deck

**Why Writers Use it:** Connecting vowel sounds creates internal rhyme. It makes the words flow together, and can help make phrases more memorable. It’s very popular among lyricists, and you’ll be more likely to find it in songs and poetry than prose.

### ASYNDETON

**Definition:** The omission of conjunctions between clauses

**Example:** “I came; I saw; I conquered”—Julius Caesar (there is no ‘and’ between the ideas)

**Why Writers Use it:**It creates a hurried rhythm and the effect of strong emphasis.

### EPISTROPHE

**Definition:** Ending a series of lines, phrases, clauses, or sentences with the same word or words.

**Examples:**  The time is now. The need is now. We must act now.

**Why Writers Use it:** It is memorable and adds emphasis to ideas.

### HYPERBOLE

**Definition:** A purposeful exaggeration or overstatement.

**Example:**  I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.

**Why Writers Use It:** Even though the statement might not be exactly true, hyperbole can create emphasis or also make something sound funny.

### METONYMY

**Definition:** When the name of an object is replaced by another closely associated object

**Examples:**  “The pen is mightier than the sword” (meaning “Words are stronger than weapons”)

“We cannot only have a plan for Wall Street…We must also help Main Street.”—President Obama (meaning “We shouldn’t just help business…We must also help the common people.”)

**Why Writers Use it:** Metonymy can often allow writers and speakers to refer to complicated concepts or large groups of people with a single world. It also creates a quick mental image.

### PARALLELISM

**Definition:** Parallelism is the use of components in a sentence that are grammatically same or similar in their construction, sound, meaning or meter.

### Example: “Wounds caused by knives will heal. Wounds caused by words will not heal.”—Mongolian proverb

### “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”—Charles Dickens

**Why Writers Use It:** Parallelism adds balance and rhythm to sentences, giving ideas a smoother flow and can be persuasive because of the sense of logic and orderliness.

### PERSONIFICATION

**Definition:** When an author gives objects, concepts or animals human characteristics, emotions or abilities.

**Example:** The stars danced around playfully in the moonlit sky.

**Why Writers Use It:** Personification can make non-human objects and ideas more relatable, since it is easier for humans to relate to another person than, say, a mop. It can also make objects or ideas seem more vivid.

### SYNECDOCHE

**Definition:** **A figure of speech where a part of something is used to represent the whole thing or the whole is used to represent the part.**

**Example:** I got a new set of wheels. (meaning a car)

“Friends, Romans, countrymen. Lend me your ears.”—Shakespeare’s Mark Antony

**Why Writers Use It:** Synecdoche can be used for brevity, symbolism, and to draw extra attention to something common.