



# Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are writing techniques used to invoke a specific reaction or way of thinking from their reader. These are commonly used in critical and formal writing as they help back up a claim about a topic and help your reader understand your argument. Creative writing also benefits from the use of rhetorical devices as they build the narrative and perspective of the work. This handout covers some of the most common rhetorical devices and how to implement them into your writing.

## Balanced Sentences

Balanced sentences consist of equal number of words on both sides of the punctuation. This punctuation is commonly a comma to connect the two ideas together and avoid a cluster of single-clause sentences. Balanced sentences create interest and emphasis through their parallel structure and are easy to read and understand. A famous example of a balanced sentence is the opening line of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

**Example 1:** We visited the dogs, they were all asleep.

**Example 2:** We wanted peace, they wanted war.

## Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions are questions that are not meant to be answered. Rhetorical questions speak directly to the reader, letting them pause and contemplate before continuing. In an essay or article, rhetorical questions bring your reader into your topic and make a point that leads up to your claim. Rhetorical questions often come up in larger assignments with large topics to draw the reader into the writer's way of thinking.

**Example 1:** Who doesn't like a good story?

**Example 2:** Can the story exist beyond the page and depend solely on audio and visuals?

## Hypophora

Hypophora is a rhetorical device where writer poses a question and then immediately answers it. Hypophora serves a similar function to the rhetorical question, but takes things a step further. Rather than letting the reader pause to consider the question and how it falls within your work, using a hypophora anticipates the response and, in this way, steers the audience's

thinking. This gives you a sense of authority within the work as readers now know your answer and how you will prove it.

**Example:** Can the story exist beyond the page and depend solely on audio and visuals to draw the audience in? Music enables artists to explore new forms and elements of story.

## Parallelism

Parallelism, or parallel structure, consists of making the structure of related parts of a sentence similar, in order to create a definitive pattern. This creates balance and flow within the sentence.

**Example:** I came, I saw, I conquered.

Writers commonly use parallelism in lists. For more information on creating lists with parallelism, see the parallelism and lists handout. Some choose to enhance the impact of parallelism when structuring the list through the use of climactic or anti-climactic order.

## Climactic Order

Climactic order is arranging ideas or details in increasing importance—essentially saving the best for last. Writers use climactic order not only to create suspense when writing prose, but also to emphasize the most important detail in formal writing. Climactic order helps bring the reader understand how the details lead up to the finishing point, which is the most important.

**Example 1:** She ran, jumped, and dove into the water.

**Example 2:** The storm continued to build throughout the night with rain, thunder, and lightning filling the skies.

## Anti-climactic Order

Anti-climactic Order arranges ideas and details in decreasing importance. While climactic order saves the best for last, anti-climactic order grabs the reader's attention right away and shifts the tone to a different idea. Anti-climactic order often takes the readers by surprise, which is why it is used for comedic effect in creative writing. In formal writing, anti-climactic order can transition from one idea to the next.

**Example :** The odds are one in a million, one in a hundred, and one in ten.

## Fragments

Sentence fragments are grammatically incomplete sentences, meaning they lack a subject, predicate, or object. While academic writing avoids using sentence fragments to prevent choppy and awkward sentences that confuse the reader, fragments can be a powerful rhetorical device to create emphasis if used correctly. For this reason, fragments are used in creative writing to add voice to a character's perspective.

If you plan on using a fragment in your writing, you must be confident that its placement will add to the writing rather than hinder it. For strategies to identify and fix fragments, please see the fragments handout from Writing Support Services.

When using a fragment, balance it with longer sentences around it to put it into context. While we always want to have sentences of varying length, placing a fragment between sentences interrupts the natural flow of writing. This gives the fragment a clear purpose, while also pairing it with other ideas. Some situations where you might consider a fragment are:

- Writing dialogue in creative work
- Creating internal dialogue, such as free indirect discourse
- Establishing a personal voice in reflections
- Emphasizing a point the reader must remember
- Crafting active and suspenseful scenes in creative work

**Example 1:**

They pause, closing their eyes. Focus. Listening for the sound once again.

**Example 2:**

Better than I thought...

## Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is a form of comparison used to emphasize differences between two ideas or details. When using juxtaposition, writers place the details close together to reveal how they differ from each other. Creative writers use this rhetorical device to create tension and dynamic characters in a foil, while critical writing uses this to counter an idea or highlight a gap in the discourse surrounding your topic. This structure for comparison is a useful tool to emphasize difference for a dramatic effect and grab your audience's attention.

**Example 1:**

Mother lovingly painted the walls of our decaying shack with a bright garden scene.

In the example above the cheerful wall art is juxtaposed with the deterioration of the house in order to highlight the contrast between the mother's loving care with her financial resources.

**Example 2:**

The director of the documentary interspersed scenes of children playing with images of child soldiers to emphasise the loss of innocence that occurs in combat.

In the example above, the writer analysed a director's use of juxtaposition to visually convey a message to audiences.