

Most Common Rhetorical Strategies/Devices

Terms	Definition	Example/Explanation
Analogy	Explaining something complex by comparing it to something more simple.	"An amateur playing in a professional game is like an ibex stepping into a lion's den."
Argument	The combination of reasons, evidence, etc that an author uses to convince an audience of their position.	Too comprehensive a concept for a single example! In effective rhetoric, every phrase serves to further build the argument.
Aristotelian appeals	Three different methods of appealing to an audience to convince them—ethos, logos, and pathos.	See ethos, logos and pathos.
Attitude	The writer's personal views or feelings about the subject at hand.	Difficult to convey in a short example, but something like "the deplorable state of this school" would convey that the author has a negative attitude towards the school.
Audience	Who the author is directing his or her message towards	When you create a resume, your audience is potential employers.
Compare and contrast	Discussing the similarities and differences between two things to some persuasive or illustrative purpose.	"Hybrid cars have a much smaller carbon footprint than traditional midsize vehicles."
Connotation	The implied meaning of a word; words can broadly have positive,	conscientious = positive connotation fussy = negative connotation

	negative, or neutral connotations.	
Context	The extra-textual environment in which the text is being delivered.	If I am delivering a congratulatory speech to awards recipients, the immediate context might be the awards presentation ceremony; the broader context might be the purpose or significance of the awards themselves.
Counterargument	The argument(s) against the author's position.	If I want to eliminate the dress code, a counter argument might be that this will place a burden on students of a lower socioeconomic status, who must now afford an entire school wardrobe or risk unwanted attention.
Deductive reasoning	A form of logical reasoning wherein a general principle is applied to a specific case.	If all planets orbit a star, and Theta II is a planet, then it must orbit a star.
Denotation	The literal, dictionary-definition meaning of a word.	The denotation of "chair" is "a place to sit."
Diction	The style of language used; generally tailored to be appropriate to the audience and situation.	You might say "What's up, loser?" to your little brother, but you would probably say "How are you doing today?" to your principal.
Ethos	Setting up a source as credible and trustworthy.	"Given my PhD in the subject and years of experience in the field" is an appeal to ethos.

Evidence	The information presented meant to persuade the audience of the author's position.	If I were arguing that Anne is a good student, I might reference her straight-A report card and her 1500 SAT score as pieces of evidence.
Figurative language	The use of language in a non-literal way; i.e. metaphor, simile, etc.	"The sky's like a jewel box tonight!"
Genre	The specific type of work being presented.	Broader categories include "novel" and "play," while more specific genres would be things like "personal essay" or "haiku."
Imagery	Any descriptive language used to evoke a vivid sense or image of something; includes figurative language.	"The water was a pearl-studded sea of azure tipped with turquoise."
Implication	When something is suggested without being concretely stated.	"Watch your wallet around Paul," implies that Paul is a thief without coming out and saying "Paul is a thief."
Inductive reasoning	Making a generalization based on specific evidence at hand.	All of the planets in this solar system orbit a star, so all planets probably orbit stars.
Irony	At the most basic sense, saying the opposite of what you mean; also used to describe situations in which the results of an action are dramatically different than intended.	"I do so hope there are more papers to sign," is something that might be said ironically.

Juxtaposition	Placing two very different things together for effect.	"There they stood together, the beggars and the lords, the princesses and the washerwoman, all crowding into the square."
Logos	Appealing to someone's sense of concrete facts and logic.	Citing peer-reviewed scientific studies is an appeal to logos.
Occasion	The reason or moment for writing or speaking.	When giving a graduation speech, the occasion is graduation.
Organization	How the different parts of an argument are arranged in a piece of writing or speech.	Think about the outlines you write in preparation for drafting an argumentative essay and you'll have an idea of what organization is.
Pathos	An Aristotelian appeal. Involves appealing to someone's emotions.	Animal shelters ads with pictures of cute sad animals and dramatic music are using pathos.
Purpose	The author's persuasive intention.	If you are trying to convince your mother you should get a dog, your purpose in addressing an essay on the subject to her would be to convince her that you should get a dog.
Repetition	Re-using a word or phrase repeatedly for effect or emphasis.	"We run, and we run, and we run, like rats on a wheel."
Rhetoric	The use of spoken or written word (or a visual medium) to convey your ideas and convince an audience.	Almost everything is an example of rhetoric!

Rhetorical triangle	The relationship between the author, the audience, the text/message, and the context.	The author communicates to the reader via the text; and the reader and text are surrounded by context.
Speaker	The persona adopted by the author to deliver his or her message; may or may not actually be the same person as the author.	Similar to the difference between author and narrator in a work of fiction.
Style	The author's own personal approach to rhetoric in the piece; similar to voice.	We might say the Taylor Swift's songwriting style is straightforward and emotive.
Symbolism	Using a symbol to refer to an idea or concept.	"Fire" is commonly used a symbol for passion and/or anger.
Syntax	The way sentences are grammatically constructed.	"She likes pie," is syntactically simple. On the other hand, "As it so happened, when Barbara got out of class early she liked to have a piece of pie—key lime or pecan, always—at the corner diner; while she was there she watched the people passing by the window and imagined herself inside each of their lives, riding in their heads for moments and moments until the afternoon was whiled away and she'd become fifty people," is syntactically complicated.
Synthesis	Combining sources or ideas in a coherent way in the purpose of a larger point.	A typical research paper involves synthesizing sources to make a broader point about the topic.

Themes	Overarching ideas or driving premises of a work.	Some themes you will probably hear in your high school graduation speech include leaving behind a legacy, moving into the great unknown, becoming an adult, and changing the world.
Tone	The use of stylistic devices to reveal an author's attitude toward a subject.	Only a narrow distinction from attitude. The phrase "the deplorable state of this school" reveals a negative attitude, but the word choice of "deplorable" is part of the author's tone.
Voice	An author's unique sound. Similar to style.	Think of the way that you can recognize a pop singer on the radio without hearing who it is first.

Bonus Rhetorical Terms

Terms	Definition	Example/Explanation
Alliteration	Using words with the same first letter repeatedly close together in a phrase or sentence.	"She purchased the pretty purple parka."
Allusion	Making a brief reference to the cultural canon—e.g. the Bible, Shakespeare, classical mythology, etc.	"Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, George was not good at resisting temptation."
Anecdote	Offering a brief narrative episode. This device can serve many functions in a text—for example, introducing an issue, serving as evidence, to illustrate a point, and so on.	"When I went to buy my morning coffee, I ran into an old friend. He told me he had won the lottery and he was about to buy a yacht. Two months later I heard he had declared bankruptcy."

Concession	Agreeing with the opposing viewpoint on a certain smaller point (but not in the larger argument).	"While I admit that hybrid cars have higher carbon production costs than conventional automobiles, this is dramatically offset by the much-smaller lifetime carbon footprint of the vehicles."
Didactic	A text with an instructive purpose, often moral.	Aesop's fables are an example of a didactic work.
Euphemism	Referring to something with a veiled phrase instead of saying it directly	"She let Bob go," is a euphemism for "she fired Bob."
Exemplification	Providing examples in service of a point.	"The Town Beautification Funds are being sorely misused; the streets are full of litter, the parks are full of broken equipment, and City Hall's facade is drab and crumbling."
Hyperbole	Overstating a situation for humorous or dramatic effect.	"My backpack weighs tons!"
Idiom	A commonly used phrase that signifies something very different than its literal meaning.	"This costs an arm and a leg!" is an idiom which means "This is very expensive."
Onomatopoeia	Using "sound-effect" words (e.g. "clap," "buzz).	"We heard an ominous hiss from the kitchen."
Paradox	A phrase or assertion that appears to contradict itself (but the contradiction itself may have its own meaning).	Paradoxical phrases include "dark angel," "fresh rot," "blissful hell," etc.
Parallelism	Repeated structural elements in a sentence.	"We went to sea; we went to war; we went to bed."

Parody	Using the form of something to mimic and make fun of it.	Weird Al is the master of the musical parody genre.
Personification	Giving human characteristics to a nonhuman object or idea.	"The sun was shining happily today."
Sarcasm	Mockingly stating the opposite of what you mean. Easier to convey in the spoken word than via writing.	"Did you come up with that all by yourself?" might be delivered sarcastically after someone delivers a poorly-thought out idea.
Satire	A genre of humorous and mocking criticism to expose the ignorance and/or ills of society.	Stephen Colbert is a popular modern satirist.
Synecdoche	Referring to one part of something as a way to refer to the whole.	"Ask for her hand" is a synecdoche for marriage; the "hand" stands in for the whole woman.
Understatement	Deliberately minimizing something, usually for humorous effect.	"My mom's a little bit irritated I crashed the car—I'm grounded for the next twenty-four months."