**Rhetorical Devices (as explained by Robert Harris)**

Good writing depends upon more than making a collection of statements worthy of belief, because writing is intended to be read by others, with minds different from your own. Your reader does not make the same mental connections you make; he does not see the world exactly as you see it; he is already flooded daily with thousands of statements demanding assent, yet which he knows or believes to be false, confused, or deceptive. If your writing is to get through to him--or even to be read and considered at all--it must be interesting, clear, persuasive, and memorable, so that he will *pay attention to, understand*, believe, and *remember* the ideas it communicates. To fulfill these requirements successfully, your work must have an appropriate and clear thesis, sufficient arguments and reasons supporting the thesis, a logical and progressive arrangement, and, importantly, an effective style.

While style is probably best learned through wide reading, comprehensive analysis and thorough practice, much can be discovered about effective writing through the study of some of the common and traditional devices of style and arrangement. By learning, practicing, altering, and perfecting them, and by testing their effects and nuances for yourself, these devices will help you to express yourself better and also teach you to see the interrelatedness of form and meaning, and the psychology of syntax, metaphor, and diction both in your own writing and in the works of others.

***Syntax*** is the ordering of words into meaningful verbal patterns such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. Poets often manipulate syntax, changing conventional word order, to place certain emphasis on particular words. Emily Dickinson, for instance, writes about being surprised by a snake in her poem "A narrow Fellow in the Grass," and includes this line: *"His notice sudden is."* In addition to the alliterative hissing s-sounds here, Dickinson also effectively manipulates the line’s syntax so that the verb is appears unexpectedly at the end, making the snake’s hissing presence all the more "sudden."

***Diction***, or choice of words, depends on a number of factors. Firstly, the word has to be right and accurate. Secondly, words should be appropriate to the context in which they are used. Lastly, the choice of words should be such that the listener or readers understand easily. Proper diction or proper choice of words is important to get the message across. On the contrary, the wrong choice of words can easily divert listeners or readers which results in misinterpretation of the message intended to be conveyed. It is also important to note that diction also is related to a word’s connotation (underlying meaning) as well as denotation (literal meaning). In addition to adding to clarity and understanding, diction also helps set the mood or tone of a piece. Keats in his “Ode to the Grecian Urn” uses formal diction to achieve a certain effect. He goes: *“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on.”* Notice the use of formal “ye” instead of informal “you”. The formality here is due to the respect the urn inspires in Keats. In the same poem he says*: “Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed/Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu.”* It is more formal to use “adieu” than to say “goodbye”.

***Allusion*** is a short, informal reference to a famous person or event:  *“You must borrow me Gargantua's mouth first. 'Tis a word too great for any mouth of this age's size.” --Shakespeare   •”If you take his parking place, you can expect World War II all over again.” “Plan ahead: it wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.” --Richard Cushing   “Our examination of the relation of the historian to the facts of history finds us, therefore, in an apparently precarious situation, navigating delicately between the Scylla of an untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts . . . and the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian . . . .” --Edward Hallett Carr*      Notice in these examples that the allusions are to very well known characters or events, not to obscure ones. (The best sources for allusions are literature, history, Greek myth, and the Bible.)

***Understatement*** deliberately expresses an idea as less important than it actually is, either for ironic emphasis or for politeness and tact. When the writer's audience can be expected to know the true nature of a fact which might be rather difficult to describe adequately in a brief space, the writer may choose to understate the fact as a means of employing the reader's own powers of description. For example, instead of endeavoring to describe in a few words the horrors and destruction of the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, a writer might state:  *“ The 1906 San Francisco earthquake interrupted business somewhat in the downtown area”*   The effect is not the same as a description of destruction, since understatement like this necessarily smacks of flippancy to some degree; but occasionally that is a desirable effect.

***Hyperbole***, the counterpart of understatement, deliberately exaggerates conditions for emphasis or effect. In formal writing the hyperbole must be clearly intended as an exaggeration, and should be carefully restricted. That is, do not exaggerate everything, but treat hyperbole like an exclamation point, to be used only once a year. Then it will be quite effective as a table-thumping attention getter, introductory to your essay or some section thereof:  *“There are a thousand reasons why more research is needed on solar energy.”* Or it can make a single point very enthusiastically: *“I said ‘rare,’ not ‘raw.’ I've seen cows hurt worse than this get up and get well.”*

***Anaphora*** is the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, commonly in conjunction with climax and with parallelism*:  “To think on death it is a misery,/ To think on life it is a vanity;/ To think on the world verily it is,/ To think that here man hath no perfect bliss”. --Peacham    “ In books I find the dead as if they were alive; in books I foresee things to come; in books warlike affairs are set forth; from books come forth the laws of peace.” --Richard de Bury*

***Rhetorical question (erotesis)*** Asking a question that the author does not answer, but allows the audience to answer in their minds. It is used for effect, emphasis, or provocation, or for drawing a conclusionary statement from the facts at hand. *“ . . . For if we lose the ability to perceive our faults, what is the good of living on?” --Marcus Aurelius   “Is justice then to be considered merely a word? Or is it whatever results from the bartering between attorneys?”*  Often the rhetorical question and its implied answer will lead to further discussion: *“Is this the end to which we are reduced? Is the disaster film the highest form of art we can expect from our era?”* Perhaps we should examine the alternatives presented by independent film maker Joe Blow . . *. “I agree the funding and support are still minimal, but shouldn't worthy projects be tried, even though they are not certain to succeed? So the plans in effect now should be expanded to include . . . .”* [Note: Here is an example where the answer "yes" is clearly desired rhetorically by the writer, though conceivably someone might say "no" to the question if asked straightforwardly.]  Several rhetorical questions together can form a nicely developed and directed paragraph by changing a series of logical statements into queries*: “We shrink from change; yet is there anything that can come into being without it? What does Nature hold dearer, or more proper to herself? Could you have a hot bath unless the firewood underwent some change? Could you be nourished if the food suffered no change? Do you not see, then, that change in yourself is of the same order, and no less necessary to Nature?” --Marcus Aurelius*  Sometimes the desired answer to the rhetorical question is made obvious by the discussion preceding it: *“The gods, though they live forever, feel no resentment at having to put up eternally with the generations of men and their misdeeds; nay more, they even show every possible care and concern for them. Are you, then, whose abiding is but for a moment, to lose patience--you who are yourself one of the culprits?” --Marcus Aurelius*    When you are thinking about a rhetorical question, be careful to avoid sinking to absurdity. You would not want to ask, for example, "But is it right to burn down the campus and sack the bookstore?" The use of this device allows your reader to think, query, and conclude along with you; but if your questions become ridiculous, your essay may become wastepaper.

***Simile*** is a comparison between two different things that resemble each other in at least one way. In formal prose the simile is a device both of art and explanation, comparing an unfamiliar thing to some familiar thing (an object, event, process, etc.) known to the reader. When you compare a noun to a noun, the simile is usually introduced by like: *“ I see men, but they look like trees, walking”. --Mark 8:24     “After such long exposure to the direct sun, the leaves of the houseplant looked like pieces of overcooked bacon”.   “The soul in the body is like a bird in a cage.”*

***Metaphor*** compares two different things by speaking of one in terms of the other. Unlike a simile or analogy, metaphor asserts that one thing is another thing, not just that one is like another. Very frequently a metaphor is invoked by the to be verb:   *“Affliction then is ours; / We are the trees whom shaking fastens more”. --George Herbert     “Thus a mind that is free from passion is a very citadel; man has no stronger fortress in which to seek shelter and defy every assault. Failure to perceive this is ignorance; but to perceive it, and still not to seek its refuge, is misfortune indeed”. --Marcus Aurelius*

***Analogy*** compares two things, which are alike in several respects, for the purpose of explaining or clarifying some unfamiliar or difficult idea or object by showing how the idea or object is similar to some familiar one. While simile and analogy often overlap, the simile is generally a more artistic likening, done briefly for effect and emphasis, while analogy serves the more practical end of explaining a thought process or a line of reasoning or the abstract in terms of the concrete, and may therefore be more extended*.   “You may abuse a tragedy, though you cannot write one. You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table. It is not your trade to make tables.” --Samuel Johnson*

***Situational irony*** occurs when the final outcome is contradictory to what was expected. Usually, the episodes in the plot of a story will lead the audience to expect a particular resolution or ending. If such an expected outcome fails and instead another contrary outcome occurs, the absurdity is termed situational irony. The irony is sometimes comic, and sometimes tragic, but often emphasizes the thematic element of the story. Examples of situational irony include O.Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi,” in which the characters sell their most prized possessions to purchase gifts for the other’s most prized possession (which was sold to buy the other a gift); a firehouse burning down,