

# Scholarly Definitions of Rhetoric

**Plato:** [Rhetoric] is the "art of enchanting the soul." (The art of winning the soul by discourse.)

**Aristotle:** Rhetoric is "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion."

## RHETORICAL FIGURES

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### 1. Alliteration:

Figure of emphasis that occurs through the repetition of initial consonant letters (or sounds) in two or more different words across successive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Two kinds may be distinguished: 1) Immediate juxtaposition occurs when the second consonant sound follows right after the first -- back-to-back. 2) Non-immediate juxtaposition occurs when the consonants occur in nonadjacent words.

*Example:*

*"Now in the third year of his Administration we find more of our people unemployed than at any other time. We find our houses empty and our people hungry; many of them half-clothed and many of them not clothed at all. We find not only the people not only going further into debt, but that the United States is going further into debt. The condition has become deplorable. Instead of his promises, the only remedy that Mr. Roosevelt has described is to borrow more money if he can, and to go further into debt. And with it all there stalks a slimy specter of want, hunger, destitution, and pestilence."*

- Huey P. Long, *Address to Senate Staffers*

### 2. Allusion:

Figure of explication using a brief or casual reference to a famous person, historical event, place, or work of art. It is important to stress that the referent of an allusion be generally well-known. Sources include history, myth, and the Bible. Contemporary instances of allusion extend to media created content, events, and persons -- even to the extent that a character in one movie may use an allusion in referring to a fictional, but nonetheless well-known, event or person from another movie. Popular music lyrics are a further source of allusion.

*Examples:*

1

"And finally you're all familiar with Dr. Wilmut's cloned sheep. We actually missed the real story behind this. We're so interested in talking about when this will happen with humans. (And, by the way, if we haven't already done it somewhere, the cloning of a human being is likely anytime. It's no longer a theoretical issue; it's just a question of who's going to do it.) The real story behind the sheep is that Dr. Wilmut created the prototype for bioindustrial design. **He's the Henry Ford of the Biotech Century.** It is now possible to replicate in countless numbers exact copies of an original living creature with the same kind of quality controls and engineering standards we did using mass production and assembly line factory work with inert materials. That's what's so important about this animal. We moved from the industrial age to the bioindustrial age."

2

"And I can pledge our nation to a goal: When we see that **wounded traveler on the road to Jericho**, we will not pass to the other side."

- George W. Bush, [2000 Inaugural Address](#)

*Note: The reference here is to the biblical character in the parable about the good.*

### **3. Analogy:**

A kind of extended metaphor or long simile in which an explicit comparison is made between two things (events, ideas, people, etc) for the purpose of furthering a line of reasoning or drawing an inference; a form of reasoning employing comparative or parallel cases.

*Example:*

"I don't think there's anything certainly more unseemly than the sight of a rock star in academic robes. It's a bit like when people put their King Charles spaniels in little tartan sweats and hats. It's not natural, and it doesn't make the dog any smarter."

- Bono, [2004 Commencement Address at The University of Pennsylvania](#)

### **4. Metaphor:**

Figure of explication occurring when a comparison made by speaking of one thing in terms of another; an implied comparison between two *different* things which share at least one attribute in common; an association between two unlike things (A vs. B) achieved by borrowing the language that refers to thing A and applying it to thing B. (not to be confused with [simile](#))

*Examples:*

"With this faith we will be able to transform **the jangling discords of our nation** into a **beautiful symphony of brotherhood.**"

- Martin Luther King, [I Have a Dream](#)

*Note here there are two metaphors which serve as a comparison for two different but related ideas: 1) racial problems = "jangling discords" and 2) racial problems solved through faith = "beautiful symphony of brotherhood"*

"This is of course the big event of show business and the atmosphere here is pure electricity. But as a television show, it does tend to go slightly **off the boil**, particularly as we drift into the third and fourth hour. What can we do about it?"

- Paul Hogan, [Remarks at the 59th Academy Awards](#)

### **5. Simile:**

Figure of explication in which two things that share at least one attribute are explicitly associated with each other; an overt comparison between two unlike things as though they were similar -- usually with the words "like" or "as".

Examples:

*"It is a curious thing, **the death of a loved one. It's like walking up the stairs to your bedroom in the dark and thinking that there's one more stair than there is. Your foot falls down through the air and there's a sickly moment of dark surprise.**"*

- delivered by Jude Law (from the movie *A Series of Unfortunate Events*)

*"**People** in the streets see it now. They're running towards the East River -- thousands of them **dropping in like rats**. Now the smoke's spreading faster. It's reached Times Square. People are trying to run away from it, but it's no use. They're **falling like flies**."*

- delivered by Orson Wells (from the original radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds*)

### **6. Antithesis** (an-TIH-theh-sis):

Figure of balance in which two contrasting ideas are intentionally juxtaposed, usually through [parallel structure](#); a contrasting of opposing ideas in adjacent phrases, clauses, or sentences.

Examples:

***"The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."***

- Abraham Lincoln, [Gettysburg Address](#) (delivered by Jeff Daniels)

*"...although the surface appears to be...very, very fine-grained as you get close to it. It's almost like a powder...Okay, I'm going to step off the LEM now. That's one **small step for [a] man**; one **giant leap for mankind**."*

- Neil Armstrong, *Apollo 11 Moon Landing Speech*

*"I want to urge you, as many of you as can, to visit our country, and invite members of our Congress to visit you. Let them understand how the world looks from your perspective. Let them see how you do your jobs. Tell them what you're worried about and where you disagree with us. And give us a chance to build that base of common experience and mutual trust that is so important to our future together...We must have a sense of responsibility for the future. We are not **destined to be adversaries**. But it is not **guaranteed that we will be allies**."*

- William Jefferson Clinton, [Address to the Russian Duma](#)

### **7. Climax:**

Figure of repetition in which words or phrases or sentences are arranged in order of increasing intensity or importance, often in [parallel construction](#); words or phrases arranged by degrees of increasing significance.

Examples:

*"And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with **good night, good luck, a merry Christmas, and God bless all of you, all of you on the good earth.**"*

- Frank Borman, *Astronaut*

## 8. Distinctio:

Figure of explication in which an introductory reference to a word's meaning is made (e.g., "by x I mean", "which is to say that", "that is") followed by a further elaboration of that word's meaning; explicit definition of or elaboration upon the meaning or meanings of a particular word or set of words.

*Examples:*

*Let me walk you through the five procedural errors that occurred in conjunction with that mission [the flying of 12 cruise missiles back to Barksdale AFB, Louisiana] that facilitated this serious and unprecedented incident. As you see here -- if we'll bring up slide 1, please -- on the morning of August 29th, a team of Minot airmen was dispatched to the base Weapons Storage Area to pick up and transport two **pylons** to a Barksdale B-52 aircraft. For those of you unfamiliar with the term "pylon," **for our purposes today, a pylon is a self-contained package of six cruise missiles that can be quickly mounted to the wing of a B-52.***

- U.S. Department of Defense briefing on B-52 munitions and the "Bent Spear" incident, delivered 20 October 2007 by [Major General Richard Y. Newton III, USAF](#)

*"I've been in football all my life, really, and I want to say this -- that it's a great game, and it's a **Spartan type of game. I mean by that it takes Spartan qualities in order to be a part of it, to play it. And I speak of the Spartan qualities of sacrifice and self-denial rather than that other Spartan quality of leaving the weak to die.**"*

- Vince Lombardi

## 9. Enumeratio:

Figure of amplification in which a subject is divided into constituent parts or details, and may include a listing of causes, effects, problems, solutions, conditions, and consequences; the listing or detailing of the parts of something.

*Examples:*

*"These abuses have continued because, for too long, the history of women has been a history of silence. Even today, there are those who are trying to silence our words. But the voices of this conference and of the women at Huairou must be heard loudly and clearly:*

**- It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied food, or drowned, or suffocated, or their spines broken, simply because they are born girls.**

**- It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution for human greed -- and the kinds of reasons that are used to justify this practice should no longer be tolerated.**

**- It is a violation of human rights when women are doused with gasoline, set on fire, and burned to death because their marriage dowries are deemed too small.**

**- It is a violation of human rights when individual women are raped in their own communities and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war.**

**- It is a violation of human rights when a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44 is the violence they are subjected to in their own homes by their own relatives.**

**- It is a violation of human rights when young girls are brutalized by the painful and degrading practice of genital mutilation.**

**- It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will."**

- Hillary Clinton, [Women's Rights are Human Rights](#)

"The terrorist threat to our nation did not emerge on September 11th, 2001. Long before that day, radical, freedom-hating terrorists declared war on America and on the civilized world: **the attack on the Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983, the hijacking of the Achille Lauro in 1985, the rise of al-Qaida and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, the attacks on American installations in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, the East Africa [embassy] bombings of 1998, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000.** These and other atrocities were part of a sustained, systematic campaign to spread devastation and chaos and to murder innocent Americans."

- Condoleezza Rice - [9/11 Commission Hearing Statement](#)

#### **10. Euphemismos** (you-feh-MISS-muss):

Figure used to transform an unpleasant, distasteful or repulsive expression into more socially acceptable terms.

*Examples:*

"Some pundits said our programs would result in catastrophe. The fact is what they called 'radical' was really 'right.' What they called 'dangerous' was just 'desperately needed.'"

- Ronald Reagan, [Farewell Address](#)

#### **11. Exemplum:**

Figure of amplification using an example, brief or extended, real or fictitious, to illustrate a point; an example.

*Example:*

"I've come to understand that a cultural war is raging across our land. **For example, I marched for civil rights with Dr. King in 1963. But when I told an audience last year that white pride is just as valid as black pride or red pride or anyone else's pride, they called me a racist.**"

- Charlton Heston, [Winning the Cultural War](#)

#### **12. Expletive:**

Figure of emphasis in which a single word or short phrase, usually interrupting normal speech, is used to lend emphasis to the words on either side of the expletive. Typical examples include: *in fact, of course, to be sure, indeed, I suppose, I hope, you know, you see, clearly, in any event, in effect, certainly, remarkably.*

*Example:*

"I would like, ***if I may***, to take you on a strange journey."

- *from the movie Rocky Horror Picture Show*

### **13. Hyperbole:**

deliberate exaggeration of a person, thing, quality, event to emphasize a point external to the object of exaggeration; intentional exaggeration for rhetorical effect.

*Examples:*

"The chamber is celebrating an important milestone this week: your 70th anniversary. I ***remember the day you started.***"

- *Ronald Reagan*

"So first of all, let me assert my firm belief that ***the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.***"

- *Franklin Delano Roosevelt, First Inaugural Address*

### **14. Oxymoron:**

Figure that binds together TWO words that are ordinarily contradictory; a TWO WORD [paradox](#); two words with contrary or apparently contradictory meanings occurring next to each other, and, which, nonetheless, evoke some measure of truth; the figure conjures a new way of seeing or understanding, a novel meaning.

*Example:*

***"...And it is important that the Iraqi people continue to reject these terrorists, who know nothing but violence and destruction, who do not care about the future of Iraq, who do not care about the future of the Iraqi people. These cold acts of terrorism like this have gone on far too long. Together, we can put a stop to this, and we must throw these heartless zealots out of this country for good."***

- ***Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno, 07/26/07 Press Briefing***

*Note:* A zealot may be many things -- "dauntless" "stainless," "mindless," even "bathless" -- but not heartless. The word "zealot" is closely related to the word "zeal," a notion that typically entails radical ideology wedded to fervent emotional commitment. A zealot especially may not be characterized or even faulted for a lack of "heart," as this aspect is embedded within the very definition of the term. Lieutenant General Odierno likely means that these zealots don't care about the havoc they wreak upon the peace-desiring citizens of Iraq. The sentiment is entirely understandable. However, these zealots do care, care enough, in fact, to commit the very acts for which they are being charged as

"heartless." What zealots can be faulted for is having a heart in the wrong place. In this case, Iraq may well have no place for this particular brand of zealotry.

### **15. Paradox:**

Figure that employs an apparent contradiction which, nonetheless, evokes some measure of truth; a statement which seems at one level to be nonsensical because it moves against a normalcy. At another level, however, the figure conjures a new way of seeing or understanding, a novel meaning.

Examples:

"Mr. Chairman, Mr. President, my fellow Democrats, my fellow Americans:

I **proudly, and humbly** accept your nomination."

- Hubert Humphrey, [1964 Democratic National Convention Address](#)

Paradox has been defined as 'Truth standing on her head to attract attention.' But it must be admitted that writers, like other mendicants and mountebanks, frequently do try to attract attention. They set out conspicuously, in a single line in a play, or at the head or tail of a paragraph, remarks of this challenging kind; as when Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote: '**The Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule**'; or Oscar Wilde observed: '**I can resist everything except temptation**'; or as a duller scribe (not to be named with these and now doing penance for his earlier vices in the nobler toil of celebrating the virtues of Mr. Pond) said in defense of hobbies and amateurs and general duffers like himself: '**If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing badly.**' To these things do writers sink."

- G.K. Chesterton, *When Doctors Agree* (Audiobooksforfree.com)

### **16. Parallelism:**

Figure of balance identified by a similarity in the syntactical structure of a set of words in successive phrases, clauses, sentences; successive words, phrases, clauses with the same or very similar grammatical structure. This figure often occurs public address with others such as antithesis, [anaphora](#), [asyndeton](#), [climax](#), [epistrophe](#) and [symploce](#)

Examples:

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall **pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe** to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

- John F. Kennedy, [Inaugural Address](#)

"We have seen the state of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. We've seen **the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers** -- in English, Hebrew, and Arabic."

- George W. Bush, [9-20-01 Address to the Nation on Terrorism](#)

### **17. Personification:**

Figure which represents abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities, including physical, emotional, and spiritual; the application of human attributes or abilities to nonhuman entities.

*Example:*

*"To the fans in Chicago, St. Louis and Atlanta, I wanna say 'thank you' for your support. Your chanting of 'B-r-u-u-c-e' as I entered the game always gave me chills. I wish I could trot out there and get that feeling again, but **Father Time has caught up with me**. First **he took my arm**, then **he took my hair**, then **he took the color from my beard**. But **he cannot take the great friendships and memories I have from being a baseball player.**"*

- *Bruce Sutter, Baseball Hall of Fame Induction Address*

### **18.Rhetorical Question:**

Figure which asks a question, not for the purpose of further discussion, but to assert or deny an answer implicitly; a question whose answer is obvious or implied.

*Example:*

*Can anyone look at the record of this Administration and say, "Well done"?*

*Can anyone compare the state of our economy when the Carter Administration took office with where we are today and say, "Keep up the good work"?*

*Can anyone look at our reduced standing in the world today and say, "Let's have four more years of this"?*

-- Ronald Reagan, [1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address](#)

*Note: Reagan was a particularly effective user of "stacked" rhetorical questions. A "stacking" technique in which multiple rhetorical questions are asked in succession to intensify the point .*