Rhetorical Devices for AP Language and Composition

Taken from Robert A Harris A Handbook of Rhetorical Devices <http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>

**Terms**

**Alterations (grammatical changes to alter meanings)**

Asyndeton: consists of omitting conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses. In a list of items, asyndeton gives the effect of unpremeditated multiplicity, of an extemporaneous rather than a labored account:

* On his return he received medals, honors, treasures, titles, fame.

Parenthesis: consists of a word, phrase, or whole sentence inserted as an aside in the middle of another sentence:

* But the new calculations--and here we see the value of relying upon up-to-date information--showed that man-powered flight was possible with this design.

Polysyndeton: is the use of a conjunction between each word, phrase, or clause, and is thus structurally the opposite of asyndeton. The rhetorical effect of polysyndeton, however, often shares with that of asyndeton a feeling of multiplicity, energetic enumeration, and building up.

* They read and studied and wrote and drilled. I laughed and played and talked and flunked.

Zeugma: **Zeugma** includes several similar rhetorical devices, all involving a grammatically correct linkage (or yoking together) of two or more parts of speech by another part of speech. Thus examples of zeugmatic usage would include one subject with two (or more) verbs, a verb with two (or more) direct objects, two (or more) subjects with one verb, and so forth. The main benefit of the linking is that it shows relationships between ideas and actions more clearly.

In one form (prozeugma), the yoking word precedes the words yoked. So, for example, you could have a verb stated in the first clause understood in the following clauses:

* Pride opresseth humility; hatred love; cruelty compassion. --Peacham
* Fred excelled at sports; Harvey at eating; Tom with girls.
* Alexander conquered the world; I, Minneapolis.

A more important version of this form (with its own name, diazeugma) is the single subject with multiple verbs:

* . . . It operated through the medium of unconscious self-deception and terminated in inveterate avarice. --Thomas Love Peacock
* Fluffy rolled on her back, raised her paws, and meowed to be petted.

**Arrangement (arrange and organize words to create or clarify meanings)**

Climax: consists of arranging words, clauses, or sentences in the order of increasing importance, weight, or emphasis. Parallelism usually forms a part of the arrangement, because it offers a sense of continuity, order, and movement-up the ladder of importance. But if you wish to vary the amount of discussion on each point, parallelism is not essential.

Hypophora: consists of raising one or more questions and then proceeding to answer them, usually at some length. A common usage is to ask the question at the beginning of a paragraph and then use that paragraph to answer it

Hypotaxis: using subordination to show the relationship between clauses or phrases

* While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. --John 9:5

Rhetorical Question: differs from hypophora in that it is not answered by the writer, because its answer is obvious or obviously desired, and usually just a yes or no. It is used for effect, emphasis, or provocation, or for drawing a conclusionary statement from the facts at hand.

* But how can we expect to enjoy the scenery when the scenery consists entirely of garish billboards?

Metabasis: consists of a brief statement of what has been said and what will follow. It might be called a linking, running, or transitional summary, whose function is to keep the discussion ordered and clear in its progress:

* Such, then, would be my diagnosis of the present condition of art. I must now, by special request, say what I think will happen to art in the future. --Kenneth Clark
* We have to this point been examining the proposal advanced by Smervits only in regard to its legal practicability; but next we need to consider the effect it would have in retarding research and development work in private laboratories.
* I have hitherto made mention of his noble enterprises in France, and now I will rehearse his worthy acts done near to Rome. --Peacham

**Comparison/Contrast**

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.

Antithesis: establishes a clear, contrasting relationship between two ideas by joining them together or juxtaposing them, often in parallel structure. Human beings are inveterate systematizers and categorizers, so the mind has a natural love for antithesis, which creates a definite and systematic relationship between ideas:

* To err is human; to forgive, divine. --Pope
* That short and easy trip made a lasting and profound change in Harold's outlook.
* That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. --Neil Armstrong

Litotes: a particular form of understatement, is generated by denying the opposite or contrary of the word which otherwise would be used. Depending on the tone and context of the usage, litotes either retains the effect of understatement, or becomes an intensifying expression

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.

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

**Details (specific details selected to emphasize qualities of meaning)**

Enumeratio: detailing parts, causes, effects, or consequences to make a point more forcibly:

* I love her eyes, her hair, her nose, her cheeks
* is an adjective or adjective phrase appropriately qualifying a subject (noun) by naming a key or important characteristic of the subject, as in "laughing happiness," "sneering contempt," "untroubled sleep," "peaceful dawn," and "lifegiving water." Sometimes a metaphorical epithet will be good to use, as in "lazy road," "tired landscape," "smirking billboards," "anxious apple." Aptness and brilliant effectiveness are the key considerations in choosing epithets. Be fresh, seek striking images, pay attention to connotative value.

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Exemplum: citing an example; using an illustrative story, either true or fictitious

**Figurative Language (changes from the literal meanings of words)**

Apostrophe: interrupts the discussion or discourse and addresses directly a person or personified thing, either present or absent. Its most common purpose in prose is to give vent to or display intense emotion, which can no longer be held back

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.

Metonomy: is another form of metaphor, very similar to synecdoche (and, in fact, some rhetoricians do not distinguish between the two), in which the thing chosen for the metaphorical image is closely associated with (but not an actual part of) the subject with which it is to be compared.

* The orders came directly from the White House.

In this example we know that the writer means the President issued the orders, because "White House" is quite closely associated with "President," even though it is not physically a part of him. Consider these substitutions, and notice that some are more obvious than others, but that in context all are clear:

* You can't fight city hall.
* This land belongs to the crown.
* In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread . . . . --Genesis 3:19

Personification: metaphorically represents an animal or inanimate object as having human attributes--attributes of form, character, feelings, behavior, and so on. Ideas and abstractions can also be personified.

* The ship began to creak and protest as it struggled against the rising sea.
* We bought this house instead of the one on Maple because this one is more friendly.

Synechdoche: is a type of metaphor in which the part stands for the whole, the whole for a part, the genus for the species, the species for the genus, the material for the thing made, or in short, any portion, section, or main quality for the whole or the thing itself (or vice versa).

* Farmer Jones has two hundred head of cattle and three hired hands.

Here we recognize that Jones also owns the bodies of the cattle, and that the hired hands have bodies attached. This is a simple part-for-whole synecdoche. Here are a few more:

* If I had some wheels, I'd put on my best threads and ask for Jane's hand in marriage.

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.

**Reference: Using historical, religious, or literary figures or texts to emphasize a point or quality**

Allusion: is a short, informal reference to a famous person or event, usually from history, religion, mythology, art, or literature

Eponym: substitutes for a particular attribute the name of a famous person recognized for that attribute. By their nature eponyms often border on the cliche, but many times they can be useful without seeming too obviously trite.

Sententia: quoting a maxim or wise saying to apply a general truth to the situation; concluding or summing foregoing material by offering a single, pithy statement of general wisdom:

* But, of course, to understand all is to forgive all.
* As the saying is, art is long and life is short.
* For as Pascal reminds us, "It is not good to have all your wants satisfied."

**Repetition or qualities or attributes often for emphasis**

Appositive: a noun or noun substitute placed next to (in apposition to) another noun to be described or defined by the appositive. Don't think that appositives are for subjects only and that they always follow the subject

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

Epistrophe: forms the counterpart to anaphora, because the repetition of the same word or words comes at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences:

* Where affections bear rule, there reason is subdued, honesty is subdued, good will is subdued, and all things else that withstand evil, for ever are subdued. --Wilson
* And all the night he did nothing but weep Philoclea, sigh Philoclea, and cry out Philoclea. --Philip Sidney
* You will find washing beakers helpful in passing this course, using the gas chromatograph desirable for passing this course, and studying hours on end essential to passing this course.

Epistrophe is an extremely emphatic device because of the emphasis placed on the last word in a phrase or sentence. If you have a concept you wish to stress heavily, then epistrophe might be a good construction to use. The danger as usual lies in this device's tendency to become too rhetorical. Consider whether these are successful and effective or hollow and bombastic:

* The cars do not sell because the engineering is inferior, the quality of materials is inferior, and the workmanship is inferior.
* The energies of mankind are often exerted in pursuit, consolidation, and enjoyment; which is to say, many men spend their lives pursuing power, consolidating power, and enjoying power.

Parallelism/chiasmus: is recurrent syntactical similarity. Several parts of a sentence or several sentences are expressed similarly to show that the ideas in the parts or sentences are equal in importance. Chiasmusmight be called "reverse parallelism," since the second part of a grammatical construction is balanced or paralleled by the first part, only in reverse order. Instead of an A,B structure (e.g., "learned unwillingly") paralleled by another A,B structure ("forgotten gladly"), the A,B will be followed by B,A ("gladly forgotten"). So instead of writing, "What is learned unwillingly is forgotten gladly," you could write, "What is learned unwillingly is gladly forgotten." Similarly, the parallel sentence, "What is now great was at first little," could be written chiastically as, "What is now great was little at first." Here are some examples:

* He labors without complaining and without bragging rests.
* Polished in courts and hardened in the field, Renowned for conquest, and in council skilled. --Joseph Addison
* For the Lord is a Great God . . . in whose hand are the depths of the earth; the peaks of the mountains are his also. --Psalm 95:4

**Sound: Use of sounds repeated for a creation of a strong image**

Alliteration: is the recurrence of initial consonant sounds

Assonance: similar vowel sounds repeated in successive or proximate words containing different consonants

Onomatopoeia: is the use of words whose pronunciation imitates the sound the word describes. "Buzz," for example, when spoken is intended to resemble the sound of a flying insect. Other examples include these: slam, pow, screech, whirr, crush, sizzle, crunch, wring, wrench, gouge, grind, mangle, bang, blam, pow, zap, fizz, urp, roar, growl, blip, click, whimper, and, of course, snap, crackle, and pop.