

## Common Rhetorical Devices

1) *euphemism* – a term with a positive or neutral association that is substituted for one with a negative association

Ex) **restroom/bathroom**

Ex) **pre-owned/ pre-enjoyed** vehicles

Ex) **freedom fighters, soft targets, friendly fire**

Ex) **Big Brother** (from Orwell's *1984*)

2) *dysphemism* – a term with a negative association that is substituted for one with a positive or neutral association

Ex) **rebel/ insurgent**

Ex) **shacking up/ living in sin**

3) *rhetorical definition* – a definition designed primarily to affect beliefs, attitudes, or behavior, not to articulate an accurate meaning

Ex) **A liberal is someone who loves raising taxes.**

Ex) **A conservative is someone who doesn't care about the poor.**

Ex) **Capital punishment is institutionalized murder.**

Ex) **Capital punishment is justice for the ultimate crime.**

4) *stereotype* – an oversimplified generalization about every member of a certain category

Ex) **The liberals/conservatives/Communists/Catholics/ psychiatrists** all...

5) *loaded question* – a question that presupposes some unwarranted assumption

Ex) **Have you got your drinking under control yet?**

Ex) from Kent Brockman: **Apu, will you ever stop selling spoiled meat?**

6) *innuendo* – an implicitly critical suggestion (i.e., criticism “between the lines”)

Ex) Yes, my landlord told the truth, **this time.**

7) *hedge words* – an expression used to protect a claim by weakening it

Ex) You **may** have already won \$10 million.

Ex) **If** we draw your name...

8) *hyperbole* – extravagant overstatement

Ex) Dr. Erion's midterm was **an especially cruel form of torture.**

Ex) “Las Vegas is **a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment.**”

9) *proof surrogate* – an expression that suggests evidence without actually citing it

Ex) **Studies show** that...

Ex) **As we all know,** ...

10) *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.

Ex) **The 1906 San Francisco earthquake interrupted business somewhat in the downtown area.**

11) *Hypophora* - 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. This is an attractive rhetorical device, because asking an appropriate question appears quite natural and helps to maintain curiosity and interest.

Ex) **What behavior, then, is uniquely human? My theory is this . . .**

Ex) **But what was the result of this move on the steel industry? The annual reports for that year clearly indicate. . . .**

12) *Procatalepsis* - anticipating an objection and answering it. This permits an argument to continue moving forward while taking into account points or reasons opposing either the train of thought or its final conclusions. Often the objections are standard ones:

Ex) **It is usually argued at this point that if the government gets out of the mail delivery business, small towns like Podunk will not have any mail service. The answer to this can be found in the history of the Pony Express . . . .**

13) *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

Ex) **But, of course, to understand all is to forgive all.**

Ex) **As the saying is, art is long and life is short.**

Ex) **For as Pascal reminds us, "It is not good to have all your wants satisfied."**

14) *Exemplum* - citing an example; using an illustrative story, either true or fictitious

Ex) **Let me give you an example. In the early 1920's in Germany, the government let the printing presses turn out endless quantities of paper money, and soon, instead of 50-pfennige postage stamps, denominations up to 50 billion marks were being issued.**

15) *Pleonasm* - using more words than required to express an idea; being redundant. Normally a vice, it is done on purpose on rare occasions for emphasis

Ex) **We heard it with our own ears.**

Ex) **And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.**

16) *Oxymoron* - apparent paradox achieved by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict one another

Ex) **I must be cruel only to be kind.**

Ex) **Jumbo Shrimp**

17) *Paradox* - an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it.

Ex) **What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young.**

18) *Rhetorical Question* - a question with either no answer or an obvious answer designed to emphasize a point, to create thought, or to appeal to common sense.

Ex) **Where would I be today if it weren't for my friends?.**

19) *Loaded Word* - what is suggested in addition to the literal meaning of a word. Often "loaded words" have connotations which evoke emotional responses