

## Literary and Rhetorical Terms

1. **allusion** – when reference is made to a person, event, object, or work from history or literature. Writers and speakers often make allusions to stories from the Bible, to Greek and Roman myths, to plays by Shakespeare, to political and historical events, and to other materials with which they can expect their readers to be familiar. By using allusions, writers and speakers can bring to mind complex ideas simply and easily.
2. **antithesis** – Antithesis as a rhetorical technique in which words, phrases, or ideas are strongly contrasted, often by means of a repetition of grammatical structure. It allows the speaker to say a lot in a few words and still be clear. For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson uses it in his description of the taunting of “**lofty land/With little men.**” It is used by Abe Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” in the following: “as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.” “The world will little note, nor long **remember** what we say here, but it can never **forget** what they did here,” “that we here highly resolve that these **dead** shall not have **died** in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new **birth** of freedom.” The last two examples have strong contrast of images with the words remember/forget and dead/birth.
3. **connotation** – A connotation is an emotional association or implication attached to an expression. For example, the word *inexpensive* has positive emotional associations, whereas the word *cheap* has negative ones, even though the two words both *denote*, or refer to, low cost. In another example, consider this sentence: “Over ten thousand teenage drivers are **running** loose in our town and are **menacing** other drivers—these teenagers are **an accident waiting to happen.**” Rather than using neutral terms, the writer uses words that appeal to the readers’ fears to make teenage drivers sound uncontrolled and dangerous. Readers should be suspicious of a writer whose persuasion relies heavily on loaded language. If a writer depends on outrageous terms to provoke strong emotion, the logical appeals could be weak.
4. **diction** – When applied to writing, diction refers to word choice. Much of a writer’s *style* is determined by his or her diction, the types of words he or she chooses. Diction can be formal or informal, simple or complex, contemporary or archaic, ordinary or unusual.  
**style** – Style is the manner in which something is said or written. A writer’s style depends upon many things, including her diction, selection of grammatical structures (simple versus complex sentences, for example), and preference for abstract or concrete words.  
**tone** – Tone is the writer or speaker’s emotional attitude toward the reader or toward the subject. A writer’s tone may be formal or informal, friendly or distant, personal or pompous. For example, William Faulkner’s tone in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech is earnest and serious, while James Thurber’s tone in “The Night the Ghost Got In” is humorous and ironic.
5. **figurative language** (metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, understatement) -- Figures of speech are expressions that have more than a literal meaning.  
**metaphor** – A metaphor is when one thing is spoken or written about *as if* it were another. For example, “My love is a red rose” is a metaphor because the person the speaker loves is being described as a red rose.  
**simile** – A simile is a comparison of two different things, but unlike with a metaphor, the words *like* or *as* are used in the comparison. For example, “It is as cold as an igloo in that classroom” is a simile because the room is being compared to an igloo, and the word *as* is used.  
**personification** – Personification is used when an idea, animal, or thing is described as having human qualities. For example, “The sun smiled down on us today” is personification because it described the *sun* (a non-human thing as having the human capacity to *smile*).  
**hyperbole** – Hyperbole is a figure of speech involving great exaggeration. The effect is usually satiric, sentimental or comic. Anne Bradstreet uses hyperbole when she writes, “My love is such that rivers cannot quench./Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.”

6. **parallelism** – Parallel structure occurs when a writer emphasized the equal value or weight of two or more ideas by expressing them in *the same grammatical form*. For example, when Abe Lincoln said, “...that government *of the people, by the people, and for the people*, shall not perish...” this is parallel structure because of the repeated grammatical form in the repeated prepositional phrases. Lincoln uses parallel structure at least five times in the Gettysburg Address.” Parallelism is also used frequently in the “Declaration of Independence” in the sentence structure of the list of grievances against King George III of Great Britain.
7. **repetition** – Repetition is a poetic device in which a sound, word, phrase, or other element is repeated for style and emphasis. For example, Carl Sandburg’s poem “Chicago” has the repeated phrase “they tell me.”
8. **chiasmus** – A chiasmus is a rhetorical technique in which the order of occurrence of words or phrases is reversed, as in the line “We can **weather changes**, but we can’t **change the weather**.” Ben Franklin uses chiasmus in an essay when he writes, “we should find no people so **rude**, as to be without rules of **politeness**, nor any so **polite**, as not to have some remains of **rudeness**.”
9. **rhetorical question** – A rhetorical question is one asked for effect but not meant to be answered because the answer is clear from the context. For example, Patrick Henry’s “Speech in the Virginia Convention” contains many of these, such as the question, “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?” This is a rhetorical question; we know his answer to this question is *no*.
10. **emotional appeal** – This is when a writer or speaker attempts to persuade an audience to act or agree with his or her views by appealing to the audience’s emotions. Although frequently abused, the emotional appeal is a legitimate aspect of rhetorical argument, for a speaker wants his or her audience to care about the issue being addressed. The most effective way for an ethical writer to use emotional appeal is to use vivid and concrete but *accurate* illustrations, examples, and details in arguments. Good writers use emotional appeals along with logical appeals, supporting facts, and concrete proof. A speech that *only* used appeals to emotion is usually weak or faulty since facts are not used to support the speaker’s claims.
11. **appeal to authority** – This is when a writer or speaker cites an authority or expert on a particular subject to support a point. Such an appeal is inappropriate if the authority is not qualified to have an expert opinion on the subject.
12. **logical appeal** – the writer or speaker tries to convince the audience using facts, scientific research, statistics or experts.
13. **loaded (charged) words** – words with strong connotations likely to produce an emotional response.
14. **aphorism/proverb** – An **aphorism** is a short saying or pointed statement that usually embodies a moral or homespun wisdom. An aphorism that gains currency and is passed from generation to generation is called a **proverb, adage, or maxim**. Examples of aphorisms are in Ben Franklin’s writing from *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. Examples include “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.” And “Little strokes fell great oaks.”
15. **See section 4.14 “Avoiding Faulty Arguments” and 4.15 “Understanding Propaganda Techniques” in *Lit. and the Language Arts* textbook, pages 977-982.**