LA10 ~ Fundamentals of Rhetoric

Definition

The art of analyzing all of the choices involving language that a writer, speaker, reader, or listener might make in a situation so that the text becomes meaningful, purposeful, and effective. It also involves the specific techniques used by writers to make meaningful, purposeful, effective texts.

The study of rhetoric is essentially based on understanding the choices which writers make, recognizing the strategies writers employ, and evaluating the quality of a writer's thinking. We will be concerned with, first and foremost, discerning what a writer's message and purpose are—a chore which is oftentimes more complex than it might first seem. Furthermore, we will be concerned with discovering just HOW the writer established that message and purpose: what techniques and choices has the writer made that make a piece effective? In addition, we will be concerned with EVALUATING the quality of a writer's message and purpose by carefully analyzing the support provided as well as the strength of the reasoning and rationale employed. Finally, the goal is to then for you to apply these skills and knowledge to your own writing so that it will be more effective, better reasoned, and in general more powerful. In the process, you will become a much more sophisticated and effective reader, writer, and thinker.

On the following pages you will find a list of basic rhetorical devices, as well as full definitions of some of the more complex and/or odd ones. We will not be using/discuss ALL of these, but this document will be your reference point for anything we do discuss.

Our ultimate goal is for you to:

- Analyze rhetorical situations and appeals in order to offer insights into text.
- Compose a rhetorical analysis (essay) that looks carefully at the ways a text (or author) delivers its message.

BASIC RHETORICAL DEVICES:

(note: not all devices are listed here and some are not defined on the following pages)

Tone
Point of View
Style
Ethos/Pathos/Logos
Diction/Connotation/Denotation
Syntax:

- Parallel Structure
- Periodic Sentence
- Asyndeton/Polysyndeton

Figurative Language:

- Hyperbole
- Understatement
- Symbol
- Simile/metaphor
- Personification

Imagery
Analogy
Oxymoron/Paradox
Pun
Rhetorical Question
Irony:

- Situational
- Verbal

Satire/Parody
Anecdote
Juxtaposition/comparison
Structure/Organization
Anaphora/Repetition/Refrain
Fallacies (some):

- Ad Hominem
- Argument From Authority
- Appeal to Ignorance
- Begging the Question
- Hasty Generalization
- Non Sequitur
- False Dichotomy
- Slippery Slope
- Faulty Causality
- Sentimental Appeals
- Red Herring
- Scare Tactics
- Bandwagon
- Dogmatism
- Equivocation
- Faulty Analogy

Polysyndeton

Definition

Polysyndeton is a stylistic device in which several coordinating conjunctions are used in succession in order to achieve an artistic effect.

The term polysyndeton comes from a Greek word meaning "bound together". It makes use of coordinating conjunctions like "and", "or", "but" and "nor" (mostly and and or) which are used to join successive words, phrases or clauses in such a way that these conjunctions are even used where they might have been omitted. For example, in the sentence "We have ships and men and money and stores," the coordinating conjunction "and" is used in quick succession to join words occurring together. In a normal situation, the coordinating conjunction "and" is used to join the last two words of the list and the rest of the words in the list are separated or joined by a comma.

Polysyndeton vs. Asyndeton

Polysyndeton is opposite to another stylistic device asyndeton. In an asyndeton, the words in a list are separated by commas and no conjunctions are used to join the words in a list. Thomas S. Kane describes the difference between the two devices saying that they are nothing more than the techniques of handling a long series of words or lists. Polysyndeton uses conjunctions after every word or term, while asyndeton uses no conjunctions but commas.

Asyndeton: "Hew was a bag of bones, a floppy doll, a broken stick, a maniac." (Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, 1957)

Polysyndeton: "He was a bag of bones and a floppy doll and a broken stick and a maniac."

Function of Polysyndeton

Polysyndeton performs several functions. Not only does it join words, phrases and clauses and thus brings continuity in a sentence, but it acts also as a stylistic device, brings rhythm to the text with the repetition of conjunctions in quick succession. It is also employed as a tool to lay emphasis to the ideas the conjunctions connect.

Asyndeton

Definition

Asyndeton is derived from a Greek word asyndeton which means unconnected. It is a stylistic device used in literature and poetry to intentionally eliminate conjunctions between the phrases and in the sentence, yet maintain the grammatical accuracy. This literary tool helps in reducing the indirect meaning of the phrase and presents it in a concise form. It started to be seen in Greek and Latin literature.

Function of Asyndeton

Asyndeton helps in speeding up the rhythm of words. Mostly this technique is employed in speech but can be used in written works too. It helps in attracting the readers to collaborate with the writers, since it suggests that words, phrases and sentences are incomplete and the readers would have to do some work to deduce meanings. This version creates immediate impact and the readers are attuned to what the author is trying to convey.

Asyndeton are applied often intentionally in order to give a unique emphasis to the text, thereby drawing the attention of readers towards a particular idea the author wants to convey.

Rhetorical Appeals: Pathos

Definition

Pathos is a quality of an experience in life or a work of art that stirs up emotions of pity, sympathy and sorrow. Pathos can be expressed through words, pictures or even with gestures of the body.

Pathos is an important tool of persuasion in arguments. Pathos is a method of convincing people with an argument drawn out through an emotional response. Analyzing examples of pathos, one would come to the conclusion that it differs from other "ingredients of persuasion" namely "Ethos" and "logos". Ethos means convincing others through the credibility of a persuader, while Logos is a method to convince others by employing logic and reason.

Function of Pathos

We humans are emotional beings and writers know it very well. They introduce pathos in their works to touch upon our delicate sensations such as pity, sympathy, sorrow and, consequently, try to develop an emotional connection with readers.

In addition, emotions are part of real life. Thus, by giving pathos expression in their works, writers bring their narratives, characters and themes closer to real life. Furthermore, the use of pathos by a debater in an argument appeals to people emotionally, making it a tool to convince people and change their opinions.

Rhetorical Appeals: Logos

Definition

Logos is a Greek word meaning logic. Logos is a literary device that can be defined as a statement, sentence or argument used to convince or persuade the targeted audience by employing reason or logic. In everyday life, arguments depend upon pathos and ethos besides logos. Logos mostly employs the utilization of inductive and deductive reasoning methods to be effective.

Function of Logos

Logos is used in citing facts besides statistical, literal and historical analogies. It is something through which inner thoughts are presented in a logical way before the audience for persuasion. In society, rationality and logic are greatly valued and this type of convincing approach is generally honored more than appeals made by a speaker or character to the audience. On the other hand, scientific reasoning and formal logic are perhaps not suitable for general audiences, as they are more appropriate for scientific professionals only.

Rhetorical Appeals: Ethos

Definition

In rhetoric, ethos represents credibility or an ethical appeal which involves persuasion by the character involved.

The term has its roots in Aristotle's "ingredients of persuasion" or "appeals". He divides means of persuasion into three distinct categories: ethos, pathos and logos. He says in his treatise "On Rhetoric":

"Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. […] Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible."

It is a means of convincing others of the character or credibility of the persuader. It is natural for us to accept the credibility of people whom we hold in reverence.

In an argument, it is of utmost value for a speaker or a writer to impress upon listeners and readers the idea that is worth listening to. In other words, not only the credibility of a speaker or a writer relies on his or her authority on the subject matter but also on the fact that how much he or she is liked and worthy of respect.

Function of Ethos

The above explanations and examples of ethos reveal the following facts about the said device:

Ethos confirms the credibility of a writer or a speaker and thus they become trustworthy in the eyes of listeners and readers who as a result are persuaded by their arguments.

Ethos of a speaker or a writer is created largely by the choice of words he or she makes in order to convince listeners or readers.

Being an expert on the subject matter that a speaker or a writer chooses determines his or her ethos.

Diction

Definition

Diction can be defined as style of speaking or writing determined by the choice of words by a speaker or a writer.

Diction or choice of words separates good writing from bad writing. It 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. Besides, 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.

Function of Diction

In literature, writers choose words to create and convey a typical mood, tone and atmosphere to their readers. A writer's choice of words and his selection of graphic words not only affects the reader's attitude but also conveys the writer's feelings toward the literary work. Moreover, poetry is known for its unique diction that separates it from prose. Usually, a poetic diction is marked by the use of figures of speech, rhyming words etc.

Connotation

Definition

Connotation refers to a meaning that is implied by a word apart from the thing which it describes explicitly. Words carry cultural and emotional associations or meanings in addition to their literal meanings or denotations. For instance, "Wall Street" literally means a street situated in Lower Manhattan but connotatively it refers to "wealth" and "power".

Positive and Negative Connotations

Words may have positive or negative connotations that depend upon the social, cultural and personal experiences of individuals. For example, the words childish, childlike and youthful have the same denotative but different connotative meanings. Childish and childlike have a negative connotation as they refer to immature behavior of a person. Whereas, youthful implies that a person is lively and energetic.

Common Connotation Examples

Below are a few connotation examples. Their suggested meanings are shaped by cultural and emotional associations:

A dog connotes shamelessness or an ugly face.

A dove implies peace or gentility.

Home suggests family, comfort and security.

Politician has a negative connotation of wickedness and insincerity while statesperson connotes sincerity.

Pushy refers to someone loud-mouthed and irritating.

Mom and Dad when used in place of mother and father connote loving parents.

Function of Connotation

In literature, connotation paves way for creativity by using figures of speech like metaphor, simile, symbolism, personification etc. Had writers contented themselves with only the literal meanings, there would have been no way to compare abstract ideas to concrete concepts in order to give readers a better understanding .Therefore, connotative meanings of words allow writers to add to their works, dimensions which are broader, more vivid and fresher.

Syntax

Definition

Syntax is a set of rules in a language. It dictates how words from different parts of speech are put together in order to convey a complete thought.

Syntax and Diction

Syntax and diction are closely related. Diction refers to the choice of words in a particular situation while syntax determines how the chosen words are used to form a sentence. Most often than not, adopting a complex diction means a complex syntactic structure of sentences and vice versa. In combination, syntax and diction help writers develop tone, mood and atmosphere in a text along with evoking interest of the readers.

Function of Syntax

To convey meaning is one of the main functions of syntax. In literature, writers utilize syntax and diction to achieve certain artistic effects like mood, tone etc. Like diction, syntax aims to affect the readers as well as express the writer's attitude.

Juxtaposition

Definition

Juxtaposition is a literary technique in which two or more ideas, places, characters and their actions are placed side by side in a narrative or a poem for the purpose of developing comparisons and contrasts.

In literature, juxtaposition is a useful device for writers to portray their characters in great detail to create suspense and achieve a rhetorical effect. It is a human quality to comprehend one thing easily by comparing it to another. Therefore, a writer can make readers sense "goodness" in a particular character by placing him or her side by side to a character that is predominantly "evil". Consequently, goodness in one character is highlighted by evil in the other character. Juxtaposition in this case is useful in the development of characters.

Function of Juxtaposition

Writers employ the literary technique of juxtaposition in order to surprise their readers and evoke their interest by means of developing a comparison between two dissimilar things by placing them side by side. The comparison drawn adds vividness to a given image, controls pacing of poem or a narrative and provides a logical connection between two various vague concepts.

Charles Dickens uses the technique of juxtaposition in the opening line of his novel "A Tale of Two Cities":

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way…"

In order to give us an idea of the factors responsible for the French Revolution, Dickens uses Juxtaposition throughout the novel in which the have not's and the haves are put side by side to highlight the presence of severe disparity and discord in the then French society that paved the way for the revolution. By examining the given juxtaposition, readers can vividly imagine the calamitous atmosphere before the revolution and understand its need at that time.

Anecdote

Definition

Anecdote is defined as a short and interesting story or an amusing event often proposed to support or demonstrate some point and make readers and listeners laugh. Anecdotes can include an extensive range of tales and stories. In fact, it is a short description or an account of any event that makes the readers laugh or brood over the topic presented for the purpose.

Function of Anecdote

Anecdotes and humorous pieces are not only jokes, but exquisite literary devices as well. Their major purposes are to stir up laughter, to disclose a truth in a general way, or to describe a feature of a character in such a way that it becomes humorous and at the same time gives us a better understanding of the character.

Anecdotes may also serve as cautions. Writers tell their readers about the possibilities of future happenings in case they do not follow particular processes and techniques.

Anaphora

Definition

In writing or speech, the deliberate repetition of the first part of the sentence in order to achieve an artistic effect is known as Anaphora.

Anaphora, possibly the oldest literary device, has its roots in Biblical Psalms used to emphasize certain words or phrases. Gradually, Elizabethan and Romantic writers brought this device into practice.

Common Anaphora Examples

It is common for us to use anaphora in our everyday speech to lay emphasis on the idea we want to convey or for self-affirmation. Read the following anaphora examples:

"Every day, every night, in every way, I am getting better and better"

"My life is my purpose. My life is my goal. My life is my inspiration."

"Buying nappies for the baby, feeding the baby, playing with the baby: This is what your life is when you have a baby.

"I want my money right now, right here, all right?"

Functions of Anaphora

Apart from the function of giving prominence to ideas, the use of anaphora in literature adds rhythm to it and thus, making it more pleasurable to read and easier to remember. As a literary device, anaphora serves the purpose of furnishing artistic effect to the passages of prose and poetry.

As a rhetorical device, it is used to appeal to the emotions of the audience in order to persuade, inspire, motivate and encourage them.

Fallacy

Definition

A fallacy is an erroneous argument dependent upon an unsound or illogical contention. There are many fallacy examples that we can find in everyday conversations.

Types of Fallacies

Here are a few well-known kinds of fallacies you might experience when making an argument:

1. Appeal to Ignorance

Appeal to ignorance happens when one individual utilizes another individual's lack of information on a specific subject as proof that his or her own particular argument is right.

2. Appeal to Authority

This sort of error is also known as "Argumentum Verecundia" (argument from modesty). Instead of concentrating on the benefits of an argument, the arguer will attempt to append their argument to an individual of power or authority in an effort to give trustworthiness to their argument.

3. Appeal to Popular Opinion

This sort of appeal is when somebody asserts that a thought or conviction is correct since it is the thing that the general population accepts.

4. Association Fallacy

Sometimes called "guilt by affiliation," this happens when somebody connects a particular thought or drill to something or somebody negative so as to infer blame on another individual.

5. Attacking the Person

Also regarded as "Argumentum ad Hominem" (argument against the man), this is a common fallacy used during debates where an individual substitutes a rebuttal with a personal insult.

6. Begging the Question

The conclusion of a contention is accepted in the statement of the inquiry itself.

7. Circular Argument

This fallacy is also known as "Circulus in Probando". This error is committed when an argument takes its evidence from an element inside the argument itself instead of from an outside one.

8. Relationship Implies Causation Fallacy

Also called "Cum Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc", this fallacy is a deception in which the individual making the contention joins two occasions that happen consecutively and accepts that one made the other.

9. False Dilemma/Dichotomy

Sometimes called "Bifurcation", this sort of error happens when somebody presents their argument in such a way that there are just two conceivable alternatives left.

10. Illogical conclusion

This is a fallacy wherein somebody attests a conclusion that does not follow from the suggestions.

11. Slippery Slope

The error happens when one contends that an exceptionally minor movement will unavoidably prompt great and frequently ludicrous conclusions.

12. Syllogism Fallacy

This fallacy may also be used to form incorrect conclusions that are odd. Syllogism fallacy is a false argument as it implies an incorrect conclusion.

Fallacy Examples

To understand the different types of fallacies better, check out the following examles of fallacy:

Example #1: Appeal to Ignorance

"You can't demonstrate that there aren't Martians living in caves on the surface of Mars, so it is sensible for me to accept there are."

Example #2: Appeal to Authority

"Well, Isaac Newton trusted in Alchemy, do you suppose you know more than Isaac Newton?"

Example #3: Appeal Popular Opinion

"Lots of individuals purchased this collection, so it must be great."

Example #4: Association Fallacy

"Hitler was a veggie lover, in this way, I don't trust vegans."

Example #5: Attacking the Person

"Don't listen to Eddie's contentions on instruction, he's a simpleton."

Example #6: Begging the Question

"If outsiders didn't take my daily paper, who did?" (accept that the daily paper was really stolen).

Example #7: Circular Argument

"I accept that Frosted Flakes are incredible since it says as much on the Frosted Flakes bundling."

Example #8: Relationship Implies Causation Fallacy

"I saw a blackbird and ten minutes after the fact, I crashed my auto, in this manner, blackbirds are terrible fortunes."

Example #9: False Dilemma/dichotomy

"If you don't vote for this applicant, you must be a Communist."

Example #10: Illogical Conclusion

"All Dubliners are from Ireland. Ronan is not a Dubliner, in this manner, he is not Irish."

Example #11: Slippery Slope

"If we permit gay individuals to get hitched, what's afterward? Permitting individuals to wed their pooches?"

Example #12: Syllogism Fallacy

"All crows are black and the bird in my cage is black. So, the bird in my cage is a crow."

Functions of Fallacy

Literary critics find the weaknesses of literary pieces by searching for fallacies in the pieces being critiqued. Because of this, there is a tendency for critics to distort the intentions of the writer.

Non Sequitur

Definition

Non sequiturs are those literary devices which include the statements, sayings and conclusions that do not follow the fundamental principles of logic and reason. They are frequently used in theater and comedies to create comedic effects.

In fact, non sequitur is a Latin phrase that means "it doesn't follow". Here "non" means not and "sequitur" means to follow. It takes place when a difference is created between the principle idea and the conclusion, which finally leads to a fallacy. In conversation, non sequitur is something that is said but seems quite absurd to the point of confusion due to lack of proper meanings. It is sometimes taken as postulation that means the statement might not be true. For instance:

Maria drives a car. She must be a wealthy person.

David eats broccoli. David should love to eat meat.

The sentences do not follow a proper sequence in non sequitur and words do not give the same meaning as readers suppose them to do.

Function of non sequitur

Non sequitur is produced inadvertently due to some confusion and even sometimes deliberately to confound the readers and the listeners in order to point out the confusion existing in the situation or the society at large. However, it is often used in order to change the subject of the conversation and give a humorous touch by jumping to the conclusion abruptly without following the fundamental principles of conversation. Similarly, as a literary device it is used in the Theater of the Absurd and in surreal absurdist comedies. In theater, there are characters that give one non sequitur after another and move away to provide comedic effect. Since the audience could not foresee what the next statement would be, they merely laugh at it.

Red Herring

Definition

Red herring is a kind of fallacy that is an irrelevant topic introduced in an argument to divert the attention of listeners or readers from the original issue. In literature, this fallacy is often used in detective or suspense novels to mislead readers or characters or to induce them to make false conclusions.

Let us consider a simple example of a red herring. A teacher catches a student cheating during a test. The student in response says, "I know I've made a mistake. But think of my parents. They're going to kill me". The student uses a red herring in his response. He tries to appeal to pity to distract his teacher from the real issue.

The term red herring means a kind of dried red fish, which has a pungent smell. In fox hunting, hounds are prevented from catching the fox by distracting them with the strong scent of red herring. Similarly, a person can be stopped from proving his point in an argument by distracting him with an irrelevant issue.

Function of Red Herring

A red herring is a common device used in mystery and thriller stories to distract the reader from identifying the real culprit. The red herring in a story can take the form of characters that the reader suspect, but who turn out be innocent when the real murderer is identified. It aims at keeping the readers guessing at the possibilities until the end and therefore keeps them interested in the story. The readers enjoy solving the mysteries created by red herrings in the story. Undoubtedly, it would be difficult to keep the reader's interest, if thrillers exposed the killer from the start.

Moreover, for politicians, red herrings come in handy as they use them frequently to dodge difficult questions in a discussion or an argument. They do it by referring to a different issue, which of course is irrelevant, to sidetrack from the original issue under discussion.

Ad Hominem

Definition

Ad hominem (Latin) means "against the man". As the name suggests, it is a literary term that involves commenting on or against an opponent to undermine him instead of his arguments.

There are cases where consciously or unconsciously people start to question the opponent or his personal association rather than evaluating the soundness and validity of the argument that he presents. These types of arguments are usually mistaken for personal insults but they are somehow different in nature and the distinction is very subtle.

Arguers who are not familiar with the principles of making logical arguments commonly end up saying something that would draw the audience's attention to the distasteful characteristics of the individual. Such people use this fallacy as a tool to deceive their audience. Making such a blatant personal comment against somebody makes it hard for people to believe it isn't true. Typically, even the arguer himself believes that such personal traits or circumstances are not enough to dispose of an individual's opinion or argument. However, if looked at rationally, such arguments even if true never provide a valid reason to disregard someone's criticism.

Functions of Ad Hominem

A writer's background is considered to be a very important factor when it comes to judging his work. A book written on a particular subject in history will be perceived differently keeping in view the background of the author. Therefore, it is important to understand that a writer's traits and circumstances have a pivotal role to play in his feelings, thinking and the construction of his arguments.

To put it simply, the considerations regarding the use of ad hominem can explain certain arguments and the motives behind them better. Nevertheless, such considerations are not enough on their own to evaluate an individual's opinion and are certainly not sufficient to disregard them as false or invalid. The fact is that ad hominem is a kind of fallacy that leaves a great impression on the audience's mind. It is an argumentative flaw that is hard to spot in our daily life. Although, the personal attack that has been made on the opponent might not even have a speck of truth in it, it somehow makes the audience biased. Ironically, despite being flawed, ad hominem has an amazing power of persuasion.