



# Analyzing Rhetoric and Rhetorical Devices

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**Rhetoric** in its simplest form is the art of *persuasive speech or writing*. For thousands of years, politicians and orators have been known for their use of rhetoric to influence and persuade an audience to their side or way of thinking. Rhetoric is all around us, in the form of political speeches, commercials, art, television, movies, newspaper and magazine articles—even in our everyday conversations. Each time we want to get our way, or take out our money to buy a product we saw in a commercial, we are either using rhetoric or are persuaded by the use of rhetoric. While various media use different ways of appealing to an audience, they each have the same purpose: to persuade.

There are different ways a speaker or writer can appeal and seek to persuade to his or her audience: 1) logic or reason (*logos*), 2) emotion (*pathos*), and/or 3) ethics and morals (*ethos*).

- **Logos:** by appealing to an audience's sense of reason and logic, the speaker or writer intends to make the audience think clearly about the sensible and/or obvious answer to a problem
  - *Logos appeals to the audience with facts, statistics, definitions, historical proof, quotes from "experts." Think of the commercials that have a sports star or celebrity giving statistics about and their own endorsement of a product. It is logical that if a sports star uses this elliptical machine and is in shape that it works—or at least, that is what you are led to believe.*
- **Pathos:** by appealing to the audience's emotions, the speaker or writer can make the audience feel sorrow, shame, sympathy, embarrassment, anger, excitement, and/or fear.
  - *Pathos appeals to the audience through the use of figurative language, imagery, vivid descriptions, an emotional choice of words, or examples that are designed to make you FEEL a certain way. Think of an ad or an article showing our servicemen in uniform holding their tiny newborns or hugging their child and wife, with tears streaming down their eyes.*
- **Ethos:** the overall appeal of the speaker or writer himself or herself; it is important that this person have impressive credentials, a notable knowledge of the subject, and/or appear to be a likeable and moral person.
  - *Ethos appeals to the audience with a calm, trustworthy, seemingly sincere approach. The speaker uses good grammar and is well-spoken, and tells stories that are backed by general common sense and need to feel secure. Think of a commercial of a "doctor" in a white lab coat telling the audience all about how a new medicine can help treat one's symptoms. We listen because we trust the doctor, who appears to be well-spoken and knowledgeable about his subject.*
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It is not only important what a speaker or writer has to say, but *how* he or she actually says or presents it. There are literally hundreds of rhetorical devices, dating back to the famous orators Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Besides using devices you may already be familiar with, such as figures of speech (metaphor, simile, personification) and sound devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance), writers and speakers use many other rhetorical devices to communicate their message.

## Analyzing Rhetoric and Rhetorical Devices

Below is a very short list of some of the more common rhetorical devices, their definitions, and a brief example of the device in use.

- **alliteration:** repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words ex. "**P**eter **P**iper picked a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers.
- **anaphora:** repetition of a word or phrase at the *beginning* of successive phrases, clauses or lines, ex. "Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!" (*King John*, II, i)
- **antithesis:** opposition or juxtaposition of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction, ex. "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more." (*Julius Caesar*, III, ii)
- **aporia:** questioning oneself (or rhetorically asking the audience), often pretending to be in doubt, ex. "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?" (Matthew 21:25)
- **aposiopesis:** a sudden pause or interruption in the middle of a sentence (often for dramatic effect) ex. "I will have revenges on you both / That all the world shall— I will do such things — What they are yet, I know not; but they shall be / The terrors of the earth!" (*King Lear* II, iv)
- **apostrophe:** a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person, either absent or present, real or imagined, ex. "Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55)
- **asyndeton:** the absence of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words, ex. "Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, / Shrunk to this little measure?" (*Julius Caesar*, III, i)
- **conduplicatio:** repetition of a key word over successive phrases or clauses "We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future." Robert F. Kennedy's Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968)
- **euphemism:** a substitution of a more pleasant expression for one whose meaning may come across as rude or offensive, ex. "He passed away," rather than "He died."
- **hyperbole:** exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect, ex. "I died laughing."
- **irony:** (verbal) expression in which words mean something contrary to what is actually said, ex. Looking into your wallet full of nothing but a few pennies, and exclaiming, "Lunch is on me, guys— I am rich!"
- **metonymy:** a reference to an object or person by naming only a part of the object or person, ex. "She stood in the driveway watching as the bears moved her furniture into her new house."
- **paralipsis:** pretending to omit something by drawing attention to it, ex. A politician saying: "I will not even mention the fact that my opponent was a poor student."

- **parallelism:** repetition of a key word over successive phrases or clauses, “We will have difficult times. We’ve had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future.” Robert F. Kennedy’s Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968)
- **personification:** giving human characteristics to non-human objects ex. The pen danced across the author’s page.
- **polysyndeton:** using conjunctions to emphasize rhythm, and therefore emphasize a certain point ex. “In years gone by, there were in every community men and women who spoke the language of duty and morality and loyalty and obligation.” *William F. Buckley*
- **rhetorical question:** a question that is posed for emphasis, not requiring an answer, ex. “Art thou mad? Is not the truth the truth?” (*Henry IV, Part 1, II, iv*)
- **synecdoche:** a part or quality of something which is used in substitution of the larger whole, or vice versa, ex. “The hospital worked for hours to revive him,” (referring to the doctors and nurses inside the hospital) OR “She took us outside to look at her new set of wheels,” (referring to her new car)
- **understatement:** deliberately de-emphasizing something in order to downplay its importance, ex. “The Internet has contributed somewhat to improving communication,” is an understatement.

## Analysis of Rhetoric and Rhetorical Devices Activity

*Directions: Use either Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail or King's "I Have a Dream" Speech to answer the following questions with thought and support.*

1. Who do you think is the intended audience for this piece? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Using King's entire speech find two examples of each of the use of pathos, ethos, and logos. Be sure to indicate which line or section you are quoting in your response, explaining/defending your choice.

Pathos: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Pathos: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ethos: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ethos: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Logos: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Logos: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Find examples of three different rhetorical devices. Be sure to indicate which type of device is being used.

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Device: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Device: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Device: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which rhetorical device did King seem to use most? Was this the best choice? Why?

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you think King gave a good argument? If King was giving a speech to a courtroom and you were a juror in the case, would King's speech have swayed you to one side or another? How?

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Choose three parts of the speech that were particularly interesting or memorable to you. Why did you choose these particular segments to highlight? How did they appeal to you (logos, pathos, ethos)?

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