



## Device #4

**Antithesis:*****A fairly simple way to show a complex thought.***

*Antithesis* makes use of a contrast in language to bring out a contrast in ideas. It is one of the most attractive and powerful tools in speech and writing. Some of the most famous lines in modern history are built on the *antithesis*, from Neil Armstrong's "*That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind,*" to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "*...not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*" *Antithesis* has a natural beauty to the human ear because we are creatures who love to organize and categorize our thoughts and ideas. *Antithesis* organizes ideas in a way that is both evocative and powerful, and it is an excellent tool to have in your writer's toolbox.

*Antithesis* can be built by contrasting any of the different parts of a statement.

- You may wish to keep the structure of the sentences identical, but use two opposing words.
- You may wish to change entire clauses to contrast with one another.
- You may even wish to have whole sentences oppose one another throughout the course of a paragraph. While simply opposing a key word can be the easiest to build, longer uses of *antithesis* can be very powerful.

The sound of a sentence built on *antithesis* can also be used to great effect. Trying to alliterate, or match the first sound of the contrasting words, can help highlight the opposition. For example:

*"Life can be kind and cruel, full of hope and heartache,"*

can drive the point home more eloquently than:

*"Life can be kind and mean, full of joy and heartache."*

*Antithesis* can also help to point out fine distinctions in an issue by presenting them together. By contrasting legality and morality, wisdom and learning, or success and happiness, you make your reader think about the subtle shades of difference between the concepts. When dealing with ideas that you think your reader might tend to think of as the same, joining them in *antithesis* can help set the stage for your argument.

*Example #1: "We live within our limits, for we are men, not gods."*

*Example #2: "I speak not from ignorance, but from experience."*

*Example #3: "War is not fought to achieve joy, but rather to avoid pain."*

**Exercise 1:**

Write 5 original statements that use *antithesis* to emphasize a point or startle a reader into paying attention. *The first one has been done for you as an example.*

1. The villain lives by his wits, not by his labor.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

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### Exercise 2:

For each famous quote, underline the specific words and phrases that are being contrasted by *antithesis*.

1. "We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by division, wanting unity." —Richard Nixon
2. "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." —John F. Kennedy
3. Marc Antony: "I came to bury Caesar, not to praise him." —Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*)
4. "I pass with relief from the tossing sea of Cause and Theory to the firm ground of Result and Fact." —Winston Churchill
5. "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." —Barry Goldwater
6. Brutus: "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more." —Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*)