

Rhetorical Devices and Logical Fallacies

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Common Rhetorical Devices

Paradox

A statement that initially seems contradictory but actually reveals a truth when viewed in a new context. A paradox can effectively grab a reader's attention, such as in a hook in an opening line.

EXAMPLE: Less is more.

Point of View

The perspective from which a story is told, which can color the delivery of the author's message in either a positive or negative light. Is she an expert? Is he biased? Do we trust her?

EXAMPLES: 1st person: the author uses an "I," which can be subjective

3rd person: the narrator writes using "he" or "she," which can be objective.

Tone

The author's attitude toward the subject and audience.

EXAMPLES: The introduction to Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* sets a serious and formal tone that continues throughout the speech: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation..."

David Sedaris's essay, "Remembering My Childhood on the Continent of Africa," establishes a humorous tone: "When Hugh was in the fifth grade, his class took a field trip to an Ethiopian slaughterhouse. He was living in Addis Ababa at the time, and the slaughterhouse was chosen because, he says, 'it was convenient.'"

Understatement

Intentionally falling short of describing the full extent of the subject, often used for humor or emphasis.

EXAMPLE: It gets a *little uncomfortable* in the sun on those 115-degree summer afternoon.

Anaphora

Repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses, which can add dramatic heft or subtly emphasize the main idea that underlies each example clause.

EXAMPLE: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..."

Metaphor

A comparison of two unlike things.

EXAMPLE: In enforcing its patents so harshly, Monsanto Company acted as a feudal king demanding heavy taxes from his subjects.

Qualifiers

Words or phrases that modify or tone down a claim. Using absolutes (like *all* or *always*) can make one's writing more aggressive, while qualifying language (like *almost all*, *generally*, or *usually*) softens it.

EXAMPLE: The **general** trend in the data shows that **most** of the experiments were a success.

Allusion

A reference to well-known work or famous person, place, event, etc. Allusions may evoke the theme or tone of the referenced work in the new work or help the reader understand the context.

EXAMPLE: Harriet Tubman was called the Moses of her time.

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Procatalepsis

The author raises an objection to his or her own argument and then immediately responds, dealing with counter-arguments before the reader can raise them (similar to “straw man argument” below).

EXAMPLE: You might say that most people can lose weight by diet alone, but in reality both diet and exercise are essential weight loss components for most people.

Common Logical Fallacies

Post Hoc

The conclusion that one event causes another simply because the proposed cause occurred before the proposed effect.

EXAMPLE: Joan was scratched by a cat while visiting her friend and came down with a fever two days later. The cat’s scratch therefore caused the fever.

Ad Hominem

An argument made personally against an opponent instead of against the argument.

EXAMPLE: You can't believe anything in this book because the author is a Democrat.

Either/Or

A claim that presents an artificially limited range of choices.

EXAMPLE: You can either be pro-choice or pro-life; there is no middle ground.

Slippery Slope

A fallacy based on the fear that one step will inevitably lead to the next.

EXAMPLE: Embryonic stem cells used for research will lead to full-scale reproductive cloning.

Straw Man

A weak or imaginary opposing argument brought up only to be easily refuted.

EXAMPLE: Some say that sunny days are good. But if all days were sunny, we'd never have rain, and without rain, we'd have famine and death.

Non Sequitur

An argument whose conclusion does not follow from its premises.

EXAMPLE: People in the U.S. pay more for health care, so quality is inevitably high.

Circular Reasoning

A fallacy in which the premises and the conclusion are essentially the same.

EXAMPLE: If such actions were not illegal, then they would not be prohibited by the law.

Bandwagon Appeal

An argument for a certain idea based solely on the fact that it is popular.

EXAMPLE: The governor has high approval ratings; he is therefore doing a good job.

Red Herring

A fallacy in which an irrelevant topic is presented in order to divert attention from the original issue.

EXAMPLE: Protestors worried about abortion ending lives should spend more time investigating the impact of handguns in childhood deaths.