**Rhetorical Devices List**

Anecdote A brief story or tale told by a character in a piece of literature

Aphorism A concise statement designed to make a point or illustrate a commonly held belief. The

writings of Benjamin Franklin contain many aphorisms, such as "Early to bed and early

to rise/Make a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Contradiction A direct opposition between things compared; inconsistency

Apostrophe A figure of speech in which a person, thing, or abstract quality is addressed as if present;

for example, the invocation to the muses usually found in epic poetry.

Oxymoron A figure of speech that combines two apparently contradictory elements, as in "jumbo

shrimp" or "deafening silence."

Allusion —A figure of speech which makes brief, even casual reference to a historical or literary

figure, event, or object to create a resonance in the reader or to apply a symbolic meaning

to the character or object of which the allusion consists

Syllogism A form of deduction. An extremely subtle, sophisticated, or deceptive argument

Satire A literary style used to make fun of or ridicule an idea or human vice or weakness

Delayed sentence A sentence that withholds its main idea until the end. For example: Just as he bent to tie his shoe, a car hit him.

Sarcasm A sharp caustic remark. A form of verbal irony in which apparent praise is actually

bitterly or harshly critical. For example, a coach saying to a player who misses the ball,

"Nice catch."

Expletive A single word or short phrase intended to emphasize surrounding words. Commonly,

expletives are set off by commas. Examples: in fact, of course, after all, certainly

Irony A situation or statement characterized by significant difference between what is expected

or understood and what actually happens or is meant. Irony is frequently humorous, and

can be sarcastic when using words to imply the opposite of what they normally mean

Eulogy A speech or writing in praise of a person or thing; an oration in honor of a deceased

person

Paradox A statement that seems contradictory, but is actually true.

Epiphany A sudden or intuitive insight or perception into the reality or essential meaning of

something usually brought on by a simple or common occurrence or experience

Onomatopoeia A word capturing or approximating the sound of what it describes, such as buzz or hiss.

Diction An author's choice of words to convey a tone or effect

Hyperbole An overstatement characterized by exaggerated language

Analogy Comparison of two things that are alike in some respects. Metaphors and similes are both

types of analogy

Inductive Conclusion or type of reasoning whereby observation or information about a part of a

class is applied to the class as a whole. Contrast with deductive.

Nostalgia Desire to return in thought or fact to a former time

Chiasmus Figure of speech by which the order of the terms in the first of parallel clauses is reversed

in the second. “Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the Church?”*-- T.*

*S. Eliot*,

Thesis Focus statement of an essay; premise statement upon which the point of view or

discussion in the essay is based. Antithesis—The juxtaposition of sharply contrasting

ideas in balanced or parallel words or phrases.

Litote Form of understatement in which the negative of the contrary is used to achieve emphasis

and intensity. For example, "She is not a bad cook." Or "No man ever followed his genius

until it misled him." Thoreau

Doppelganger Ghostly counterpart of a living person or an alter ego

Zeugma Grammatically correct linkage of one subject with two or more verbs or a verb with two

or more direct objects. The linking shows a relationship between ideas more clearly.

Ethos In dramatic literature, the moral element that determines a character's actions, rather than

thought or emotion.

Propaganda Information or rumor deliberately spread to help or harm a person, group, or institution

Didactic Intended for teaching or to teach a moral lesson

Formal Language Language that is lofty, dignified, or impersonal

Allegory Narrative form in which characters and actions have meanings outside themselves;

characters are usually personifications of abstract qualities

Abstract Not related to the concrete properties of an object; pertaining to ideas, concepts, or

qualities, as opposed to physical attributes

In medias res Opening a story in the middle of the action, requiring filling in past details by exposition

or flashback.

Colloquial Ordinary language; the vernacular. For example, depending on where in the United States

you live, a sandwich is called a sub, a grinder, or a hero.

Isocolon Parallel structure in which the parallel elements are similar not only in grammatical

structure, but also in length. For example, "An envious heart makes a treacherous ear"

(Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston).

Aesthetic Pertaining to the value of art for its own sake or for form

Juxtaposition Placing of two items side by side to create a certain effect, reveal an attitude, or

accomplish some other purpose

Elegy Poem or prose lamenting the death of a particular person. Perhaps the most famous elegy

is Thomas Grey's poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

Antihero Protagonist of a literary work who does not embody the traditional qualities of a hero

(e.g., honor, bravery, kindness, intelligence); for example, the protagonists created by

Byron in Don Juan and Childe Harold, and the characters of Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern in Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead

Catharsis Purification or cleansing of the spirit through the emotions of pity and terror as a witness

to a tragedy.

Epigraph Quote set at the beginning of a literary work or at its divisions to set the tone or suggest a

theme.

Motif Recurrent device, formula, or situation that often serves as a signal for the appearance of

a character or event

Parallelism Recurrent syntactical similarity where several parts of a sentence or several sentences are

expressed alike to show that the ideas in the parts or sentences equal in importance. It

also adds balance, rhythm, and clarity to the sentence. For example, "I have always

searched for, but never found the perfect painting for that wall."

Anaphora regular repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases or

clauses. For example, "We shall fight in the trenches. We shall fight on the oceans. We

shall fight in the sky."

Anadiplosis Repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the next clause. For example,

"The crime was common, common be the pain." (Alexander Pope)

Appeals to: authority, emotion, logic Rhetorical arguments in which the speaker: either claims to be

an expert or relies on information provided by experts (appeal to authority), attempts to

affect the listener's personal feelings (appeal to emotion), or attempts to persuade the

listener through use of deductive reasoning (appeal to logic).

Imagery Sensory details in a work; the use of figurative language to evoke a feeling, call to mind

an idea, or describe an object. Imagery involves any or all of the five senses

Euphemism Substitution of a milder or less direct expression for one that is harsh or blunt. For

example, using "passed away" for "dead."

Genre Term used to describe literary forms, such as tragedy, comedy, novel, or essay

Voice The acknowledged or unacknowledged source of words of the story; the speaker, a

"person" telling the story or poem.

Tone The attitude a literary work takes towards its subject and theme. It reflects the narrator's

attitude.

Theme The central or dominant idea or concern of a work; the main idea or meaning

Protagonist The chief character in a work of literature

Denotation The dictionary definition of a word; the direct and specific meaning

Mood The feeling or ambience resulting from the tone of a piece as well as the writer/narrator's

attitude and point of view. The effect is created through descriptions of feelings or

objects that establish a particular feeling such as gloom, fear, or hope

Realism The literary practice of attempting to describe life and nature without idealization and

with attention to detail

Prose The ordinary of form of written language without metrical structure, as distinguished

from poetry or verse

Audience The person(s) reached by a piece of writing.

Asyndeton The practice of omitting conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses. In a list, it

gives a more extemporaneous effect and suggests the list may be incomplete. For

example, "He was brave, fearless, afraid of nothing."

Deductive The reasoning process by which a conclusion is drawn from set of premises and contains

no more facts than these premises

Assonance The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds, usually in successive or proximate

words.

Alliteration The repetition of initial consonant sounds or any vowel sounds within a formal grouping,

such as a poetic line or stanza, or in close proximity in prose

Consonance The repetition of two or more consonants with a change in the intervening vowels, such

as pitter-patter, splish-splash, and click-clack.

Invective The use of angry and insulting language in satirical writing

Point of view The view the reader gets of the action and characters in a story

Persona The voice or figure of the author who tells and structures the story and who may or may

not share of the values of the actual author.

Syntax The way words are put together to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. It is sentence

structure and how it influences the way a reader perceives a piece of writing.

Canon (canonical)— The works of an author that have been accepted as authentic.

Foreshadow To hint at or present things to come in a story or play

Begging the question To sidestep or evade the real problem.

Personification Treating an abstraction or nonhuman object as if it were a person by giving it human

qualities.

Anachronism Use of historically inaccurate details in a text; for example, depicting a 19th-century

character using a computer. Some authors employ anachronisms for humorous effect, and

some genres, such as science fiction or fantasy, make extensive use of anachronism

Ambiguity —Use of language in which multiple meanings are possible. Ambiguity can be

unintentional through insufficient focus on the part of the writer; in good writing,

ambiguity is frequently intentional in the form of multiple connotative meanings, or

situations in which either the connotative or the denotative meaning can be valid in a

reading.

Connotation What is implied by a word. For example, the words sweet, gay, and awesome have

connotations that are quite different from their actual definitions.

Transition words Words and devices that bring unity and coherence to a piece of writing. Examples:

*however*, *in addition*, and *on the other hand.*