

# LITERARY DEVICES

Assuming an argument is logically sound, skillful use of the following strategies increases the rhetorical effectiveness of language without sacrificing meaning. These devices are extremely effective ways for speakers to engage a sympathetic audience with pathos, while challenging them intellectually. These terms are often discussed by name on the AP exam.

## RHYMES: DEVICES OF DICTION

Rhyme refers to any rhythmic arrangement of sounds within words, wherever those sounds occur in words. Because rhyme does not depend upon repetition of whole words but rather the rhythmic arrangement of the sounds within words, it is a product of diction (word choice) rather than syntax (word order).

**Alliteration:** repetition of sounds at the beginning of words and phrases

**Examples:** "... The only verdict is vengeance; a vendetta held as a votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous. Verily, this vichyssoise of verbiage veers most verbose, so let me simply add that it's my very good honor to meet you and you may call me V." – V's speech from *V for Vendetta*

Softly and slowly darkness settles over the sleepy city

**Assonance:** repetition of stressed vowel sounds

**Examples:** "Smoothly and soothingly the wind blew through the empty room"

"Feel the shot, ody rock, rock it, don't stop. Run around, up and down, around the clock" - Black Eyed Peas

"Yertle the Turtle" by Dr. Seuss

**Consonance:** repetition of stressed consonant sounds

**Example:** The mass of serpents twists and slithers

"all mammals named Sam are clammy"

## SCHEMES: DEVICES OF SYNTAX

For the most part, schemes, or syntactic devices, do not depend upon the meanings of the words they repeat, but upon the whole words themselves. Schemes draw attention to the ideas they describe, while lending rhythm that, if artfully arranged, encourages an audience to continue listening.

**Anadiplosis:** beginning a clause with the last word of the previous clause

**Examples** "Scissors cut paper; paper covers rock; rock crushes scissors; scissors fall apart." *Arizona* by Pedro the Lion

"Pleasure might cause her to read, reading might make her know; knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain." Phillip Sydney, Sonnet 1 from *Astrophel and Stella*

**Anaphora:** repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses

**Examples:** “Take my heart, take my soul, take my life.”

“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...”

— Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

**Epistrophe:** repetition of a word or phrase at the end of successive clauses

**Examples:** “this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. — Abraham Lincoln in the *Gettysburg Address*

“We want the funk. Give up the funk. We need the funk. Gotta have that funk.” – Give up the Funk by Parliament

**Epanalepsis:** beginning and ending a clause with the same word.

**Examples:** “A lie begets a lie.”

“Next time there won’t be a next time.”

“Blood hath brought blood, and blows have answer’d blows.”

**Chiasmus:** two corresponding pairs of words arranged in parallel inverse order.

**Examples:** “Fair is foul and foul is fair.”

“Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.”  
John F. Kennedy

You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.” Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Fair is foul and
X
foul is fair

## TROPES: DEVICES OF IDEA

Tropes arrange ideas in novel and interesting ways, simultaneously challenging and engaging the listener. Because the ideas are arranged uniquely while the words retain an rhythmic, melodic character, the listener is compelled to listen further, thus allowing him or her more time to decipher the challenging ideas at the core of the argument.

**Parallelism:** similar syntactic structure in successive phrases (can also fall under devices of syntax)

**Examples:** “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”

“Veni, vidi, vici (I came, I saw, I conquered).”

**Antithesis:** contrasting opposite ideas in parallel syntactic structure

**Examples:** “Give me liberty or give me death”

“When there is need of silence, you speak, and when there is need of speech, you are dumb”