

Glossary of Rhetorical Terms & Devices

Abstract	refers to language that describes concepts rather than concrete images (ideas and qualities rather than observable or specific things, people, or places). The observable or “physical” is usually described in concrete language.
Allegory	an extended narrative in prose or verse in which characters, events, and settings represent abstract qualities and in which the writer intends a second meaning to be read beneath the surface of the story; the underlying meaning may be moral, religious, political, social, or satiric.
Allusion	a brief reference to a person, place, event, or passage in a work of literature or the <i>Bible</i> assumed to be sufficiently well known to be recognized by the reader
Anaphora	the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses.
Anastrophe	inversion of the usual syntactical order of words for rhetorical effect “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country....”
Antithesis	the presentation of two contrasting images. The ideas are balanced by word, phrase, clause, or paragraphs. “To be or not to be...” “The long and the short of it...”
Appeal to authority	an ethical appeal ; citation of information from people recognized for their special knowledge of a subject for the purpose of strengthening a speaker’s or writer’s argument
Appeal to fear	an emotional appeal ; uses information likely to frighten the audience for the purpose of strengthening a speaker’s or writer’s argument
Appeal to patriotism	an emotional appeal ; appeals to the audience’s love of country, persuading them to act by implying they are treasonous if they choose not to (similar to appeal to pride)
Appeal to pride	an emotional appeal ; used to convince the audience that they must act in order to maintain dignity and self-respect (see also appeal to patriotism)
Argumentation	writing that attempts to prove the validity of a point of view or an idea by presenting reasoned arguments; persuasive writing is a form of argumentation
Bandwagon	an attempt to strengthen an argument by convincing the audience that accepting the writer’s or speaker’s view will put them on the popular or apparently winning side
Concrete	refers to language that describes specific, observable things, people, or places, rather than ideas or qualities.
Connotation	implied or suggested meaning of a word because of its association in the reader’s mind.
Contrast	to compare in order to emphasize striking differences
Deduction	the process of moving from a general rule to a specific example
Denotation	Literal meaning of a word as defined
Diction	word choice, an element of style; Diction creates tone, attitude, and style, as well as meaning. Different types and arrangements of words have significant effects on meaning.
Discourse	spoken or written language, including literary works; the four traditionally classified modes of discourse are description, exposition, narration, and persuasion.

Emotional words	use of words likely to engage strong emotions in the audience
Epigraph	the use of a quotation at the beginning of a work that hints at its theme. Hemingway begins <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> with two epigraphs. One of them is “You are all a lost generation” by Gertrude Stein.
Ethos	an ethical appeal When a writer tries to persuade the audience to respect and believe him or her based on a presentation of image of self through the text. Reputation is sometimes a factor in ethical appeal, but in all cases the aim is to gain the audience’s confidence.
Euphemism	a more acceptable and usually more pleasant way of saying something that might be inappropriate or uncomfortable. “He went to his final reward” is a common euphemism for “he died.” Euphemisms are also often used to obscure the reality of a situation. The military uses “collateral damage” to indicate civilian deaths in a military operation.
Generalization	When a writer bases a claim upon an isolated example or asserts that a claim is certain rather than probable. Sweeping generalizations occur when a writer asserts that a claim applies to all instances instead of some.
Hyperbole	an extravagant exaggeration of fact, used whether for serious or comic effect
Induction	the process that moves from a given series of specifics to a generalization
Inference	a conclusion one can draw from the presented details
Logical reasoning	arguing according to the principles of correct reasoning; showing what can be expected because of what has gone before
Logos	a logical appeal; When a writer tries to persuade the audience based on statistics facts, and reasons
Metonymy	using a part to name the whole, or using the name of one thing for that of another associated with it. e.g. Calling the king, “the throne” or “the crown;” referring to the President as “The White House”
Oversimplification	When a writer denies the complexity of the issues in an argument
Oxymoron	a figure of speech composed of contradictory words or phrases, such as “wise fool,” bitter-sweet, “pretty ugly,” “jumbo shrimp,” “cold fire”
Paradox	a statement that seems to contradict itself but that turns out to have a rational meaning, as in this quotation from Thoreau: “I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.”
Parallelism	using the same part of speech or syntactic structure in (1) each element of a series, (2) before and after coordinating conjunctions (and, but, yet, or, for, nor), or (3) after each of a pair of correlative conjunctions (not only...but also, neither...nor, both...and, etc.)
Pathos	an emotional appeal; when a writer appeals to readers’ emotions (often through pathos) to excite and involve them in the argument.
Persuasion	a form of argumentation, one of the four modes of discourse; language intended to convince through appeals to reason or emotion.
Repetition	repeating words or phrases for emphasis when speaking or writing
Rhetoric	the effective use of language (speaking or writing) for the purpose of persuading an audience
Rhetorical question	to ask a question of an audience to engage them without having a response from the audience
Sarcasm	Verbal irony; usually taunting, sneering, cutting, or caustic remark(s)
Stereotype	a character who represents a trait that is usually attributed to a particular social or racial group and who lacks individuality; a conventional pattern, expression or idea.