

# Rhetorical Devices

## 1. Antithesis

Antithesis is a literary device that refers to the [juxtaposition](#) of two opposing elements through the parallel grammatical structure. The word antithesis, meaning absolute opposite, is derived from Greek for “[setting](#) opposite,” indicating when something or someone is in direct [contrast](#) or the obverse of another thing or person.

### Examples of **Antithesis** in Everyday Conversation

- Go big or go home.
- Spicy food is heaven on the tongue but hell in the tummy.
- Those who can, do; those who can't do, teach.
- Get busy living or get busy dying.
- Speech is silver but [silence](#) is gold.
- No pain, no gain.
- It's not a show, friends; it's show business.
- No guts, no glory.
- A moment on the lips; a lifetime on the hips.
- If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail.

Antithesis can be an effective rhetorical device in terms of calling attention to drastic differences between opposing ideas and concepts. By highlighting the contrast side-by-side with the exact same structure, the [speaker](#) is able to impact an audience in a memorable and significant way. Here are some common examples of antithesis from [famous](#) speeches:

- “I have [a dream](#) that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their [character](#).” (Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream”)
- “The world will little note, nor long [remember](#) what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.” (Abraham Lincoln “The Gettysburg Address”)
- ““Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not.” (Edward Kennedy quoting Robert F. Kennedy during [eulogy](#))

- “We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom, symbolizing an end as well as a beginning, signifying renewal as well as change.” (John F. Kennedy “Presidential Inaugural Speech”)
- “You see, for any champion to succeed, he must have a team — a very incredible, special team; people that he can depend on, count on, and rely upon through everything — the highs and lows, the wins and losses, the victories and failures, and even the joys and heartaches that happen both on and off the court.” (Michael Chang “[Induction](#) Speech for Tennis Hall of Fame”)

## 2. Zeugma

### Examples Used in Everyday Conversation

Zeugma can be used to create drama, add emotion or produce a level of shock value. While there can still be an underlying sense of confusion, generally, a zeugma is used purposely.

- All over Ireland, the farmers grew potatoes, barley and bored.
- He fished for trout and compliments.
- He opened his mind and his wallet every time he went out with her.
- She firmly held her tongue and her hand.
- On our first date, I held my breath and the car door for her.
- When he came to pick me up, I opened my door and my heart to him.
- The disgruntled worker quickly took his belongings and his leave.
- She kicked that bad habit and soon after the bucket.
- The student observed the specimen with a microscope and some disgust.
- The storm sank my boat and my dreams.
- In quick succession, Susan lost her job, her house and her mind!
- She had already exhausted her kids and her patience by the end of the first day of summer vacation.

All of these examples serve a particular purpose. Look at the example, "The storm sank my boat and my dreams." This zeugma translates to a more powerful meaning. Now, the feelings of sadness over the loss of a treasured boat and lifelong dream are more pronounced than something literal like, "My boat sank in the storm. I couldn't realize my dreams."

## Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Jane Austen is known for her memorable, timeless stories. But she added a few zeugma examples into her work too.

"Yet time and her aunt moved slowly — and her patience and her ideas were nearly worn out before the tete-a-tete was over."

## The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

When it comes to purposeful prose, Mark Twain was a master. See how he used zeugma in this passage.

"They tugged and tore at each other's hair and clothes, punched and scratched each other's nose, and covered themselves with dust and glory."

## 3. Asyndeton

Asyndeton is derived from the Greek word *asyndeton*, which means "unconnected." It is a stylistic device used in literature and poetry to intentionally eliminate conjunctions between the phrases, and in the [sentence](#), yet maintain grammatical accuracy. This literary tool helps in reducing the indirect meaning of the [phrase](#) and presents it in a concise form. It was first used in Greek and Latin literature.

## Difference Between Syndeton and Asyndeton

Syndeton and asyndeton are opposite to one another. Syndeton includes the addition of multiple conjunctions, such as in this example: "He eats **and** sleeps **and** drinks." On the other hand, asyndeton is the elimination, or leaving out, of conjunctions, such as in this example: "He eats, sleeps, drinks."

Each creates a completely different effect. Syndeton slows down the [rhythm](#) of speech, and makes it moderate, whereas asyndeton speeds up the rhythm of the speech.

## Use of **Asyndeton** in Sentences

1. They observe, they take up, they complete it.
2. Once he is lazy, second he is lethargic, third, he is a failure.
3. Once they leave, they leave forever, they disappear.
4. The more you talk, the more you listen, the more you absorb.
5. Going fast, they leave the road, they enter the fields.

Example #1: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

**IAGO**

“Call up her father.

Rouse him. Make after him, Poison his delight,

Proclaim him in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,

And, though he in a fertile climate dwell...”

In this excerpt, Shakespeare has eliminated conjunctions deliberately. There is a shortage of the conjunctions *and*, *for*, *or*, and *but*, which are required to join the sentences. Due to this, the words have been emphasized, and feelings of anger and jealousy are articulated explicitly.

Example #2: *The Scholar-Gipsy* (By Matthew Arnold)

“Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes!

No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,

Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,

Nor the cropp'd herbage shoot another head...

Thou hast not lived, why should'st thou perish, so?

Thou hadst *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire;

Else wert thou long since numbered with *the dead*...

This is a good example of asyndeton. The conjunctions are missing in the sentences, such as the second and sixth lines are not connected with adjoining words. However, it produces speed in the *poem*.

Example #3: *The Winter's Tale* (By William Shakespeare)

"Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?

Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career

Of laughter with a sigh? (a note infallible

Of breaking honesty!) horsing *foot* on foot? "

In this excerpt, we can observe both types of asyndeton. The first type (between the words) such as "from" is removed between the words "leaning" and "cheek" and similarly the second type (between the sentences) with the sentences not being joined by conjunctions.

Example #4: *Rhetoric* (By Aristotle)

"This is *the villain* among you who deceived you, who cheated you, who meant to betray you completely..."

The word "and" is not featured in the given lines, which could have functioned as a conjunction here. Aristotle believed that asyndeton could be effective if used in the ending of the texts. Here he himself employed this device.

Example #5: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (By James Joyce)

"Consciousness of place came ebbing back to him slowly over a vast tract of time unlit, unfelt, un-lived..."

Joyce has also used this device, omitting the conjunctions in order to give rhythm and pace to the text. Here, we can see the elimination of conjunctions, which could have joined the words unlit, unfelt, and unlive. This creates a frantic and hurried effect.

## 4. Chiasmus

Chiasmus is a rhetorical device in which two or more [clauses](#) are balanced against each other by the reversal of their structures in order to produce an artistic effect.

Let us try to understand chiasmus with the help of an example:

“Never let a Fool Kiss You or a Kiss Fool You.”

Notice that the second half of this [sentence](#) is an inverted form of the first half, both grammatically and logically. In the simplest sense, the term chiasmus applies to almost all “criss-cross” structures, and this is a concept that is common these days. In its strict classical sense, however, the function of chiasmus is to reverse grammatical structure or ideas of sentences, given that the same words and phrases are not repeated.

### **Example #1: Aeschylus, 5th Century B.C.**

“It is not the oath that makes us believe the man,  
but the man the oath.”

### **Example #2: Bias, 6th Century B.C.**

“Love as if you would one day hate,  
and hate as if you would one day love.”

### **Example #3: Socrates, 5th Century B.C.**

“Bad men live that they may eat and drink,  
whereas good men eat and drink that they may live.”

# Examples of Chiasmus from Literature

## Example #1: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

“But O, what damned minutes tells he o’er  
Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves.”

## Example #2: *Essay on Man* (By Alexander Pope)

“His **time** a **moment**, and a **point** his **space**.”

## Example #3: *Do I Love You Because You’re Beautiful?* (By Oscar Hammerstein)

“Do [I love you](#) because you’re beautiful?  
Or are you beautiful because I love you?”

## Example #4: *Paradise Lost* (By John Milton)

“...in his face  
Divine compassion visibly appeared,  
Love without end, and without measure Grace...”

## Example #5: *Quote* (By Judith Viorst)

“Lust is what makes you keep wanting to do it, Even when you have no desire to be with each other. Love is what makes you keep wanting to be with each other, Even when you have no desire to do it.”

## Example #6: *Quote* (By John Marshall)

“In the blue grass region,  
A [paradox](#) was born:  
The **corn** was full of **kernels**  
And the **colonels** full of **corn**.”

## Example #7: *Quote* (By Alfred P. Solan)

“Some have an idea that the reason we in this country **discard things so readily** is because **we have so much**. The facts are exactly opposite – the reason **we have so much** is simply because **we discard things so readily**.”

**Example #8: Quote (By Voltaire)**

“The instinct of a man is  
to **pursue** everything that **flies from him**, and  
to **fly from** all that **pursues** him.”

**Example #9: Quote (By Thomas Szaz)**

“When **religion was strong** and **science weak**, men  
mistook magic for medicine;  
Now, **when science is strong** and **religion weak**, men  
mistake medicine for magic.”

## **5. Metonymy**

Metonymy is a [figure of speech](#) in which one [object](#) or idea takes the place of another with which it has a close association. In fact, metonymy means “change of name.” As a literary device, it is a way of replacing an object or idea with something related to it instead of stating what is actually meant. Metonymy enables writers to express a word or thought in a different way by using a closely related word or thought. Therefore, this is a method for writers to vary their expression and produce an effect for the reader.

*Silver screen* is an excellent use of metonymy. This [phrase](#) is a figure of speech, meaning it's used for effect rather than literal meaning. Also, it is a substitute concept for movies, movie theaters, etc. “Screen” is related to the way movies were traditionally shown (or screened) in a theater. In addition, “silver” is associated with original black and white films and the glitter of Hollywood. As metonymy, it can take the place of words such as movie, theater, film, etc. In this way, words such as movie or film aren't overused.

# Common Examples of Metonymy

Here are some examples of metonymy that may be found in everyday expression:

- **Hollywood** (represents associations with the movie industry)
- **Turf** (represents associations with area of residence or expertise)
- **Feds** (represents associations with government law enforcement)
- **Press** (represents associations with news organizations)
- **Breeze** (represents associations with something that is simple, straightforward, or easy)
- **Broadway** (represents associations with New York [drama](#) productions and stage fame)
- **Coast** (represents associations with seaside, ocean area, regions of land near water)
- **Booze** (represents associations with alcohol or liquor)
- **Academics** (represents associations with school, college, university, classes, or studying)
- **Management** (represents associations with administration, leadership, or person in charge of something)

## Famous Metonymy

### Titles

- “Rags to Riches” (American television series)
- “The Crown” (Netflix television series)
- “He Got Game” (American film)
- “Hurtin’ (on the Bottle)” (song, Margo Price)
- “Guys and Dolls” (American stage musical)

### Quotes

- “In the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- “The circus arrives without warning.” (Erin Morgenstern)
- “Yesterday’s gone on down the river...” (Larry McMurtry)
- “But I, being poor, have only my dreams” (W.B. Yeats)
- “Be the rainbow in someone’s cloud.” (Maya Angelou)

## 6. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a [figure of speech](#) in which a part of something is used to signify the whole, or vice-versa. In fact, it's derived from the Greek word *synekdoche*: "simultaneous meaning." As a literary device, synecdoche allows for a smaller component of something to stand in for the larger whole, in a rhetorical manner. Synecdoche can work in the opposite direction as well, in which the larger whole stands in for a smaller component of something. Synecdoche is a helpful device for writers to express a word or idea in a different way by using an aspect of that word or idea. This allows for variation of expression and produces an effect for the reader.

For example, a common synecdoche for proposing marriage is to [ask](#) for a person's "hand." This is a figure of speech in the sense that asking for someone's hand is for effect, not intended literally. The "hand" in this example of synecdoche is the part that signifies the whole person receiving the marriage proposal and reflects the symbolic placement of a wedding ring. As a literary device, synecdoche is a means for writers to avoid overusing words or phrases and create an artistic form of expression.

Here are some examples of synecdoche that may be found in everyday expression:

- **The White House** (signifies the U.S. president or executive branch)
- **Wearing heels** (signifies high-heeled shoes)
- **Green thumb** (signifies person who is good at gardening)
- **The Pentagon** (signifies U.S. military leaders)
- **England** (signifies Great Britain)
- **Boots on the ground** (signifies soldiers)
- **Paper or plastic** (signifies type of shopping bag)
- **Stars and stripes** (signifies U.S. flag)
- **Suits** (signifies people in business)
- **Wheels** (signifies a vehicle)
- **Pearly gates** (signifies Heaven)
- **Behind bars** (signifies being in jail)
- **Threads** (signifies clothing)
- **Tickle the ivories** (signifies playing [piano](#) keys)
- **Twinkle toes** (signifies a dancer)

## Examples of Synecdoche as Character Names

Fictional characters often feature synecdoche in their names to indicate an aspect or part of them that signifies their nature as a whole. These names can be meant in a genuine or ironic way. Here are some examples:

- The Brain (Alan from children's television series "Arthur")
- Fang (Hagrid's dog from "Harry Potter" series)
- Red (Ellis Boyd Redding from "The Shawshank Redemption")

- Hot Lips (Margaret Houlihan from “M\*A\*S\*H”)
- Whiskers (cat from “Toy [Story](#)”)
- Spot (dog from “Dick and Jane”)
- Stickers (nickname for Lightning McQueen in “Cars”)
- Blackbeard (pirate)
- Freckles (title [character](#) of Gene Stratton-Porter [novel](#))
- Two-Face (villain in DC Comics)

## Famous Examples of Synecdoche

Think you haven’t heard of any [famous](#) synecdoche? Here are some well-known and recognizable examples of this figure of speech:

- All hands on deck
- Faces in the crowd
- Lend me your ears
- Lend me a hand
- Keep the change
- Have a nice day
- You have my heart
- I know those voices
- Keep your eyes up here