

RHETORICAL DEVICES/STRATEGIES

The following devices/strategies will help you understand the techniques writers use for effect. They will also help you in your own writing. Being able to notice these devices/strategies in use will help you critique a writer's work. This is not a complete list, but provides a good foundation.

Rhetoric : the skill of using spoken or written communication effectively; the art of guiding the reader or listener to agreement with the writer or speaker.

ad hominem: the fallacy in ethical argument of attempting to discredit a logical argument by attacking the character of its author

Example: "Bill claims that $1+1=2$. But he is a Republican, so his claim is false."

alternatives: consideration of other possibilities

analogy: making clear a concept or idea by showing its similarity to a more familiar concept

analysis of cause: identifying the forces responsible for an effect

anticipate an objection: to address the anticipated objection by addressing it before anyone else can raise the objection

antithesis: a statement of purpose opposed to an earlier assertion or thesis

aphorism: a brief statement of an opinion or elemental truth.

Example: Ben Franklin wrote, "Glass, China, and Reputation, are easily crack'd, and never well mended."

appeal: an address to the audience, usually through the pronoun "you" or "we," used to link the speaker to listeners

assertion: the suggestions of a point for consideration as true or possible

concession: an acknowledgement of objections to a proposal

consequences of an event: listing or indicating what resulted from a particular event or condition

correction of erroneous views of statement (not a technical term): pointing out where another's observations need modification or correction

corrective measures: proposing measures to eliminate undesirable conditions

deduction: arguing from a general point to a particular application

definition: to explain/clarify a concept like "excessive violence" to help resolve a question by narrowing or clarifying meaning

description: the enumeration (listing) of characteristics of objects that belong to the same class (this is more like classification)

direct address: to speak directly; to remove any separation between speaker and audience

emotional appeal (by prophecy, pledge, warning, or advice): a speaker's efforts to engage feelings in the audience

ethos, pathos, and logos: the three main rhetorical appeals put forth by Aristotle. "Ethos" means a speaker appeals to your sense of ethics, presenting himself as trustworthy; "pathos" appeals to your sense of emotion (pity); "logos" means appealing to logic.

euphemism: the use of a safer or nicer word for something others find inappropriate or unappealing

Example: Saying someone "moved on to greener pastures" instead of "died."

extended metaphor: a protracted metaphor or conceit (an elaborate or exaggerated metaphor, often to the point of absurdity) which makes a series of parallel comparisons

fallacy: a failure of logical reasoning. Fallacies appear to make an argument reasonable, but falsely so. Be able to spot when an author is not making sense or is failing to convince.

inquiry as introduction: setting an essay in motion by raising a question and suggesting that the answer may be interesting or important

premise: another word for a claim. A premise is a statement of truth, at least to the person making the argument.

pun: a play on words, usually calling humorous attention to a particular point.

Example: Santa's helpers are known as subordinate Clauses.

rebuttal: final opposition to an assertion; disapproval or refutation

red herring: an argument that distracts the reader by raising issues irrelevant to the cause. It is like being given too many suspects in a murder mystery.

reduce to the absurd (Reductio ad Absurdum): to show the foolishness of an argument by taking the argument to its logical conclusion

Example: Ralph can do anything. He has built a wall so tall that no one can jump over it. But if no one can jump over it, then Ralph can't jump over it, so (since Ralph can do anything) it follows that Ralph both can and cannot jump over the wall. But this is absurd, so the initial assumption that Ralph can do anything must be false.

rhetorical question: a question of an audience to engage them without having a response from that audience

specious reasoning: having only apparent logic; a position that is not truly logical but is presented as such

Example: It has been a very cold month in New York; therefore, global warming does not exist.

thesis: a statement of the idea you want to prove; a controlling idea

under/over statement: to say considerably more or less than a condition warrants (usually for ironic contrast)