

- Rhetorical devices for speechwriters -

Alliteration

*Repetition of words beginning with the same
consonant sounds*

Somewhere at this very moment a child is being born in America. Let it be our cause to give that child a happy home, a healthy family, and a hopeful future.

Bill Clinton -- Democratic National Convention, 1992

Allusion

Figure of speech that makes reference to a person, place, event, literary work, myth or work of art

And I can pledge our nation to a goal: When we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side.

George W. Bush -- Inaugural Address, 2000

Anadiplosis

Repetition of the last word of a sentence with the first word in the next

Having power makes [totalitarian leadership] isolated; isolation breeds insecurity; insecurity breeds suspicion and fear; suspicion and fear breed violence.

Zbigniew Brzezinski -- The Permanent Purge, 1956

Analogy

An explicit comparison between two things which could be metaphor or simile

...helping to train and equip host nation forces in the midst of an insurgency is akin to building an advanced aircraft while it is in flight, while it is being designed, and while it is being shot at. There is nothing easy about it.

General David Petraeus -- ISAF Confirmation Hearing Statement, 2010

Anaphora

Repetition at the beginning

People of the world – look at Berlin!

Look at Berlin, where Germans and Americans...

Look at Berlin, where the determination...

Look at Berlin, where the bullet holes...

People of the world – look at Berlin...

Barack Obama -- Berlin Speech, 2008

Anesis

The addition of a clause, sentence or phrase to diminish what has been stated previously

This year's space budget is three times what it was in January 1961 ... that budget now stands at 5 billion ... a staggering sum, though somewhat less than we pay for cigarettes and cigars every year.

John F. Kennedy -- Rice University Address On Space Exploration, 1962

Antimetabole

Repetition of words in reverse

I, too, was born in the slum. But just because you're born in the slum does not mean the slum is born in you, and you can rise above it if your mind is made up.

Jesse Jackson -- Democratic National Convention, 1984

Antithesis

Parallel structure to highlight contrast

...to those he touched and who sought to touch him:
“Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not.”

Edward Kennedy -- Eulogy For Robert F. Kennedy, 1968

Apposition

Noun phrases placed side by side with one side defining or modifying the other

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, a great and good President, ... a believer in the dignity and equality of all human beings, a fighter for justice, an apostle of peace, has been snatched from our midst by the bullet of an assassin.

Justice Earl Warren -- Eulogy, 1963

Assonance

Repetition of words that contain the same vowel sounds

Our flag is red, white, and blue -- but our nation is rainbow. Red, yellow, brown, black, and white, we're all precious in God's sight.

Jesse Jackson -- Democratic National Convention, 1984

Asyndeton

The omission of conjunctions deliberately omitted from a series of related clauses

Now as an engineer, a planner, a businessman, I see clearly the value to our nation of a strong system of free enterprise based on increased productivity and adequate wages.

Jimmy Carter -- Democratic National Convention, 1976

Climactic Order (Climax)

Repetition of words or phrases in ascending order

Who was not embarrassed when the administration handed a major propaganda victory...

Who does not feel a growing sense of unease...

Who does not feel rising alarm when the question in any discussion of foreign policy is no longer...

Ronald Reagan -- Republican National Convention, 1980

Conduplicatio

Repetition of a keyword over successive phrases or clauses

There is no question but that this nation cannot stand still, because we are in a deadly competition, a competition not only with the men in the Kremlin, but the men in Peking. We're ahead in this competition, as Senator Kennedy, I think, has implied.

Richard Nixon -- First Debate, 1960

Distinctio

Figure of explanation or elaboration

There are evolving terrorist threats -- they don't go away. We're now dealing with the emerging cybersecurity threat, and when I say 'emerging' -- it really is here -- we have huge responsibilities under that now which are somewhat new."

Janet Napolitano -- Press Briefing, 2013

Enumeratio

Amplification in which a subject is divided into parts

It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied...

It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold...

It is a violation of human rights when women are doused ...

Hillary Clinton -- Women's Rights Are Human Rights, 1995

Epanalepsis

*Repetition of initial word/s at the end of the same clause
or sentence*

A minimum wage that is not a liveable wage can never
be a minimum wage.

Ralph Nader -- Speech To The NAACP, 2000

Epistrophe (Epiphora, Antistrophe)

*Repetition of words at the end of successive phrases,
clauses or sentences*

...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 -- Gettysburg Address, 1863

Epitheton

Descriptive word/s to further characterise something

Now, in this anxious autumn from those heroic men,
there comes back an answering appeal.

Dwight D. Eisenhower -- Stump Speech, 1952

Exemplum

Figure of amplification to illustrate a point

I've come to understand that a cultural war is raging across our land. For example, I marched for civil rights with Dr. King in 1963. But when I told an audience last year that white pride is just as valid as black pride or red pride or anyone else's pride, they called me a racist.

Charlton Heston -- Winning The Cultural War, 1999

Hyperbole

Exaggeration for emphasis

Why you got scars and knots on your head from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. And every one of those scars is evidence against the American white man.

Malcolm X -- Unknown

Hypophora

A rhetorical question that is answered by the speaker

When the enemy struck on that June day of 1950, what did America do? It did what it always has done in all its times of peril. It appealed to the heroism of its youth.

Dwight D. Eisenhower -- I Shall Go to Korea Address Speech, 1952

Irony

*Words that differ between what is said and
what is meant*

I'd like to thank the elite media for doing something that, quite frankly, I wasn't sure could be done, and that's unifying the Republican Party and all of America in support of Senator McCain and Governor Palin.

Mike Huckabee -- Republican National Convention, 2008

Metaphor

Implied comparison

...our people have always mustered the determination to construct from these crises the pillars of our history. Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our Nation...

Bill Clinton -- Inaugural Address, 1993

Metonymy

A figure of speech substituting one name for another

Until this progress is felt not just on Wall Street but Main Street we cannot be satisfied.

Barack Obama -- Wall Street Reform, 2010

Paradox

Apparent contradiction which is nonetheless true

An apostle of non-violence has been the victim of violence.

Hubert H. Humphrey -- Remarks On The Assassination of MLK, Jr., 1968

Parallelism

Parallel structure to present similarity

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

John F. Kennedy -- Inaugural Address, 1961

Personification

Endowing human qualities to non-human entities

Once again, the heart of America is heavy. The spirit of America weeps for a tragedy that denies the very meaning of our land.

Lyndon B. Johnson -- Address on the Assassination of MLK, Jr., 1968

Polyptoton

Words, derived from the same root, used in repetition

Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself

Franklin Delano Roosevelt -- Inaugural Address, 1933

Polysyndeton

Emphasis through a series of intentional conjunctions

We must change that deleterious environment of the 80's, that environment which was characterised by greed and hatred and selfishness and mega-mergers and debt overhang...

Barbara Jordan -- Democratic National Convention, 1992

Pun

Words that surprise with a second meaning

To those waiting with bated breath for that favourite media catchphrase, the 'u-turn', I have only one thing to say: 'You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning.'

Margaret Thatcher -- Conservative Party Conference, 1980

Rhetorical Question

A question that doesn't require an answer

Can anyone look at our reduced standing in the world today and say, "Let's have four more years of this"?

Ronald Reagan -- Republican National Convention, 1980

Repetition

Repeated use of grammatical structure, words or sounds

We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

Winston Churchill -- We Shall Fight On The Beaches, 1940

Scesis Onomaton

Repetition of an idea using similar words

America is all about opportunity. That's why my parents came to America more than 40 years ago. And that's why most of your parents came here generations ago in search of an opportunity, a chance, a fair shake.

Bobby Jindal -- Second Louisiana Gubernatorial Inaugural Address, 2012

Sententia

Brief moral saying, aphorism or maxim to sum up preceding material

So, I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. 'Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Martin Luther King, Jr. -- I've Been To The Mountaintop, 1968

Simile

Direct comparison

...until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Martin Luther King, Jr. -- I Have A Dream, 1963

Symploce

Repetition that combines anaphora and epistrophe in successive clauses

And while there will be time enough to debate our continuing differences, now is the time to recognise that that which unites us is greater than that which divides us.

Al Gore -- Concession Speech, 2000

Synecdoche

A part which stands for the whole

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma...

Barack Obama -- Election Night, 2008

Understatement

Words that minimise the significance but surprise the audience when they realise the importance

I gave Taliban leaders a choice: turn over the terrorists or face your ruin. They chose unwisely.

George W. Bush -- Shanghai CEO Summit, 2001

Compiled by Jeremy Porter for the purposes of writing speeches and sharing with you.

Thank you:

Wikipedia - www.wikipedia.org

American Rhetoric - www.americanrhetoric.com

Lehrman, Robert. The Political Speechwriter's Companion. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010

www.jrmyprtr.com