A Glossary of Rhetorical Terms with Examples

**Alliteration**: repetition of the same sound beginning several words in sequence.
*Let us go forth to lead the land we love. J. F. Kennedy, Inaugural
*Viri validis cum viribus luctant. Ennius
*Veni, vidi, vici. Julius Caesar

**Anacoluthon**: lack of grammatical sequence; a change in the grammatical construction within the same sentence.
*Agreements entered into when one state of facts exists -- are they to be maintained regardless of changing conditions? J. Diefenbaker

**Anaphora**: the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or lines.
*We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, 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. Churchill.
*Nihil agis, nihil moliris, nihil cogitas, quod non ego non modo audiam, sed etiam videam planeque sentiam. Cicero, In Catilinam

**Anastrophe**: transposition of normal word order; most often found in Latin in the case of prepositions and the words they control. Anastrophe is a form of hyperbaton.
*The helmsman steered; the ship moved on; yet never a breeze up blew. Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
*Isdem in oppidis, Cicero

**Antistrophe**: repetition of the same word or phrase at the end of successive clauses.
*In 1931, ten years ago, Japan invaded Manchukuo -- without warning. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia -- without warning. In 1938, Hitler occupied Austria -- without warning. In 1939, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia -- without warning. Later in 1939, Hitler invaded Poland -- without warning. And now Japan has attacked Malaya and Thailand -- and the United States --without warning. Franklin D. Roosevelt

**Antithesis**: opposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction.
*Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. Barry Goldwater
*Brutus: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar
*The vases of the classical period are but the reflection of classical beauty; the vases of the archaic period are beauty itself." Sir John Beazley
**Apostrophe:** a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person or personified abstraction absent or present.

*For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel. Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar*

**Assonance:** repetition of the same sound in words close to each other.

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.*

*O fortunatam natam me consule Romam! Cicero, de consulatu*

**Asyndeton:** lack of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words.

*We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty. J. F. Kennedy, Inaugural*

*But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. Lincoln, Gettysburg Address*

**Cacophony:** harsh joining of sounds.

*We want no parlay with you and your grisly gang who work your wicked will. W. Churchill*

*O Tite tute Tati tibi tanta tyranne tulisti! Ennius*

**Chiasmus:** two corresponding pairs arranged not in parallels (a-b-a-b) but in inverted order (a-b-b-a); from shape of the Greek letter chi (X).

*Those gallant men will remain often in my thoughts and in my prayers always. MacArthur*

*Renown'd for conquest, and in council skill'd. Addison*

*et pacis ornamenta et subsidia belli. Cicero, Pro lege Manilia*

**Hendiadys:** use of two words connected by a conjunction, instead of subordinating one to the other, to express a single complex idea.

*It sure is nice and cool today! (for "pleasantly cool")*

*I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Psalms 116*

*Perfecti oratoris moderatione et sapientia. Cicero, De oratore*

**Hyperbaton:** separation of words which belong together, often to emphasize the first of the separated words or to create a certain image.

*Speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem Vergil, Aeneid 4.124, 165*
Hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect.

*My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should got to praise
Thine eyes and on thine forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest. Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress"

*Da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
Dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
Deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum. Catullus, to his.

Hysteron Proteron ("later-earlier"): inversion of the natural sequence of events, often meant to stress the event which, though later in time, is considered the more important.

*I like the island Manhattan. Smoke on your pipe and put that in." -- from the song "America," West Side Story lyric by Stephen Sondheim

*Put on your shoes and socks!

*Hannibal in Africam redire atque Italia decedere coactus est. Cicero, In Catilinam

Irony: expression of something which is contrary to the intended meaning; the words say one thing but mean another.

*Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

Litotes: understatement, for intensification, by denying the contrary of the thing being affirmed.
(Sometimes used synonymously with meiosis.)

*A few unannounced quizzes are not inconceivable.
*War is not healthy for children and other living things.
*One nuclear bomb can ruin your whole day. (meiosis)

Metaphor: implied comparison achieved through a figurative use of words; the word is used not in its literal sense, but in one analogous to it.

*Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage. Shakespeare, Macbeth

*... while he learned the language (that meager and fragile thread ... by which the little surface corners and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant now and then before sinking back into the darkness... ) Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!

*From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. W. Churchill
**Metonymy**: substitution of one word for another which it suggests.

*He is a man of the cloth.
*The pen is mightier than the sword.
*By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread.

**Onomatopoeia**: use of words to imitate natural sounds; accommodation of sound to sense.

*At tuba terribili sonitu taratantara dixit. Ennius

**Oxymoron**: apparent paradox achieved by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict one another.

*Festina lente.
*I must be cruel only to be kind. Shakespeare, Hamlet

**Paradox**: an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it.

*What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young. George Bernard Shaw

**Paraprosdokian**: surprise or unexpected ending of a phrase or series.

*He was at his best when the going was good. Alistair Cooke on the Duke of Windsor
*There but for the grace of God -- goes God. Churchill
*Laudandus, ornandus, tollendus. Cicero on Octavian

**Paronomasia**: use of similar sounding words; often etymological word-play.

*...culled cash, or cold cash, and then it turned into a gold cache. E.L. Doctorow, Billy Bathgate
*Thou art Peter (Greek petros), and upon this rock (Greek petra) I shall build my church. Matthew 16
*The dying Mercutio: Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man. Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet
*Hic est sepulcrum haud pulchrum feminae pulchrae.

**Personification**: attribution of personality to an impersonal thing.

*England expects every man to do his duty. Lord Nelson
*Nunc te patria, quae communis est parens omnium nostrum, odi ac metuit et iam diu nihil te iudicat nisi de parricidio suo cogitare. Cicero, In Catilinam

**Pleonasm**: use of superfluous or redundant words, often enriching the thought.

*No one, rich or poor, will be excepted.
*Ears pierced while you wait!
*I have seen no stranger sight since I was born.
**Polyptoton**: Repetition of the same word or different words from the same root but with different endings.

*quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
cui primum digitum dare appetenti
et acris solet incitare mosus Catullus 2.2-3

**Polysyndeton**: the repetition of conjunctions in a series of coordinate words, phrases, or clauses.

*I said, "Who killed him?" and he said, "I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right," and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Bay and she was all right only she was full of water. Hemingway, After the Storm
*omnia Mercurio similis, vocemque coloremque
et crinis flavos et membra decora iuventae Vergil, Aeneid 4.558-9
*Horae quidem cedunt et dies et menses et anni, nec praeteritum tempus umquam revertitur, nec quid sequatur sciri potest. Cicero, De senectute

**Praeteritio (=paraleipsis)**: pretended omission for rhetorical effect.

*That part of our history detailing the military achievements which gave us our several possessions ... is a theme too familiar to my listeners for me to dilate on, and I shall therefore pass it by. Thucydides, "Funeral Oration"
*Let us make no judgment on the events of Chappaquiddick, since the facts are not yet all in. A political opponent of Senator Edward Kennedy

**Prolepsis**: the anticipation, in adjectives or nouns, of the result of the action of a verb; also, the positioning of a relative clause before its antecedent.

*In a letter home, dated July 17, 1918, Sergeant Koonce said, "I went up to the front on the thirteenth and got my right leg broken just above the knee. It was done by enemy shrapnel." The fatal wound resulted in his death on July 21, 1918.
*Vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi, Vergil, Aeneid 4.653
*Consider the lilies of the field how they grow.

**Simile**: an explicit comparison between two things using 'like' or 'as'.

*My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease, Shakespeare, Sonnet CXLVII
*Reason is to faith as the eye to the telescope. D. Hume [?]
*Let us go then, you and I,
While the evening is spread out against the sky,
Like a patient etherized upon a table... T.S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock
**Syllepsis**: use of a word with two others, with each of which it is understood differently.

*We must all hang together or assuredly we will all hang separately. Benjamin Franklin*

**Synchysis**: interlocked word order.

*aurea purpuream subnectit fibula vestem Vergil, Aeneid 4.139*

**Synecdoche**: understanding one thing with another; the use of a part for the whole, or the whole for the part. (A form of metonymy.)

*Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6*

*I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"*

*The U.S. won three gold medals. (Instead of, The members of the U.S. boxing team won three gold medals.)*

**Transferred epithet**: (hypallage): grammatical agreement of a word with another word which it does not logically qualify. More common in poetry.

*Exegi monumentum aere perennius
regalique situ pyramidum altius, Horace, Odes III.30*

**Tricolon Crescens / Rising Tricolon**: arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of ascending power. Often the last emphatic word in one phrase or clause is repeated as the first emphatic word of the next.

*One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. Tennyson, Ulysses*

*Nonne hunc in vincula duci, non ad mortem rapi, non summo supplicio mactari imperabis?
Cicero, In Catilinam*

*Facinus est vincere civem Romanum; scelus verberare; prope parricidium necare: quid dicam in crucem tollere? verbo satis digno tam nefaria res appellari nullo modo potest. Cicero, In Verrem*

**Zeugma**: two different words linked to a verb or an adjective which is strictly appropriate to only one of them.

*Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
*Longa tibi exsilia et vastum maris aequor arandum. Vergil, Aeneid*

This glossary came my way in graduate school at the University of Texas. Chris Renaud gave it to me, and she tells me it originated with Ernest Ament of Wayne State University. I have since used it from time to time in classes and I have added a couple of examples. -- Ross Scaife