

F O U R T H E D I T I O N

ANCIENT RHETORICS
FOR CONTEMPORARY
STUDENTS

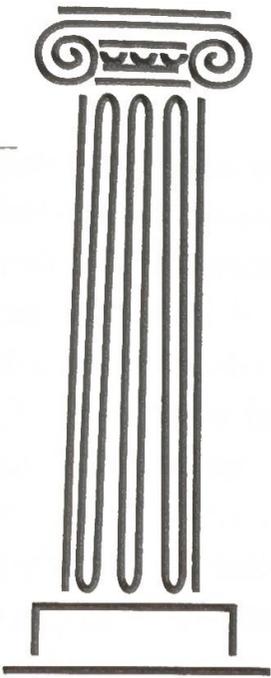
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STYLE: COMPOSITION AND ORNAMENT



Cicero holds that, while invention and arrangement are within the reach of anyone of good sense, eloquence belongs to the rhetor alone. . . . The verb eloqui means the production and communication to the audience of all that the rhetor has conceived . . . and without this power all the preliminary accomplishments of rhetoric are as useless as a sword that is kept permanently concealed within its sheath.

—Quintilian, *Institutes*
VIII Pr. 14–15

ANCIENT RHETORICIANS DEVOTED an entire canon of their art to the study of unusual uses or arrangements of words. They called this canon “style” (*lexis*, or “words,” in Greek; *elocutio*, or “speaking out,” in Latin). Defined as persuasive or extraordinary uses of language, style can be distinguished from grammar, which is the study of ordinary uses of language.

No one knows for sure when style emerged as the third canon of rhetoric. From earliest times, of course, poets and singers used unusual words and patterns in their work. Here, for example, are some lines from the *Iliad*, which is usually dated from the eighth century BCE—that is, two hundred years prior to Gorgias’s trip to Athens during the sixth century BCE:

Ah, Hektor,
this harshness is no more than just. Remember,
though,
your spirit’s like an ax-edge whetted sharp
that goes through timber, when a good shipwright
hews out a beam: the tool triples his power.
That is the way your heart is in your breast.
(III 58–62)

When he compared Hector's heart to an ax used by a strong shipbuilder, the poet employed a figure later called a simile, wherein two unlike things are placed together so that the attributes of one are transferred to the other. Notice how the simile adds meaning to the picture of Hector that the poet is painting; we learn from it that, like the strokes of an ax wielded by a strong man, Hector's courage is tireless, regular, and strong. As Quintilian remarked, such uses of language make things even more intelligible than does clarity alone (VIII ii 11).

Historians of rhetoric usually credit Gorgias with the discovery that extraordinary uses of language were persuasive in prose as well as poetry. Here, for example, is the opening passage of Gorgias's "Encomium to Helen":

Fairest ornament to a city is a goodly army and to a body beauty and to a soul wisdom and to an action virtue and to speech truth, but their opposites are unbecoming. Man and woman and speech and deed and city and object should be honored with praise if praiseworthy but on the unworthy blame should be laid; for it is equal error and ignorance to blame the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy.

The first sentence shows careful attention to **sentence composition** in its use of balanced phrases ("to a body beauty" and so on). Both sentences contain examples of **antithesis**, wherein contrary or contradictory ideas are expressed in phrases that are grammatically alike ("to blame the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy," for example). Even though Aristotle was skeptical about verbal pyrotechnics like these, he was aware of the persuasive power of language. In fact, he was among the first teachers of rhetoric to recognize that extraordinary uses of language like Gorgias's could be systematically studied. In both the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, he drew up rules for language use that exploited its tendencies to excite the emotions as well as its capacity to represent thought clearly. Some historians credit Aristotle's nephew, Theophrastus, with the realization that style could be studied separately from other closely related features of rhetoric, such as *ethos* or delivery, but other historians place the emergence of style as a separate area of study much later, during the Hellenistic period.

Stylistic ornament is still widely used. In an article on computer modeling of athletic anticipation written for *Wired*, Jennifer Kahn employed this simile: "Opponents struggling to anticipate Gretzky's next move often became disoriented, like hunters who think they're tracking a leopard, only to hear a twig crack directly behind them" (2007, 125). This example of **metaphor** appeared in a *New York Times* article about Katz's Delicatessen in Manhattan: "It's a strand of the city's DNA, a bridge between past and present that's no less a landmark than some bona fide architectural treasure" (Bruni 2007, 9). Here, the comparison between the historic lunch spot and genetic material—the basis of life and identity—borders on **personification**. Personification also crops up in the context of personal gadgets. It is almost commonplace these days, for example, to speak of iPods as having brains or hearts, such as when iPod user Revere Greist insists that his iPod "knows somehow when I am reaching the end of my

reserves, when my motivation is flagging . . . It hits me up with 'In Da Club,' and then all of a sudden I am in da club" (Dodes 2004, G1). Apple ad writers encourage such attribution of human sensibility to Apple's digital music player by including this assertion in its features description: "After all, iPod loves music as much as you do" (Apple 2007, www.apple.com/ca/ipod/features.html).

Ancient teachers of rhetoric combined Aristotle's philosophical view of language with Gorgias's sophistic view to argue that rhetorical language ought to be clear and that it ought to touch the emotions as well. Teachers helped their students to achieve stylistic excellence by teaching them about as many unusual uses of language as they could isolate and classify, by asking them to imitate famous authors and to practice composing their own examples of various **schemes** or **figures** (Greek *schemata*; Latin *figura*, "shape"). Ancient rhetoricians isolated four qualities of style that permitted them to distinguish a persuasive style from a less effective one. While there was some disagreement about which qualities ought to be included in a list of stylistic excellences, in the main, ancient authors agreed that a good style ought to manifest correctness, clearness, appropriateness, and ornament.

CORRECTNESS

The Greek and Latin words for correctness were *hellenismos* and *latinitas*, respectively. Sometimes translated as "purity," correctness meant that rhetors should use words that were current and should adhere to the grammatical rules of whatever language they wrote. In Greek and Latin, meaning depended to a great degree on word endings; nouns had different endings depending on their case, number, and gender, while verb endings indicated such things as tense and mood. Thus, the achievement of correctness in one of those languages was a more complex and interesting task than it is in English, which depends primarily on word order for its meanings.

Ancient rhetoricians ordinarily left instruction in correctness (and sometimes clarity as well) to the elementary school teachers, who were grammarians and students of literature. Cicero wrote in *De Oratore* that "the rules of correct Latin style . . . are imparted by education in childhood and fostered by a more intensive and systematic study of literature, or else by the habit of daily conversation in the family circle, and confirmed by books and by reading the old orators and poets" (III xii 48). Interestingly, Cicero agreed in this with the contemporary linguists, who argue that native speakers of any language internalize a good many of its grammatical rules while they are learning it. Since native speakers of a language have an intuitive grasp of its grammar, the **correctness rules** that trouble people today usually involve conventional niceties of written language such as spelling, punctuation, and some outdated rules of grammar and usage. Since these features of correctness govern choices that can be made while editing, we discuss a few of them in the chapter on delivery.

CLARITY

Clarity is the English word most often used for the Greek *sapheneia*, although it is sometimes translated “lucidity” (from Latin *lucere*, “to shine”), or “perspicuity” (from Latin *perspicere*, “to see through”). The Latin terms demonstrate that clarity once connoted language that lets meanings “shine through” it, like light through a window. As we noted earlier, however, rhetoricians like Gorgias were suspicious about the capacity of language to transfer meaning clearly from rhetors to audiences. For most ancient teachers, clarity simply meant that rhetors should use words in their ordinary or usual everyday senses unless they had some compelling reason to do otherwise.

According to Quintilian, rhetors could avoid the obligation to be clear only if they were compelled to refer to obscenities, unseemly behavior, or trivial matters. In any of these cases, they could resort to **circumlocution** (Greek *periphrasis*, “speaking around”), a more roundabout means of reference. Terms like *restroom* or *powder room* are circumlocutions for *toilet*; it is a circumlocution to say that “Henry and the company decided to part ways” when Henry was fired. Clarity can also be obscured by the use of obsolete, technical, new, or colloquial words. Obsolete words are those that are no longer in popular use (*motored* for *drove*). Technical language (that is, jargon) is used by specialists in a profession or discipline (for example, *valorize* and *abjection* from current talk among academics). Quintilian also advised against the practice of coining of new words (neologism) since new words are not familiar to those who hear or read them. He told a funny story about a speaker who, in his anxiety to give a formal tone to his talk, used the phrase “Iberian grass” to refer to the plant known as “Spanish broom” (VIII I 2–3). The problem with “Iberian grass” was that the phrase puzzled everyone who heard it, which is, we must admit, an offense against clarity. Colloquial words are used in a very specific locale or culture. For example, *with it*, originally from the Beat culture of the 1950s, is colloquial and now obsolete as well. So are the “in” terms from the 1970s—*groovy* and *far out*. However, other colloquial terms, such as *hip* and *cool*, are amazingly tenacious: *hip* was “cool” in the sixties, while *cool* was “hip” in the fifties and the seventies; *cool* is still in popular use today, although *hot* seemed to be gaining on it for awhile; perhaps both will be replaced by *sweet*.

Modern composition textbooks tell writers to avoid colloquial or technical language altogether. This is nonsense. As Quintilian said, the best course is to call things by the names people ordinarily use, unless for some reason the name would puzzle an audience or give offense. In other words, rhetors should always use language that is familiar to their audiences, even if this language is colloquial or jargon ridden. A rhetor who addresses an audience that uses a dialect should use it if she is comfortable doing so. Former president Jimmy Carter, who was raised in Georgia, uses a Southern dialect of English. When he campaigned in the South, he told his audiences that they should elect him in order to have someone in the presidency who

appropriate style. A young aspiring rhetor like Phaedrus, for example, might steer clear of using **hyperbole** (exaggeration of a case) in front of Socrates, the teacher of reason, for it would be in Phaedrus's best interest to establish himself as a reasonable rhetor. As you can see, concerns about style are linked to the ethical proofs, discussed in the chapter on *ethos*.

Like ethical proof, attention to *kairos* in style requires sensitivity to community standards of behavior, since appropriateness is dictated by the standards of the community in which we live. In our culture, for example, people do not generally pick their noses in public, because the community defines this as inappropriate behavior.

The community dictates the standards of rhetorical appropriateness as well. When ancient teachers of rhetoric counseled their students to use an appropriate style, they generally meant that a style should be suited to subject, occasion, and audience. This meant that rhetors had to understand the standards of behavior required by the occasion for which they composed a piece of discourse. Since every occasion for writing or speaking differs from the next, it is very difficult to generate rules to govern appropriateness. Cicero underscored this difficulty in *De Oratore*:

Different styles are required by deliberative speeches, panegyrics, lawsuits and lectures, and for consolation, protest, discussion and historical narrative, respectively. The audience is also important—whether it is the lords or the commons or the bench; a large audience or a small one or a single person, and their personal character; and consideration must be given to the age, station and office of the speakers themselves, and to the occasion, in peace time or during a war, urgent or allowing plenty of time. (III iv 211–12)

In other words, the achievement of an appropriate style requires rhetors to pay attention to the conventional rules for verbal behavior in a given context, rules that have been laid down by their culture. If a rhetor has been asked to give a eulogy (a funeral speech), for example, his language should be dignified and subdued, because our culture dictates dignified and subdued behavior on such occasions. If he writes lyrics for country music, dignified and subdued won't cut it, since the style of country music is down-home and informal.

Ancient teachers distinguished three very general levels of style that were appropriate to various rhetorical settings: grand, middle, and plain.² According to the author of *ad Herennium*, discourse was composed in the grand style "if to each idea are applied the most ornate words that can be found for it, whether literal or figurative; if impressive thoughts are chosen, . . . and if we employ figures of thought and figures of diction which have grandeur" (IV viii 11). He supplied us with a fine example of the grand style, which we quote in part:

Who of you, pray, jury members, could devise a punishment drastic enough for him who has plotted to betray the fatherland to our enemies? What offence can compare with this crime, what punishment can be found commensurate with this offence? Upon those who had done violence to a freeborn youth, outraged the mother of a family, wounded, or—basest crime of all—slain a man, our

ancestors exhausted the catalogue of extreme punishments; while for this most savage and impious villainy they bequeath no specific penalty. In other wrongs, indeed, injury arising from another's crime extends to one individual, or only to a few; but the participants in this crime are plotting, with one stroke, the most horrible catastrophes for the whole body of citizens. O such men of savage hearts! O such cruel designs! O such human beings bereft of human feeling! (IV viii 12)

In keeping with our author's definition of the grand style, this passage concerns a lofty issue—treachery—and uses a great deal of ornament. It opens with two **rhetorical questions**, a figure in which a rhetor asks a question to which she doesn't really expect an answer. In fact, asking the question actually provides an opportunity to say more damning things about the traitors. The second rhetorical question also contains an **antistrophe** ("turning about"), the repetition of the same or similar words in successive clauses. Rather than referring to Rome by name, the speaker employs an **epithet**—*fatherland*—which is also a pun that reminds listeners about their dependent relationship on the state (*father* and *patriotism* have the same root, *patria*, in Latin). There are several examples of **isocolon** (balanced clauses), and the final passionate outbursts are examples of **apostrophe** ("turning away") to address absent persons or some abstraction—"O such cruel designs."

The middle style does not use ordinary prose, but it is more relaxed than the grand style. Cicero said that "all the ornaments are appropriate" to this style, especially metaphor and its relatives (*Orator* xxvi 91–96). A rhetor using the middle style develops arguments in leisurely fashion and as fully as possible and uses as many commonplaces as can be worked into the argument without drawing attention to their presence. The author of *ad Herennium* also provided an example of the middle style:

men of the jury, you see against whom we are waging war—against allies who have been wont to fight in our defence, and together with us to preserve our empire by their valor and zeal. Not only must they have known themselves, their resources, and their manpower, but their nearness to us and their alliance with us in all affairs enabled them no less to learn and appraise the power of the Roman people in every sphere. When they had resolved to fight against us, on what, I ask you, did they rely in presuming to undertake the war, since they understood that much the greater part of our allies remained faithful to duty, and since they saw that they had at hand no great supply of soldiers, no competent commanders, and no public money—in short, none of the things needful for carrying on the war? (IV ix 13)

Here the rhetor used ordinary everyday language and loose sentence construction. While there are fewer ornaments than in the grand style, a few do appear: there is a fairly complex isocolon in the second sentence ("their resources, and their manpower, but their nearness to and their alliance with us"). "On what, I ask you" is another example of a rhetorical question.

According to the author of *ad Herennium*, the plain or simple style uses the "most ordinary speech of every day," almost as though it were

conversation (IV x 14). Cicero elaborated on this bare description of the plain style, noting that it is "stripped of ornament" and "to the point, explaining everything and making every point clear rather than impressive" (*Orator* v 20). Usually the plain style employs straightforward narrative ("This happened and then this") or simple exposition of the facts, and it uses **loose** rather than **periodic sentences**.

Once again, rhetors should choose the level of style that is appropriate to their *ethos*, their subject matter, their audience, and the occasion. The grand style is certainly appropriate for ceremonial functions like weddings, funerals, and inaugurations. The plain style is appropriate when clarity is the main goal dictated by the occasion, while the middle style is appropriate for almost any discourse that will be published.

ORNAMENT

The last, and most important, of the excellences of style is ornament. Under this heading, ancient rhetoricians discussed uses of language that were unusual or extraordinary. They divided their study of ornament into three broad categories: **figures of speech** (Latin *figurae verborum*), **figures of thought** (*figurae sententiarum*), and **tropes** (Greek *tropi*, "turn"). Ancient grammarians and rhetoricians argued endlessly over the definitions and distinctions among these three sorts of ornament, and modern scholars haven't done much better at making sense out of the categories. As ancient rhetoric matured, the confusion grew. In some scholarly traditions, ornaments like **climax** and antithesis were classed under more than one heading (sometimes as figures, sometimes as tropes), while others, like **metaphor** and epithet, were often discussed both as single words (diction) and in terms of their effects in groups of words (composition).

Contemporary rhetors don't need to keep the categories straight, since discussions of figures and tropes no longer have to be memorized, as they did in Aristotle's time. However, rhetoricians should be able to distinguish among figures of language, figures of thought, and tropes. So, with Quintilian's help, we try to distinguish among these ancient categories.

Generally, a figure is any form of expression in which "we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and ordinary" (IX i 4). Sometimes Quintilian seems to mean the term *figure* literally; a figure is any piece of language that has a remarkable or artful shape. He likened the changes in language or meaning brought about by the use of figures to the changes in the shape of the body that came about "by sitting, lying down on something or looking back" (IX i 11). That is, use of a figure changes the shape of language, just as a change in posture or position changes the shape of the body. There are two kinds of figures. Figures of thought involve artful changes in ideas, feelings, or conceptions; these figures depart from ordinary patterns of moving an argument along (17). Figures of language, in contrast, involve unusual patternings of language, such as repetition or juxtaposition of similar words or constructions.

A trope is any substitution of one word or phrase for another. Grammatically speaking, a trope can transfer words or phrases from their proper place to another. This kind of grammatical trope is rare. Winston Churchill used it when he said "this is a kind of impertinence up with which I will not put." Here Churchill substituted an unusual word order for the ordinary pattern in order to make fun of the traditional grammatical rule that says prepositions may not appear at the end of sentences. Rhetorically speaking, a trope transfers the usual signification of a word or phrase to another, as in "My love is like a red, red rose." Here the poet (Robert Burns) transferred the meanings associated with roses (fragile, thorny, blooming briefly) to his love.

We review the ornaments of style in keeping with the ancient spirit of *copia*. Cicero wrote to his friend Trebatius, "As I have a guest with such a ravenous appetite for this feast of learning, I shall provide such an abundance that there may be something left from the banquet, rather than let you go unsatisfied" (*Topics* IV 25). Rhetors can study and practice using figures and tropes in order to enlarge their linguistic repertoire and, thus, to have them at hand whenever their use is appropriate to occasion, subject, audience, and *ethos*. But there are yet other reasons for their use. Quintilian argued that ornament, carefully deployed, contributes not a little to the furtherance of our case as well. For when our audience finds it a pleasure to listen, their attention and their readiness to believe what they hear are both alike increased, while they are generally filled with delight and sometimes even transported by admiration (VIII iii 5). A carefully chosen metaphor can make an argument clearer and more striking; a nicely balanced antithesis can lend emphasis to a point. Thus ornament enhances persuasion; indeed, it can also aid clarity.

Sentence Composition

We begin with ancient advice about sentence structure, since an understanding of ancient terms for parts of sentences is necessary to an understanding of figurative language. The ancient term for a sentence was **period** (Greek *periodos*, "a way around"). Modern scholars think that the ancient conception of a period as a whole made up of parts or **members** may derive from an analogy to the human body, which also has a main part—its trunk—from which the limbs or members branch off. In any case, ancient rhetoricians called any stretch of words that could stand on its own a "period," giving a sense of completeness (this is the source of our use of the term *period* to name a piece of punctuation that marks the end of a sentence). An ancient period is equivalent to a modern punctuated sentence: in other words, a period is any unit of prose that begins with a capital letter and ends with some mark of terminal punctuation (period, question mark, or exclamation point).

In order to grasp ancient thought about periods, it is helpful to think of any period as having a main part on which all the other parts depend—just

like a tree or a human body. The main part of a period is meaningful all by itself, but this is usually not true of its members or branches.

John loves Mary.	(Main Part)
John loves Mary even though he barely knows her.	
(Main Part)	(Member)

The stretches of language on either side of the | are logically different, because the left-hand one makes sense all by itself, while the one on the right needs more information to make complete sense.

Some periods consist only of one main part, with no additional members: "John loves Mary." It is also possible to string several main parts into a single period: "John loves Mary; Mary loves Fred; Fred despises everyone." Each section of this period is meaningful by itself. (Traditional grammarians call this a **compound sentence**. The ancients did not use this terminology, however.) It is also possible to add several kinds of dependent structures to the main part of any sentence. As the name implies, dependent structures are not meaningful by themselves. (Traditional grammarians call any sentence that has a main part and one or more dependent parts a **complex sentence**.) Ancient rhetoricians recognized two kinds of dependent structures: **colons** and **commas**.

Quintilian defined a colon (Latin *membrum*, "part" or "limb") as any expression that was rhythmically complete but meaningless if detached from the rest of the sentence. The author of *ad Herennium* gave these examples of colons:

On the one hand you were helping your enemy
and on the other you were hurting your friend. (IV xix 26)

Colons are not always equivalent to English clauses. Nevertheless, the structure known in English as a dependent or subordinate clause is a colon. Hence our use of the terms *semicolon* and *colon* to refer to punctuation marks that set off internal parts of sentences.

The term *comma* (Latin *articulus*, "part jointed on") referred to any set of words set apart by pauses (whence our term for the mark of punctuation, *comma*, which serves that very function in English sentences). Demetrius of Phaleron called a comma a "chip" since it was a piece cut or hacked off from a longer member (*On Style* I i 9). Quintilian defined it as an expression lacking rhythmical completeness or a portion of a colon (IX iv 122). A comma can consist of a single word, as in these examples from the *ad Herennium*:

By your vigour, voice, looks you have tarried your adversaries.
You have destroyed your enemies by jealousy, injuries, influence, perfidy.
(4.26)

In the first example, *voice* is a comma; in the second, *injuries* and *influence* are commas. In modern prose, commas are usually set off by punctuation. Since commas are very short, the English word *phrase* is usually a satisfactory translation.

Isocrates was widely regarded throughout antiquity as a master of artful composition. We use a sentence from his "Helen" to illustrate the ancient terms of composition:

And although the Trojans might have rid themselves of the misfortunes which encompassed them by surrendering Helen, and the Greeks might have lived in peace for all time by being indifferent to her fate, neither so wished; on the contrary, the Trojans allowed their cities to be laid waste and their land to be ravaged, so as to avoid yielding Helen to the Greeks, and the Greeks chose rather, remaining in a foreign land to grow old there and never to see their own again, than, leaving her behind, to return to their fatherland. (50-51)

This is a very long sentence (ninety-four words) even by ancient standards. And yet it is still readable, because Isocrates (and his translator) paid careful attention to rhythm, internal punctuation, and the placement and balance of its parts. We graph the sentence in order to indicate its parts and their relations:

And although
 the Trojans might have rid themselves of the misfortunes which encompassed them by surrendering Helen (COLON)
 and
 the Greeks might have lived in peace for all time by being indifferent to her fate (COLON)
 neither [the Trojans nor Greeks] so wished (FIRST MAIN PART)
 on the contrary (COMMA)
 the Trojans allowed their cities to be laid waste and their land to be ravaged (FIRST HALF SECOND MAIN PART)
 so as to avoid yielding Helen to the Greeks (COLON)
 and
 the Greeks chose (SECOND HALF SECOND MAIN PART)
 remaining in a foreign land to grow old there and never to see their own again
 rather than
 leaving her behind to return to their fatherland (COLON).

Traditional grammarians would call this a **compound-complex sentence**, since it has two main parts and each of these has dependent clauses attached. An ancient rhetorician, however, would have noticed the artful placement of the carefully balanced colons, as well as the rhythms built into the entire period. In order to appreciate these, you may have to read the sentence aloud. You can best appreciate the rhetorical effects of the other examples we provide for ancient figures of language if you read them aloud, as well, since they are intended to please the ear as well as the eye. Indeed, we recommend that you get into the habit of reading your own prose aloud in order to determine whether it has rhythm and shape. Reading aloud sometimes indicates the places where internal punctuation is needed, as well.

Paratactic and Periodic Styles

Ancient rhetoricians distinguished two types of sentences, which they called loose and periodic. Greek terms for a loose sentence can be translated “running” or “strung-on” or “continuous.” Aristotle defined a style made up of loose sentences as having “no natural stopping-places.” This style “comes to a stop only because there is no more to say of that subject” (III ix 9). He seems to have meant that the parts of a loose sentence are simply tacked onto one another. If we accept Aristotle’s definition, a style made up of loose sentences might most accurately be called **paratactic** (Greek *parataxis*, “placed alongside”). A paratactic style gives the impression that the rhetor placed utterances somewhat carelessly side by side, just as they occurred to him. (The preceding sentence is an example.)

Later rhetoricians recommended this style for use in conversation and informal letters because of its simplicity and naturalness. They refined their discussions of the paratactic style to suggest that loosely constructed sentences also observe the ordinary or usual word order of the language in which they are written (as this very sentence does, or did, until we added this parenthesis). Paratactic style is frequently used in electronic mail, for this medium is fast, casual, and conducive to “chat” rather than to formal decrees. Since the paratactic style observes the natural word order of a language, its use does not constitute a figure unless a rhetor uses it to achieve some artistic effect, such as an impression of carelessness or breathlessness.

Aristotle thought that the paratactic style was unpleasant to read “because it goes on indefinitely—one always likes to sight a stopping-place in front of one. That explains why runners, just when they have reached the goal, lose their breath and strength, whereas before, when the end is in sight, they show no signs of fatigue” (*Rhetoric* III xi 1409a). For this reason, Aristotle preferred a style in which units of speech were more carefully demarcated and set off from one another. Like the rhetoricians who would later apply his terminology to all sentences, he called a unit of this kind a “period,” and he defined it as “a portion of speech that has in itself a beginning and end, being at the same time not too big to be taken in at a glance” (35). Aristotle wrote that periods satisfied readers because they reached definite conclusions and they were easier to remember too. A periodic sentence, then, has an obvious structure; ordinarily its main part does not come at the beginning, as in a loose sentence. Its meaning may be distributed among several of its parts, as it is in the example from Isocrates, where the two main parts of the sentence are sandwiched between two groups of paired colons. Later rhetoricians dictated that rhetors should postpone the sense of the period until readers reached its final member, but this restriction was not usually a part of classical lore about style. In this example from Gorgias’s “Helen,” the main part of the period is placed last: “Who it was and why and how he sailed away, taking Helen as his love, I shall not say” (5). Hellenistic rhetoricians also dictated that periods could contain as few as one member or as many as four. Of course it is possible to write sentences

that contain an infinite number of members, but ancient rhetoricians generally cautioned against such excess.

A style becomes periodic when readers have the sense that sentences are carefully constructed and satisfactorily "rounded off." Since the periodic style was appropriate to the most dignified and important occasions, most teachers also cautioned their students to use periodic sentences sparingly.

Figurative Language

In general, a paratactic style does not employ many figures of language, because it is structurally simple by definition. This is not true of the periodic style, however. Ancient rhetoricians compiled endless lists of variations on the use and arrangements of the basic parts of the period: these variations are the figures of language. Quintilian wrote that this group of figures has "one special merit, that they relieve the tedium of everyday stereotyped speech and save us from commonplace language" (IX iii 3–4). When they are used sparingly, they serve as a seasoning to any style.

We have divided the figures of language into two broad categories: those that interrupt normal word order and those that repeat words or structures for effect.

Figures That Interrupt Normal Word Order

Here is a periodic sentence from Gorgias's "Defense of Palamedes": "If then the accuser, Odysseus, made his accusation through good will toward Greece, either clearly knowing that I was betraying Greece to the barbarians or imagining somehow that this was the case, he would be best of men" (Sprague, 2001, 55).

If then the accuser made his accusation through good will toward Greece
 either
 knowing clearly that I was betraying Greece to the barbarians
 or
 imagining somehow that this was the case
 he [Odysseus] would be the best of men.

Notice that Gorgias delayed the sense of the sentence until the very end (Odysseus is the best of men—if his motives are honest). The periodic structure keeps readers in suspense, heightening their curiosity about the author's opinion of Odysseus. Later on, Gorgias used a sentence constructed on similar lines to state another possibility: "But if he has put together this allegation out of envy or conspiracy or knavery, just as in the former case he would be the finest of men, so in this he would be the worst of men."

But if he has put together this allegation out of envy or conspiracy or knavery
 just as
 in the former case he would be the finest of men
 so
 in this he would be the worst of men.

Again, the author's judgment of Odysseus's motives is postponed to the very end of the sentence. Taken together, the two sentences create an antithesis that works across several sentences.

Here is a periodic sentence from the nineteenth century written by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay "Nature": "Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration" (1983, 10).

Crossing a bare common
 in snow puddles
 at twilight
 under a clouded sky
 without . . . good fortune
 I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration.

Emerson postponed the point of the sentence (his achievement of perfect exhilaration) until its end, thus keeping readers in suspense and yet giving them the satisfaction of a firm closure when it finally arrives. He also used grammatically balanced commas (each is a prepositional phrase) inside a longish colon ("crossing . . . fortune") to build up suspense.

Here is a third example, a beautiful periodic sentence written by Alice Walker: "Wrapped in his feathered cape, his winged boots, he sent his soul flying to Zede while holding his body, his thought, his attentions on Carlotta, whom he did not cease to love" (1990, 24).

Wrapped in his feathered cape
 his winged boots
 he sent his soul flying to Zede
 while holding
 his body
 his thought
 his attentions on Carlotta, whom he did not cease to love.

Walker used parallel commas to emphasize her character's divided loyalties, which she reveals to readers only at the conclusion of the period.

News writers occasionally use periodic sentences, as well. This one appeared in a reflective essay on the history of racism in America, written by Jeffrey Gettleman: "Yet even at the height of segregation, when working-class whites clubbed black demonstrators in the streets of Birmingham and Atlanta, some white leaders were willing to question the old ways" (2002). The juxtaposition of the two contrasting but balanced comments about whites, with the second, more unexpected, clause coming last, demonstrates the force that a good period sentence can convey.

Rhetors can also interrupt normal word order by inserting a word or phrase inside a colon or period, as in this example, again composed by *New York Times* writer Jeffrey Gettleman, in an article about Somalia: "But confidence in the government—never very high—is rapidly bleeding away" (2007). Quintilian called this figure *interpositio*, but it is still known in English

by its Greek name, *parenthesis* ("a statement alongside another"). As the interpolation in the previous sentence demonstrates, a parenthetical statement decreases distance, since it suddenly discloses the author's presence—as though she were speaking behind her hand. Parenthetical statements may appear between commas, like this, but they are more often punctuated by dashes—as we have done here—or with parentheses (as illustrated here). The novelist Robert Graves made interesting use of an almost wholly parenthetical style in the opening passage of his novel, *I Claudius*:

I, Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus This-that-and-the-other (for I shall not trouble you yet with all my titles) who was once, and not so long ago either, known to my friends and relatives and associates as "Claudius the Idiot," or "That Claudius," or "Claudius the Stammerer," or "Clau-Clau-Claudius" or at best as "poor Uncle Claudius," am now about to write this strange history of my life. (1961, 3)

The parenthetical asides nearly swamp the main part of this sentence, inserted as they are between "I" and "am now about to write." Graves used them to suggest an important feature of Claudius's character: even though he wasn't very well organized, he was a stickler for detail.

Rhetors can interrupt normal word order in a number of other ways. The ancients gave such interruptions the generic name of *hyperbaton* ("a sudden turn"). A rhetor can attach a descriptive comma, as follows: "Mary, though reputed to be in love with John, is actually quite fond of Fred." The interpolated comma is an *appositio* ("putting off from," **apposition** in English), a phrase that interrupts the main part of the period to modify it or to add commentary about it. Or he can use an apostrophe to call on his audience or someone else: "I am, heaven help me, lost." In a very long sentence, it is sometimes helpful to sum up with an interrupter: "Invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—these, the five canons of rhetoric—are all that occupy me now." The ancients called this figure *metabasis*, a summarizing transition.

Ancient rhetoricians also identified a pair of figures having to do with the use of connecting words between colons: **asyndeton** (no connectors) and **polysyndeton** (many connectors). Using the first figure, a rhetor eliminates connectors that ordinarily appear between colons or commas, as in this example from Cicero: "I ordered those against whom information was laid, to be summoned, guarded, brought before the senate: they were led into the senate" (quoted by Quintilian, IX iii 50). Cicero eliminated the *ands* that would ordinarily connect coordinate commas in order to give an impression of haste and vigor. Compare his version to a version that inserts connecting *ands*: "I ordered those against whom information was laid to be summoned and guarded and brought before the senate, and they were led into the senate."

Gorgias used the opposing figure in the passage of his "Helen":

What is becoming to a city is manpower, to a body beauty, to a soul wisdom, to an action virtue, to a speech truth, and the opposites of these are unbecoming. Man and woman and speech and deed and city and object should be honored with praise if praiseworthy and incur blame if unworthy, for it is an equal error

and a mistake to blame the praisable and to praise the blamable. (Sprague, 2001, 82 II, p. 50)

Here, both sentences contain examples of polysyndeton, in which the rhetor employs more conjunctions (*and* in this case) than are required by either grammar or sense. This figure enabled Gorgias to stretch out a series of words or phrases, thus calling attention to each item in the series and giving the whole a leisurely pace. To grasp the rhetorical effect of polysyndeton as compared to that of asyndeton, compare Gorgias's versions to a revision that substitutes punctuation for *and*:

Fairest ornament to a city is a goodly army; to a body beauty; to a soul wisdom; to an action virtue; to a speech truth. Man, woman, speech, deed, city, object, should be praised.

Figures of Repetition

Modern composition textbooks often tell their readers to avoid repetition. Most likely, their authors worry that students rely on repetition because they do not have a sufficiently large vocabulary. But the advice to avoid repetition, however well meant, is not necessarily good advice. Since repetition is a means of calling attention to words and ideas that are important, rhetors should not be afraid to repeat words that are central to their arguments.

Artful repetition was available to speakers of Greek and Latin in single words. Rhetors could simply repeat a word in order to call attention to it, as Demosthenes is said to have done when asked what was the most important part of rhetoric. He replied: "Delivery, delivery, delivery." Gertrude Stein used repetition to make fun of poetic metaphors about roses: "A rose is a rose is a rose." In Chapter 2, on *kairos*, we encountered an instance of repetition in the speech by Governor George Ryan with which he commuted the sentences of death row inmates: "Our capital system is haunted by the demon of error, error in determining guilt and error in determining who among the guilty deserves to die" (2003). You can see how the ringing repetition of the word *error* marks the flawed system as that which drove Governor Ryan's landmark decision.

Another means of repeating words is **synonymy** ("the same name"), that is, using words that are similar in meaning as a means of repeating an important point: "call it treason, betrayal, sedition, or villainy—it is one." The author of *ad Herennium* gave these examples: "You have impiously beaten your father; you have criminally laid hands upon your parent" and "You have overturned the republic from its roots; you have demolished the state from its foundations" (IIV xxviii 38). A thesaurus can help when a rhetor wants to pile up similar words to create the figure of synonymy. A thesaurus should never be used to avoid repeating words, though; to do this is to commit the rhetorical sin of circumlocution. As the ancient rhetoricians repeatedly pointed out, repetition is not necessarily a bad thing. Artfully used, it constitutes a figure. A thesaurus supplies lists of words that are similar to one another (synonyms). But synonyms are not pure equivalents, despite their Greek name. No two words mean exactly the

same thing, because meaning depends upon context and use. Students who use a thesaurus to avoid repetition or to find words that “sound fancier” than the ones they ordinarily use, then, are misusing the thesaurus, and they run the risk as well of saying something they don’t mean.

There is another class of figures of language that use artful synonymy and exploit other similarities between words, as well. These are now known generically as **puns**. Puns allow rhetors to repeat something in an artful and often funny way: “He told the sexton and the sexton tolled the bell.” The punch lines of shaggy dog stories were funny because they punned on some sober maxim: “Don’t hatchet your counts before they chicken”; “People who live in grass houses shouldn’t stow thrones.” A practice currently in vogue is to give businesses punning names, such as “Shear Madness,” a beauty shop in State College, Pennsylvania, and “The Great Impasta,” an Italian restaurant in Champaign, Illinois. Ancient puns often do not survive translation, because the pun depends upon some similarity in word shape or sound. Quintilian quoted this one from the Roman poet Ovid: “*Cur ego non dicam, Furia, te furiam?*” (“Furia, why should I not call you a fury?”); and this one, which does survive translation, from *ad Herennium*: “*Nam amari iucundum sit, si curetur ne quid insit amari*” (“To be dear to you would bring me joy—if only I take care it shall not in anguish cost me dear”) (IV xiv 21; *Institutes* IX iii 69–70).

According to Quintilian, puns belong to the class of figures that “attracts the ear of the audience and excites their attention by some resemblance, equality or contrast of words” (IX iii 66). The ancient term for pun was *paronomasia*, which the author of *ad Herennium* defined as “the figure in which, by means of a modification of sound, or change of letters, a close resemblance to a given verb or noun is produced, so that similar words express dissimilar things” (IV xxi 29). Generally, puns exploit accidental resemblances among words.

The Fountains of Wayne Song “Hung Up on You” (“Ever since you hung up on me/I’m hung up on you”) plays on both senses of the phrase “hung up”—the act performed with telephones and the “hang-up” or slight obsession. There are many varieties of this figure, but all have to do with using words that are similar to others, either in sound, shape, meaning, or function. In short, puns can exploit almost any accidental resemblance among the shapes, functions, sounds, spellings, or meanings of words.

When editors of the *Atlantic* asked readers to help them coin a word “to describe the moment of undignified vulnerability that people in airport security lines experience when they have to take off their shoes,” they were flooded with puns about socks and shoes, including “insockurity,” “sole-baring,” “shoemiliation,” “disshoeveled,” “pedanoia” “footwary,” “unshoddenfreude.” The winner, as it turns out, was “toeing the line” (Wallraff 2007). Quintilian thought that this form of the figure was a “poor trick even when employed in jest” (*Institutes of Oratory* Ixiii. 73ff). Along with Quintilian, we often roll our eyes at puns.

Using *antanaclasis* (“bending back”), the rhetor repeats a word in two different senses: “I would leave this place, should the Senate give me

leave" (*ad Herennium* IV xiv 21). "If we don't hang together, we'll hang separately" (Benjamin Franklin). Using *homoioteleuton* ("same ending"), the rhetor repeats words having similar endings: "You dare to act dishonorably, you strive to talk despicably; you live hatefully, you sin zealously, you speak offensively" (*ad Herennium* IV xx 28). This figure had more uses in Greek and Latin than it does in English, where only a few parts of speech, such as the adverbs illustrated here, have similar endings. Still, "The Confession Procession" titles a short piece by Nancy Gibbs on the absolutism trend in politics (2007, 15).

Using *zeugma* and its relatives, the rhetor ties a number of commas or colons to the same verb. Quintilian quoted this example from Cicero: "Lust conquered shame, boldness fear, madness reason" ("*Pro Cluentio*" vi 15; *Institutes* IX iii 62). Modern rhetoricians like to cite Alexander Pope's use of *zeugma* in "The Rape of the Lock," whose heroine's confused values are such that she would just as soon "stain her honor, or her new brocade." Here is another *zeugma* from Pope:

Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.

Pope's juxtaposition of the heavily political and the slightly domestic is funny (and it was possibly even funnier when *obey* actually rhymed with *tea*). Because *zeugma* turns the same verb in different directions, it is useful for dealing with complex issues. This feature, combined with its inherent economy, makes *zeugma* a favorite for writers of headlines like these: "Mercury, and Certainty, Rising" (Monastersky 2007, A16) and "Florida Girl Learns to Lift Weights, and Gold Medals" (Goodnough 2007).

There is another set of figures that depends upon repetition of words, but this group requires the composition of periods having two or more members. Rhetors using these figures repeat words that appear in similar positions in each of several members of a period. For example, words can be repeated at the beginning of successive colons expressing either similar or different ideas (*anaphora* or *epanaphora*, literally "carrying back"): "To you must go the credit for this, to you are thanks due, to you will this act of yours bring glory" (*ad Herennium* IV xiii 19). Sportswriter Steve Wulf uses *anaphora* in this opener to his article on apologies:

Curt Schilling is sorry he said those things. Pacman Jones is sorry he did those things. Calvin Borel is sorry he thought he and Street Sense had the Preakness won. Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s crew chief is sorry he left the wrong brackets on the No. 8 car. Jason Giambi is sorry for "doing that stuff." Heck, we're sorry we made fun of Gil Meche when the Royals signed him. (2007, 28)

Or rhetors can repeat the last word in successive phrases (*epiphora*): "It was by the justice of the Roman people that the Carthaginians were conquered, by its force of arms that they were conquered, by its generosity that they were conquered." Or they can combine *epanaphora* and *epiphora* to get *symploke* ("tied together"): "One whom the Senate has condemned, one whom the Roman people has condemned, one whom universal public

opinion has condemned, would you by your votes acquit such a one?" (xiv carries the sense of the sentence, until the very end.

Yet another figure of language links colons or commas together by repeating words in each member (**anadiplosis**, "repeating two pieces"). Here is an example from *ad Herennium*: "You now even dare to come into the sight of these citizens, traitor to the fatherland? Traitor, I say, to the fatherland, you dare come into the sight of these citizens?" (IV xxviii 38). In a more complex use of anadiplosis, the rhetor repeats the last word of one member as the first word of the next. Here is a wonderful example from the journalist Tom Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*:

And there they have it, the color called Landlord's Brown, immune to time, flood, tropic heat, arctic chill, punk rumbles, slops, blood, leptotic bugs, cockroaches the size of mice, mice the size of rats, rats the size of Airedales and lumpenprole tenants. (1999, 286)

Just when this very long sentence threatens to lose itself in a chaotic list, Wolfe brings some order to it by employing anadiplosis—he ends one item in the series with the word that begins the next.

When a period has a series of members that become increasingly important, it displays a figure called climax (Greek "ladder"). The author of the *ad Herennium* defined climax as "the figure in which the speaker passes to the following word only after advancing by steps to the preceding one" (IV xxiv 34). He gave this example: "Now what remnant of the hope of liberty survives, if those men may do what they please, if they can do what they may, if they dare do what they can, if they do what they dare, and if you approve what they do?" Here is another example, from Demosthenes' *On the Crown* (179), quoted by the author of the *ad Herennium* and by Quintilian as well: "I did not say this and then fail to make the motion; I did not make the motion and then fail to act as an ambassador; I did not act as an ambassador and then fail to persuade the Thebans" (IV xxv 34; IX iii 55–56).

Strictly speaking, climax uses anadiplosis, as all of these examples do. A less strict application of the figure refers to any placement of phrases or clauses in order of their increasing importance. An eighteenth-century rhetorician named George Campbell quoted this example of climax from the "Song of Solomon":

My beloved spake and said to me, Arise, my love, my fair, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines, with the tender grape, perfume the air. Arise, my love, my fair, and come away. (II v 10–13)

Campbell noted that the poet begins with negative phrases indicating that winter has passed and moves toward positive indications of the coming of spring, arranged in order of their increasing importance (*Philosophy of Rhetoric* III i 1). Modern rhetoricians sometimes recommend that whole

discourses feature the movement of climax, saving their most important or most persuasive point for last.

Commas or colons themselves can have ornamental effects when two or more that are similarly structured are repeated within a single period. This figure is called *isocolon* in Greek and "parallelism" in English. Here is a famous example from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here." We graph this sentence in order to illustrate the balanced colons a little more clearly:

The world will	little note	what we say here,
	nor long remember	
but it	can never forget	what they did here.

In parallelism, verbs should be balanced against verbs, prepositional phrases against prepositional phrases, and so on. Some ancient authors claimed that the members of an *isocolon* should have a similar number of syllables so that the parallelism between them was nearly perfect. Here is an example from *ad Herennium*:

The father was meeting death	in battle;
the son was planning marriage	at his home. (IV xx 27)

Here is a modern example of parallelism, written by the nineteenth-century feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton:

I should feel exceedingly diffident to appear before you at this time, having never before spoken in public, were I not nerved by a sense of right and duty, did I not feel the time had fully come for the question of woman's wrongs to be laid before the public, did I not believe that woman herself must do this work; for woman alone can understand the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of her own degradation. (1848)

Stanton repeated the phrase "did I not" in successive colons in order to emphasize her urgent reasons for violating the taboo against women speaking in public. She also used asyndeton to yoke the parallel commas in the last colon, thus vigorously and forcefully expressing the seriousness of women's situation.

In a slightly less serious context, this humorous instance of parallel construction appears on McSweeney's feature "Internet Tendency: Reviews of New Food," in a contribution by D. Paul:

Now, as a college graduate who is enduring the humiliation of working for \$8 an hour icing cakes and whose car is in a constant state of disrepair, whose boyfriend flirts with prettier, skinnier girls, whose parents are ashamed, whose apartment is a filthy hole of beer cans and liquor bottles, whose checking account hovers near the red, whose student-loan payments are past due, whose only comfort is the 30 minutes during the day when she can drive to the local park to cry, I find the mere prospect of \$1,000 to be enough to inspire hope and a sense of overall well-being.

This lengthy sentence uses no fewer than eight dependent cola (each beginning with "who" or "whose") to provide details about a life while

at the same time holding us in suspense until we come to its periodic ending. Ross Simonini used parallel construction to compose this tagline for an interview with singer/songwriter David Gates: "Distinguishing bluegrass from old-time, creativity from innovation, and criticism from fiction writing" (2007).

When the parallel members express logically contrary thoughts, as they do here, the figure is called an antithesis ("counterstatement"). In classical rhetorical theory, an antithesis occurred when either words or their meanings were opposed to one another. The author of the *ad Alexandrum* differentiated these two kinds of antithesis as follows: "Let the rich and prosperous give to the poor and needy" (opposition in terms only); "I nursed him when he was ill, but he has caused me a very great deal of harm" (opposition in meaning) (26 1435b). But the author of *ad Herennium* included any use of opposites or contraries under this figure. He illustrated its use with this jingling example:

When all is calm, you are confused; when all is in confusion, you are calm. In a situation requiring all your coolness, you are on fire; in one requiring all your ardor, you are cool. When there is need for you to be silent, you are uproarious; when you should speak, you grow mute. Present, you wish to be absent; absent, you are eager to return. In peace, you demand war; in war, you yearn for peace. In the Assembly, you talk of valor; in battle, you cannot for cowardice endure the trumpet's sound. (IV xv 21)

All ancient authorities credit Gorgias with the invention of this figure, and its preference for stating balanced contraries is consonant with sophistic thought. In this example, from his "Helen," Gorgias combined antithesis with the figure of thought known as division: "For either by will of Fate and decision of the gods and vote of Necessity did she do what she did, or by force reduced or by words seduced or by love possessed" (6). Modern rhetors often use antithesis in order to express a contrast more effectively. The food writer John Mariani wrote this antithesis about culinary contrasts: "In Paris, you start the day with a great croissant and bad coffee; in Rome, with great coffee and a bad croissant" (2007, 54). John F. Kennedy's is perhaps the most famous: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." This kind of antithesis—where the actual words are reversed—is called **chiasmus** ("arranged crosswise"; in the shape of the greek letter *chi*, which looks like an X). Sometimes a chiasmus uses more than two words, like this impressive example from novelist Richard Powers: "Data survive all hope of learning, but hope must learn how to survive the data" (2000, 88). Note the crisscross pattern in the language here:

data : hope : learning :: hope : learn : data

An even more complex use of antithesis appears in the figure called *antimetabole* ("thrown over against"). Here the rhetor expresses contrasting ideas in juxtaposed structures. Here are two examples from *ad Herennium*: "A poem ought to be a painting that speaks; a painting ought to be a silent poem"; "If you are a fool, for that reason you should be silent; and

yet, although you should be silent, you are not for that reason a fool" (IV xxxviii 39). The best-known modern example was made popular by John Dean of Watergate fame: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

Figures of Thought

In *De Oratore* and *Orator* Cicero classed virtually all ornament under the head of figures of thought. This seems appropriate, since these figures (*sententia* in Latin) are the most rhetorical of the ornaments of style. By this we mean two things: first of all, the *sententia* are arguments in themselves; that is, they can function as proofs. Second, they can enhance a rhetor's *ethos* or appeal to an audience's emotions (*pathos*). As Quintilian noted, the figures of thought "lend credibility to our arguments and steal their way secretly into the minds of the judges" (IX i 19–20). Perhaps because they are so highly rhetorical, so obviously calling attention to themselves as artifice and to rhetoric as performance, the figures of thought are not often discussed by modern rhetoricians. This was not true of ancient authorities, however. Quintilian treated only those figures of thought that "depart from the direct method of statement," and he still managed to discriminate well over a dozen (IX ii 1). We have divided our discussion of the *sententia* among figures that call attention to the rhetor, figures that stimulate the emotions of an audience, and figures drawn from the argument itself.

Figures of Thought That Enhance Ethos

This group of figures allows rhetors to call attention to the fact that they are manipulating the flow of the discourse. As such, they strengthen the rhetor's *ethos*; in most cases, their use decreases distance between the rhetor and an audience, as well. (See the chapters on *ethos* and *pathos* for more information about these rhetorical appeals). Rhetors may use these figures to emphasize a point or to draw attention away from something, to hesitate, apologize, interrupt, attack opponents, make promises.

Rhetors often use questions (Latin *interrogatio*) to draw attention to important points. Quintilian gave the following example: "How long, Cataline, will you abuse our patience?" (IX 11 7–8). Notice that the effect of this differs from a flat statement: "You have abused our patience a long time, Cataline." Rhetors can also ask a question to which it is impossible or difficult to reply: "how can this be?" Or we may ask questions in order to belittle or besmirch the character of the person to whom it is addressed ("What would you have me do, you who have cut off my options?"), to excite pity ("Where will I go, what can I do?"), or to embarrass an opponent ("Can't you hear the cries of your victims?") (IX ii 9–10).

Today, the best-known figure of this group is the rhetorical question: "Do you really expect me to respond to such an outrageous accusation"? or "Who can tell the depths to which this treachery has sunk?" Here, of course, the rhetor does not expect a reply; indeed, she expects the audience to fill in the response for themselves, in the first case with "no" and in the

second with the name of the person she hopes will be blamed for the treachery. Variations on rhetorical questioning include *hypophora* or *subjectio*, in which the rhetor asks what can be said in favor of those who oppose her ("Who, indeed, can support those who discriminate against the helpless poor?") or inquires what can possibly be said against her case ("On what grounds, my friends, can you object to so honorable a cause as mine?"). Use of this figure gives rhetors an opportunity to question the opinions or practices of those who oppose them or to anticipate and answer objections that might be made to their positions. Insofar as it allows rhetors to anticipate and answer objections that might be made to their positions, this figure is useful in refutation (see Chapter 9, on arrangement).

Asking a question to get information is not a figure; in order for a question to constitute a figure, it must be used to emphasize a point. Rhetors should also guard against using questions to which they don't know the answers. Audiences can usually discern when a rhetor is asking questions in order to avoid committing himself. The only effective rhetorical question, after all, is one to which the answer is so obvious that everyone, including the audience, can supply its answer. This figure depends for its effect on an audience's feeling that it is participating in the construction of the argument.

The author of *ad Herennium* mentions another *sententia* that depends on questioning. He calls it **reasoning by question and answer** (*ratiocinatio*, "reasoning"), wherein the rhetor inserts a question between successive affirmative statements. We quote a portion of his rather long illustration of this device. (The passage also displays several prejudicial commonplaces about women's characters, prejudices that have not entirely disappeared):

When our ancestors condemned a woman for one crime, they considered that by this single judgement she was convicted of many transgressions. How so? Judged unchaste, she was also deemed guilty of poisoning. Why? Because, having sold her body to the basest passion, she had to live in fear of many persons. Who are these? Her husband, her parents, and the others involved, as she sees, in the infamy of her dishonor. And what then? Those whom she fears so much she would inevitably wish to destroy. Why inevitably? Because no honorable motive can restrain a woman who is terrified by the enormity of her crime, emboldened by her lawlessness, and made heedless by the nature of her sex. (IV xvi 23)

The use of *ratiocinatio* allowed the rhetor to repeat his charges. The repetitions hammer home the accusations, thus making them seem tenable whether they are or not. The device also calls attention to the ways in which the successive statements connect to each other, thus heightening the impression that the rhetor is proceeding rationally.

The author of *ad Herennium* pointed out that not all uses of interrogation are impressive or elegant. It is so when the points against the adversaries' cause have been summed up and it reinforces the argument that has just been delivered, as follows: "So when you were doing and saying and managing all this, were you, or were you not, alienating and estranging

from the republic the sentiments of our allies? And was it, or was it not, needful to employ some one to thwart these designs of yours and prevent their fulfilment?" (IV xv 22). Fans of courtroom drama will easily recognize this device, which contemporary attorneys often use in their summations. The "were you or were you not" construction allows the person using it to repeat statements that may or may not be true without having to commit to them.

Anticipation (Greek *prolepsis*, "to take before") is a generic name given to any figure of thought wherein a rhetor foresees and replies to possible objections to her arguments. For example, a rhetor may anticipate that some point or points in her argument will seem weak or dishonorable to her audience. In his *Time* magazine article proposing that the *Bible* should be taught in public schools, David Van Biema offers this example of anticipation:

To some, this idea seems retrograde. Citing a series of Supreme Court decisions culminating in 1963's *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, which removed prayer and devotion from the classroom, the skeptics ask whether it is safe to bring back the source of all that sectarianism. But a new, post-*Schempp* coalition insists it is essential to do so. It argues that teaching the Bible in schools—as an object of study, not God's received word—is eminently constitutional. (2007, 42)

Van Biema's argument is no doubt controversial, and not all readers will be receptive, so the figure of anticipation is crucial for him to retain his audience's interest. Notably, this figure occurs fairly early on in the article. Cicero would approve. (See Chapter 9 on arrangement.)

Rhetors may also state that they will not speak or write about something all the while they are actually doing so (*paralepsis*, "to take alongside of"). Here is an example: "I will not here list all the negative effects of hateful speech: its divisiveness, its disruptiveness, its cruelty, its ugliness." A closely related figure is **hesitation** or indecision (Latin *dubitatio*, "doubt"). Using this figure, a rhetor pretends to be unable to decide "where to begin or end, or to decide what especially requires to be said or not to be said at all" (*Institutes* IX ii 19). A rhetor may express indecision over a word choice, for example: "Conservatives label pro-choice positions as 'anti-family,' but I am not sure that this is the most informative way to characterize those who favor abortion rights." Using *dubitatio*, a rhetor may point out that an issue is so vast that it can't be covered satisfactorily in the time or space allotted. Or he may express hesitation or doubt about introducing unpleasant or distasteful matters: "Most people are so sensitive about racism that I hesitate even to discuss it." Quintilian remarked that this figure lends "an impression of truth to our statements." Rhetors who use it can depict themselves as people who are sensitive to nuance and to the feelings of audiences as well.

Another similar figure of thought is **correction**, where a rhetor replaces a word or phrase he had used earlier with a more precise one. The author of *ad Herrenium* gave this example of *correctio*: "After the men in question had conquered—or rather had been conquered, for how shall I call that a

conquest which has brought more disaster than benefit to the conquerors?" (IV xxvi 36). The rhetor's reconsideration makes him seem thoughtful and intelligent. In this example, the use of correction also emphasizes the point that the action being discussed can be read in more than one way. Here is another example: "I refer to hateful speech. However, things would be clearer if this practice were known by its rightful name—racism."

Figures of Thought That Involve Audience

Quintilian mentioned a set of figures of thought that involve the audience in the argument. He discussed these under the general heading of "communication." In these figures, the rhetor addresses the audience, taking them into her confidence: "No reasonable person can doubt the severe consequences of this practice." One form of this figure is concession, by which the rhetor concedes a disputed point or leaves a disputed point up to the audience to decide: "Of course I am aware that hateful speech hurts those it is aimed against. Nevertheless, the hurt felt by some does not justify the regulation of all." In suspension, the rhetor raises expectations that something bad or sensational will be mentioned and then mentions something much worse. Quintilian gave this example from Cicero: "What think you? Perhaps you expect to hear of some theft or plunder?" (IX ii 22). Cicero then went on to discuss serious crimes against the state.

The opposite of suspension is **paradox** ("contrary opinion"), in which the rhetor raises expectations and then mentions something trivial. The headlines on supermarket tabloids are paradoxes in this sense. In modern rhetoric, paradox has a different but related meaning. A paradox is any statement that seems self-contradictory but in some sense may be true: "There are none so credulous as unbelievers."

A related figure of thought is **oxymoron**, which yokes contradictory terms together, usually as adjective and noun: "cold heat," "eloquent silence." A favorite example of oxymoron comes from a professor of philosophy: "This passage in Heidegger is clearly opaque."

The author of *ad Herennium* discussed a figure of thought called **parrhesia** ("frankness of speech"). This figure occurs "when, talking before those to whom we owe reverence or fear, we yet exercise our right to speak out, because we seem justified in reprehending them, or persons dear to them, for some fault" (IV xxxvi 48). For example: "The university administration has tolerated hateful speech on this campus, and so to some extent they are to blame for its widespread use." An opposing figure is **litotes (understatement)**, where a rhetor diminishes some feature of the situation that is obvious to all. The author of *ad Herennium* gave this example from the defense of a very wealthy person: "His father left him a patrimony that was—I do not wish to exaggerate—not the smallest" (IV xxxviii 50). Using litotes, the rhetor avoids stating the exact extent of the rich man's holdings, and the audience is led to admire his tact as well. Modern rhetoricians define litotes as any statement that denies its contrary statement: "She was not unmindful of my wishes." But the figure

occurs in any deliberate understatement of a state of affairs wherein more is understood than is said: "Nuclear weapons are dangerous." Sometimes litotes is not deliberate, as when an American president brushed off "the vision thing" as inappropriate to his administration.

Figures of Thought That Arouse Emotion

According to Quintilian, "the figures best adapted for intensifying emotion consist chiefly in simulation" (IX ii 26). This group of figures requires more inventiveness from a rhetor than any other, since their persuasive quality depends upon skill in creating convincing fictions. As Quintilian remarked,

Such devices make a great demand on our powers of eloquence. For with things which are false and incredible by nature there are but two alternatives: either they will move our hearers with exceptional force because they are beyond the truth, or they will be regarded as empty nothings because they are not the truth. (IX ii 33)

This group of *sententia* includes personification, *enargeia*, **irony**, and *ethopoeia*. Personification or impersonation "consists in representing an absent person as present, or in making a mute thing or one lacking form articulate" (*ad Herennium* IV liii 66). We may represent someone who has died as though she were present: "If my mother were alive, she would say . . ." We can represent animals or nature as having human qualities, as the poet John Milton did in this passage from *Paradise Lost*:

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe. (IX 529–30)

The advantage of this figure, according to Quintilian, is that we can display the inner thoughts of others as though they were present. He cautioned, however, that people and things must be represented credibly.

In *enargeia* (usually translated "ocular demonstration" or "vivid demonstration"), a rhetor paints a picture of a scene so vividly that it seems to be happening right in front of the audience. This is usually done by appealing to the sense of sight. Writer Barry Yeoman composed this *enargeia* of the pickup route to an organic farm:

Several times a week a blue truck with a stainless steel collection tank drives up a newly blacktopped road in Guilford, Vermont, heading toward Mary Ellen and David Franklin's organic dairy farm. It rolls past a weathered white farmhouse roofed with Guilford and New York slate, past a sign advertising fresh eggs and grass-fed beef, until it arrives at the 19th-century barn where the Franklins do their milking. On both sides of the road, cows graze on pastureland that stretches beyond the Massachusetts line. The air is moist and earthy. (2007, 35)

Yeoman fills the description with images of old-fashioned, small-town farming in order to set up the article's intriguing incongruity: this organic farm's biggest customer is Wal-Mart.

Simply defined, irony occurs when an audience understands the opposite of what is expressed: someone says "Nice day, huh?" when it is windy

and snowing; another asks “Hot enough for you?” when everyone is obviously suffering from the heat. But irony can be extremely complex. As Quintilian put it, in this figure,

the meaning, and sometimes the whole aspect of our case, conflicts with the language and the tone of voice adopted; nay, a man’s whole life may be colored with irony, as was the case with Socrates, who was called an ironist because he assumed the role of an ignorant man lost in wonder at the wisdom of others. (IX ii 46)

Irony abounds in contemporary political rhetoric: “My opponent is an honorable woman, I am sure”; “The party of moral values is the party that brought us Watergate, the savings-and-loan scandals, and the Iran-Contra affair.” Sometimes irony rebounds on its users. When a politician labels his opponent a draft dodger, the situation becomes ironic if the politician himself somehow escaped mandated military service. If this is discovered, his figure can backfire on him.

The philosopher Claire Colebrook has dubbed irony “the new critical idiom,” and like us, she launches her discussion of irony by quoting Quintilian. Still, in the twenty-first century, the era of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, irony has certainly made a return. Advertisers often use irony in their promotional campaigns, which can be a risky move with a vast audience. Irony finds a home on T-shirts, like the one featured in an episode of *Six Feet Under* when the character Billy wears a T-shirt that says “Ski Iraq,” a deceptively simple tidbit of irony that entails a complex critique of the forces behind the invasion of Iraq. The T-shirts reading “F*** censorship” are also ironic because, well, they display a kind of censorship. Then there are the ironic T-shirts that read “[Insert Ironic Phrase Here].” Irony of ironies. Irony is very difficult to pull off in the more distant forms of writing such as memos and letters. And as David Shipley and Will Schwalbe write in their book *Send*, irony in e-mail—even when the two e-mail authors know each other quite well—can be very tricky indeed (2007, 175–179).

Ethopoeia, or character portrayal, consists in “representing and depicting in words clearly enough for recognition the bodily form of some person” (*ad Herennium* IV xlix 63). The author gave this example: “the ruddy, short, bent man, with white and rather curly hair, blue-grey eyes, and a huge scar on his chin.” But character portrayal may deal with a person’s qualities as well as her physical characteristics. The author of *ad Herennium* portrayed a rich man by depicting his habits:

That person there . . . thinks it admirable that he is called rich. . . . Once he has propped his chin on his left hand he thinks that he dazzles the eyes of all with the gleam of his jewelry and the glitter of his gold. . . . When he turns to his slave boy here, his only one . . . he calls him now by one name, now by another, and now by a third . . . so that unknowing hearers may think he is selecting one slave from among many. (IV xlix 63)

It is not difficult to update this sketch: simply put a Rolex on the man’s arm and substitute a personal secretary or a bodyguard for the slave. We have

met this kind of *ethopoeia* before, in the character sketches of Theophrastus and also in the *progymnasmata* by the same name (see Chapter 6, on *ethos*). Quintilian treated this figure as a kind of imitation in which the rhetor copies or emulates someone's words or deeds. He recommended the use of *ethopoeia* because of its charm and variety. He also pointed out that depictions of character, since they seem natural and spontaneous, can make an audience more receptive to a rhetor's *ethos* or to the *ethos* of the person being described (IX ii 59). It is quite common for celebrity interviews to begin with a detailed description of the celebrity, like this opener from an interview with Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps:

Because of the weather, a freak blizzard in late April that dumped a foot of snow on the streets of Colorado Springs, Colorado, Michael Phelps has ditched his usual flip-flops and boardshorts for a pair of scuffed Pumas and a rumpled tracksuit. With his backpack, iPod, and greasy Tigers cap, he could be any kid slouching around a college quad, another shaggy white boy banging hip-hop. But this isn't a college quad; it's the U.S. Olympic Training Center, and the kid in those baggy sweats is a coil of forward motion that might just be the greatest athlete alive. (Solotaroff 2007, 81)

With this *ethopoeia*, Solotaroff offers a vivid picture of Phelps's self-presentation. That picture will hang in the background of the question-and-answer session that follows.

Figures of Thought Borrowed from Invention and Arrangement

Quintilian disapproved of the practice of borrowing figures from invention or arrangement, and so he refused to treat them. In book IX of the *Institutes*, he huffed: "I will pass by those authors who set no limit to their craze for inventing technical terms and even include among figures what really comes under the head of arguments" (iii 99). Most ancient rhetoricians were not as fastidious as Quintilian, however. For example, the author of the *ad Herennium* treated reasoning by contraries (enthymeme or *conclusio*) as a figure of thought. As you can see from the Greek term for this figure, it is borrowed from invention. In the *ad Herennium*, reasoning by contraries is a figure when the rhetor uses one of two opposite statements to prove the other, as in the following: "A faithless friend cannot be an honorable enemy"; "George has never spoken the truth in private, and so he cannot be expected to refrain from lying in public." This figure resembles an enthymeme because it draws a conclusion (George will lie in public) from a statement that is not open to question (George lies to his friends). The author of *ad Herennium* liked it because of its "brief and complete rounding-off," and so he recommended that it be completed in one unbroken period (IV xviii 26).

Other figures of thought repeat on the sentence level the parts of arrangement suggested for whole discourses. Cicero was particularly fond of these as a means of helping the audience keep track of the progress of the argument. Along with other ancient rhetoricians, he recommended that complex topics be divided into parts and a reason for accepting the parts

be attached to each (*divisio*). Here is an example from *ad Herennium*: "If you are an upright man, you have not deserved reproach; if a wicked man, you will be unmoved" (IV xl 52). In this case, the rhetor divides alternatives into only two (the man is either upright or wicked); this allows the rhetor to select from among many characteristics that might be chosen and thus to control the audience's response to the man. This figure is closely related to **distribution** (*diairesis, distributio*), whereby the rhetor divides up possibilities and distributes them among different areas. Here is an example from *ad Herennium*: "The Senate's function is to assist the state with counsel; the magistracy's is to execute, by diligent activity, the Senate's will; the people's to choose and support by its votes the best measures and the most suitable men" (IV xxxv 47). The distribution makes this political arrangement seem fair and equitable. An Infiniti ad in the June 2007 issue of *Esquire* uses distribution to assert its car's desirability on multiple fronts: "Horsepower is what sends you against the back of your seat. Design is what makes the short journey more memorable."

Accumulation (*frequentatio*) is another figure of thought based on arrangement. Here the rhetor gathers together points that are scattered about and lists them all together. This has the effect of making a shaky conclusion seem more evident or reasonable. Interestingly, accumulation is forbidden in courtroom argument. In many cases, prosecutors are not allowed to introduce an accused person's past offenses into their argument on the grounds that a person should be tried only for the crime with which she is currently charged. This practice testifies to the rhetorical power of accumulation: while juries or judges might not be impressed by the evidence assembled to substantiate one instance of a crime, they are more likely to be impressed by evidence that testifies to the commission of a series of like or related crimes. Television uses a combination of images and speech to create the effect of accumulation, as when, for example, a sportscaster calls an NBA game a "dunkfest" while the rolling clips show twelve different slam dunks from the game. The accumulated images reinforce the credibility of the term.

Sometimes an argument about a relatively new trend will begin by accumulating instances of that trend, as with the movie *Super Size Me* (2004), which seeks to link America's rising obesity rate with the fast food industry's production of desire. The beginning of the documentary shows images of obese Americans, young and old, on the street, on the beach, some eating ice cream and some eating french fries. Written arguments about new trends can use accumulation to similar effect, as with this article in *Advertising Age* about the licensing of popular soft-drink names: "Dr. Pepper barbeque sauce. 7Up Bundt cakes. Mountain Dew lip balm. While primarily small soft-drink players such as Jones Soda Co. have for a long time licensed their brand name for products such as candy, the soda giants are increasingly breaking out of the beverage aisle in search of new revenue streams as soft drinks shrink" (MacArthur 2007, 10). Accumulation can also be used to create *enargeia*, as in this example written by David Sedaris: "The hut was a lot cozier than I'd imagined it. In the kitchen were the same sorts of things

you'd find in the homes of any of our neighbors: a postal calendar picturing a kitten, a hanging copper saucepan turned into a clock, souvenir salt-and-pepper shakers in the shapes of castles and peasants and wooden shoes" (2007, 54).

Cicero and the author of *ad Herennium* also treated **transitions** as figures of thought (*Orator* xl 137; IV xxvi 35). A transition is any word or phrase that connects pieces of discourse. Cicero recommended that rhetors use transition to announce what is about to be discussed when introducing a topic (*propositio*) and sum up when concluding a topic (*enumeratio*); if both are used together, they constitute a smooth transition between topics. Using transition, a rhetor can briefly recall what has just been said and briefly announce what will follow.

Now that we have concluded our discussion of figures, we move to an analysis of tropes.

Tropes

Neither ancient nor modern rhetoricians have ever been able to agree about what distinguishes this class of ornament from figures. It is probably safe to say that tropes are characterized by the substitution of one word or phrase for another, but even this distinction does not clearly demarcate tropes from some figures of language, such as synonymy or puns. However, even though ancient rhetoricians could not agree about the definition of a trope, they knew one when they saw one. With the notable exception of Aristotle, who was ambivalent about every ornament except metaphor, major rhetoricians used a list of ten tropes that remained more or less standard throughout antiquity. The ten are: **onomatopoeia**, **antonomasia**, metonymy, periphrasis, hyperbaton, hyperbole, **synecdoche**, **catachresis**, metaphor, and **allegory**.

Onomatopoeia

According to the author of the *ad Herennium*, the rhetor who uses onomatopoeia ("making a new name") assigns a new word to "a thing which either lacks a name or has an inappropriate name" (IV xxx 42). This trope could be used either for imitative purposes, as illustrated by words like *roar*, *bellow*, *murmur*, *hiss* (*sibulus* in Latin), or for expressiveness. To exemplify this second use of onomatopoeia, the author coined a Latin word, *fragor*, which his modern translator renders as "hullabaloo": "After this creature attacked the republic, there was a hullabaloo among the first men of the state." (The 1960s gave us another onomatopoeia for a hullabaloo—*hootenanny*.) Readers who have been paying attention will notice that onomatopoeia bears a close resemblance to neologism—the coining of new words—a practice that was condemned by Quintilian as "scarcely permissible to a Roman." That quintessential Roman, Julius Caesar, warned us to "avoid, as you would a rock, an unheard-of and unfamiliar word" (notice the nice analogy here). Nonetheless, ancient rhetoricians

agreed that onomatopoeia was the means by which language was invented, as their ancestors found names for things by emulating the noises those things characteristically made (*Institutes* VIII vi 31). Michael Lanza uses *onomatopoeia* in the classic sense to describe the sound of April snow hitting the top of his tent: "Pfft . . . pff" (2007, 90). Contemporary rhetoricians define *onomatopoeia* simply as words or language whose sound emulates or echoes their sense: "The brook babbled and murmured"; "Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed" (Alfred Noyes).

Antonomasia

In the trope called "antonomasia" ("another name"; Latin *pronomination*), a rhetor substitutes a descriptive phrase for someone's proper name (or vice versa). When Quintilian referred to Cicero as "the prince of Roman orators," he used antonomasia (VIII vi 30). The author of *ad Herennium* suggested that, rather than naming the Gracchi, whose reputations were contested, a rhetor could more effectively refer to them as "the grandsons of Africanus," since Africanus's reputation was impeccable (IV xxxi 42). Antonomasia appears frequently in contemporary rhetoric. Elvis is "the King"; athletes acquire nicknames like "The Big Aristotle," "King James," and "Mr. Excitement." One of us even earned herself the epithet "Dr. Collision" on the ultimate frisbee field. The contemporary popularity of this trope is not limited to entertainment or sports. In 2006, President George W. Bush called himself "The Decider" in the context of the future of Donald Rumsfeld (who then was secretary of state), and the superhero-like name stuck. In an article about rock-and-roll star Little Richard, music writer Bob Mehr begins with a whole collection of *antonomasia*: "Before he was the Originator, the Innovator, the Emancipator, before he could claim his throne as the King, Queen or Quasar of Rock'n'Roll, Little Richard stood before a microphone in a cramped New Orleans studio and delivered his masterwork" (2007, 90). The rhetorical effects of this trope are obvious. It not only suggests that someone is so well-known that his name need not be used, thus cementing group loyalty; it also provides a rhetor with an opportunity to characterize the person he speaks or writes about in either positive or negative terms (see the discussion of honorific and pejorative language in Chapter 6, on *ethos*).

Metonymy

Metonymy ("altered name") names something with a word or phrase closely associated with it: "the White House" for the president of the United States or "the Kremlin" for the leadership of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The maxim "The pen is mightier than the sword" is a metonymy in which *pen* stands for persuasive language and *sword* for war. We refer to the works of an author by her name: "Morrison" or "McEwan" stand in for novels written by Toni Morrison or Ian McEwan. We use metonymy when we say "I like the Dixie Chicks," meaning that we like their music.

Periphrasis

We have already met the figure called "periphrasis" ("circling speech") under its Latinate name *circumlocution*. Quintilian defined uses of this figure as "whatever might have been expressed with greater brevity, but is expanded for purposes of ornament" (VIII vi 61). He gave this poetic example from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Now was the time / When the first sleep to weary mortals comes / Stealing its way, the sweetest boon of heaven" (ii 268). Virgil did not simply say "Night arrived." Rather, he embroidered on this simple observation to achieve the effect of calmness that sleep brings.

Quintilian worried that rhetors would use this figure simply to fill up space or to impress:

Some rhetors introduce a whole host of useless words; for, in their eagerness to avoid ordinary methods of expression, and allured by false ideals of beauty they wrap up everything in a multitude of words simply and solely because they are unwilling to make a direct and simple statement of the facts. (VIII ii 17)

A contemporary rhetorician named Richard Lanham argues persuasively that much contemporary American prose is written in what he calls the "Official Style." He gives this example:

The history of Western psychological thought has long been dominated by philosophical considerations as to the nature of man. These notions have dictated corresponding considerations of the nature of the child within society, the practices by which children were to be raised, and the purposes of studying the child. (1992, 10)

In essence, this passage says that psychologists are interested in human nature and that this interest has led them to investigate childhood and child-rearing practices. In other words, users of the official style do exactly what Quintilian warned against—they pile up more words and phrases than are necessary in order to achieve an impressive effect. There is a big difference between using words to enhance an effect or to call attention to a point and simply failing to notice them.

Hyperbaton

Hyperbaton is the transposition of a word to somewhere other than its usual place: "Backward run sentences, until reels the mind" (a parody of the style of *Time* magazine). Strictly speaking, *hyperbaton* is a figure of language, since its effect depends upon a change in normal word order. But as Quintilian noted, it can be called a trope when "the meaning is not complete until the two words have been put together" (VIII vi 66). We parody our own writing by imposing a *hyperbaton* on the first sentence of this paragraph: "*Hyperbaton* is the transposition, to somewhere other than its usual place, of a word."

Hyperbole

Quintilian defined hyperbole ("thrown above"; "excess") as "an elegant straining of the truth" (VIII vi 67) and gives this wonderful example from

Cicero: "Vetto gives the name of farm to an estate which might easily be hurled from a sling, though it might well fall through the hole in the holman with a black eye, "You would have thought him a basket of mulberries"; and of a skinny man, "He has legs like parsley" (*Rhetoric* III xi 1413a). In other words, hyperbole is exaggeration used for effect. People often use hyperbole to describe extreme weather conditions. During a Midwestern July heat wave, one of us heard this hyperbole: "hotter than the hinges on the gates of hell." Sportscasters, especially "color commentators," often use hyperbole to create excitement. When someone makes a long-range three pointer, for instance, the sportscaster might yell "From the parking lot!" or engaging in even more exaggerated hyperbole, he might say the shot came "From Downtown!" Hyperbole has made it into e-mail, instant messages, and text messages. While LOL is often not hyperbole, ROTFL usually is: a person can't typically type or text while rolling on the floor.

Synecdoche

In synecdoche ("to receive together") rhetors substitute the part for the whole (or vice versa) or cause for effect (or vice versa). Quintilian wrote that this figure occurred most commonly with numbers, as in "The Roman won the day," in which "the Roman" refers to an entire army. The author of *ad Herennium* gave this example of synecdoche: "Were not those nuptial flutes reminding you of his marriage?" (the flutes stand for the whole ceremony). Like hyperbole, this trope is common in everyday speech. We say "give me a hand," where *hand* refers to help or assistance, and we use the phrase "four hundred head" to refer to four hundred animals. When we say "check out my wheels," we usually mean the whole car, not just the tires.

Catachresis

Catachresis ("to use against") is "the inexact use of a like and kindred word in place of the precise and proper one" (*ad Herennium* IV xxxiii 45). The author gave these examples: "the power of man is short," "small height," "long wisdom," "mighty speech." In these examples adjectives are misapplied to nouns: we ordinarily speak of human power as limited rather than short, of wisdom as enduring rather than long, and so on. Quintilian defined this trope more narrowly as "the practice of adapting the nearest available term to describe something for which no actual term exists" (VIII vi 34). The Latin name for catachresis means "abuse," and novice rhetors might be wise to avoid it.

Metaphor

A metaphor transfers or substitutes one word for another. The Greeks have always taken metaphor seriously. If you visit modern Greece, you might notice a transfer truck bearing the label *metaphoros*. Some metaphors are so common in our daily speech that we no longer think about their metaphoric quality: we say that a disappointed lover "struck out" or

"never got to first base," borrowing metaphors from baseball. When someone has exhausted all her alternatives, we say that she is "at the end of her rope," borrowing a grisly metaphor from executions. We say that the abortion question presents us with a thicket of difficult issues, borrowing a metaphor from nature. Truly striking metaphors appear in poetry. Here are two examples from a poem by Emily Dickinson:

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.

Dickinson compared a book to a ship and its pages to a pair of horses. In prose these comparisons don't make much sense, but they work beautifully in Dickinson's poem to evoke images and emotions.

Metaphor is often the only trope mentioned in traditional composition textbooks, giving the impression that modern writers should limit their use of ornament to a single trope. Aristotle, like other ancient rhetoricians, was more interested in metaphor than he was in other tropes or figures, and metaphor has received more attention from modern rhetoricians and literary critics than has any other trope or figure. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle defined metaphor as the movement of a name from its own genus or species to another genus or species (XXI vii 1457b). In the *Rhetoric*, he noted that metaphors borrowed from something greater in the same genus or species were complimentary, while those borrowed from something worse could be used to denigrate the person or thing to whom it was applied. Thus, pirates can be called "entrepreneurs" or "businesspeople," and someone who has made a mistake can be accused of criminal behavior (III ii 1405a). Humans often get compared to other species because of some shared characteristic that the rhetor wants to highlight. Women's National Basketball Association guard Theresa Weatherspoon, when asked about her stellar defensive game against the league's leading scorer, said: "She told me I was like a gnat, a pest who wouldn't go away." Here the comparison to a pesky insect conveys the frustration an offensive-minded player feels when guarded closely.

At another point in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle classed metaphors among those tropes and figures he called witty or urbane sayings, and he developed a theory about why metaphors give us pleasure. They do so, he wrote, "because metaphors help us to learn new things, and learning is naturally pleasurable to humans" (x 1410b). In other words, since metaphors express ideas in new or unusual ways, they help us to see things in new ways.

Aristotle suggested that metaphors be taken from two sources: those that are beautiful, either in sound or effect, and those that appeal to the senses (ii 1405b). It would not do, he wrote, to substitute *red-fingered* or even *purple-fingered* in Homer's "rosy-fingered dawn." He told a funny story about Simonides, who at first declined to write a poem for a man who had won a mule race, on the ground that he did not want to celebrate half-asses.

When the man paid enough, however, Simonides accepted the commission and wrote "Hail, daughters of storm-footed mares!" Aristotle gave many examples of successful metaphors: citizens are like a ship's captain who is strong but deaf; ungrateful neighbors are like children who accept candy but keep on crying; orators are like babysitters who eat the baby's food and then moisten the baby's lips with their saliva (iv 1406b, 1407a).

Sometimes a good metaphor can launch and sustain an argument, like Jonathan Lethem's description of a novel: "Among the encompassing definitions we could give 'the novel' . . . is this: a novel is a vast heap of sentences, like stones, arranged on a beach of time" (2007, 1). Metaphors can be expanded and explored, and Lethem's allows him to account for the novel's readers as well: "The reader may parse the stones of a novel singly or crunch them in bunches underfoot in his eagerness to cross" (12). Lethem then deploys the stones-on-the-beach metaphor in a terrific discussion of Ian McEwan's novel, which, as it happens, is set on a beach. As the Lethem example shows, the quest for an apt metaphor just might yield surprising insight. In other words, metaphors can be useful tools for invention. All tropes can be, for that matter.

Quintilian distinguished several kinds of metaphor. In one of these, a rhetor substitutes one living thing for another: "He is a lion"; "Scipio was continually barked at by Cato" (VIII vi 9). In another kind, inanimate things may be substituted for animate and vice versa. Quintilian thought this was most impressive when an inanimate object is spoken of as though it were alive, as in Cicero's "What was that sword of yours doing, Tubero?" or "The dam decided to collapse at that moment." Aristotle would have classed both of these kinds of metaphor under the head of species-to-species, in which a rhetor substitutes the name of one particular for another. Aristotle and Quintilian both named metaphors that substitute a part for a whole, or vice versa, as a separate class, but modern rhetoricians label such metaphors as synecdoches (for example, "Jane Doe" to represent all women).

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle writes, "In some cases of analogy no current term exists" (XXXI 1458a). The example he gives is this: "To release seed is to 'sow,' while the sun's release of fire lacks a name" (XXI 1458a). The resulting analogy, then, might be "the sun sowed fire on the morning." The contemporary novelist Richard Powers, writing just after September 11, 2001, offers a moving account of the tragedy while considering the very phenomenon Aristotle discusses—when "no current term exists"—to characterize something. The result, in such cases, is use of metaphor or simile (the most explicit kind of metaphor):

THE SIMILE

I was preparing to meet my undergraduate writing class at the University of Illinois when I heard the news. The day's topic was to have been figurative speech: metaphor and simile in fiction. On my way out the door, I saw the first headlines. Then the images and the repeating, unreal film. And every possible class lesson disappeared in that plume.

With the rest of the world, I found myself losing ground against the real. The anchors, the reporters, the eyewitnesses, the experts: all fighting against the onset of shock, all helpless to say what had happened, all working to survive the inconceivable. And when the first, stunted descriptions came, they came in a flood of simile. The shock of the attack was like Pearl Harbor. The gutted financial district was like Nagasaki. Lower Manhattan was like a city after an earthquake. The gray people streaming northward up the island covered in an inch of ash were like the buried at Pompeii.

And in this outpouring of anemic simile, again and again with startlingly little variation, people resorted to the most chilling refrain: like a movie. Like "Independence Day." Like "The Towering Inferno." Like "The Siege." Like bad science fiction. Like a Tom Clancy novel. (Clancy, talking to CNN, seemed to find the plot more unbelievable than any plot of his own.) The magnitude of this day could not be made real except through comparison to fiction. Nothing but the outsize scale of the imaginary was big enough to measure by.

Failed similes proliferated throughout the afternoon. Blocks like the apocalypse. Wall Street executives wandering like the homeless. Streets like Kinshasa. Rubble like Beirut or the West Bank.

No simile will ever serve. In its size and devastation and suddenness, the destruction of Sept. 11 is, in fact, like nothing, unless it is like the terrors experienced in those parts of the world that seemed so distant on Sept. 10.

I met my class, although I could pretend to no teaching. It was not like a wake; it was one. We shared the shortfall of our thoughts. "It's like a dream," my students said. And more frightening still, "Like waking from a dream." The America they woke to on Tuesday morning was, like the skyline of New York, changed forever. The always-thereness of here was gone.

The final lesson of my writing class came too soon. There are no words. But there are only words. To say what the inconceivable resembles is all that we have by way of learning how it might be outlived. No comparison can say what happened to us. But we can start with the ruins of our similes, and let "like" move us toward something larger, some understanding of what "is." (2001, 21-22)

Powers's piece gets to the heart of the ancient meaning of metaphor—"transference" or "transport"—the movement toward something through something else. And what is more portable or mobile, the word *metaphor* seems to ask, than language?

Aristotle also treated analogy as a kind of metaphor. In analogy, rhetors compare a relationship rather than items. Aristotle cited Pericles' saying that the young men killed in a recent war had vanished from Athens as though someone had taken spring from the year (III x 1411a). Analogies frequently come in handy when a physician questions a patient about his pain—"does the pain feel more like needles or a knife?"

Allegory

A metaphor becomes an **allegory** (literally "speaking otherwise"), when it is sustained throughout a long passage. One of the most well-known allegories is Plato's allegory of the cave in book VII of *The Republic*,

where the darkness of the cave is made analogous to those who don't know philosophy.

In her book *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*, English professor and rhetoric scholar Linda Brodkey uses allegory to compare the marking off of public smoking spaces to the marking off of writing spaces in American universities. We offer two excerpts from her book to illustrate the use of allegory:

The international sign that bans smoking in public places can also be read as a sign of cultural hegemony, a frequent and forcible reminder that in democratic societies civic regulations commonly inscribe the will of the dominant culture. That there are two versions of the sign suggests that the dominant culture is of at least two minds when it comes to smoking in public places. One version of the sign prohibits smoking altogether, and the other regulates smoking by appending a note that may be more familiar to smokers than to nonsmokers: "Smoking Permitted in Designated Areas Only." This second sign, signaling the temporary segregation of smokers from nonsmokers, is part of the same expansionist public policy as the first, which seems likely to succeed eventually given the rapidly diminishing number and size of public spaces where smokers are still allowed to smoke. In the meantime, however—so long as they remove themselves to those designated areas—smokers constitute a literal and figurative body of evidence that a desire to smoke remains strong enough in some people to withstand the ever increasing pressure of social hostility and medical injunctions. That smokers commonly honor the signs, either by not smoking or by smoking only in designated areas, provides smokers and nonsmokers alike with continual public enactments of civil power, namely, the power of the professional-managerial middle class to enforce the public suppression of a desire it has recently identified and articulated via science as endangering its well being—as a class. (1996, 130)

Here Brodkey sets up one end of the allegory, the smoking signs and regulations with which her readers are already familiar. Boldly questioning the assumptions behind such regulation and its subscription to scientific ideology, Brodkey rearticulates the regulations as "cultural hegemony," the imposition of one group's will onto another group or groups. After developing her critique of smoking regulation a bit further, Brodkey moves to the other side of the allegory, the set of practices she wants to cast in a different light by way of the extended metaphor itself and a series of direct arguments: American writing instruction. Brodkey writes:

Composition classrooms are the designated areas of American colleges and universities. Composition courses are middle-class holding pens populated by students from all classes who for one reason or another do not produce fluent, thesis-driven essays of around five hundred words in response to either prompts designed for standardized tests or assignments developed by classroom teachers. . . .

It has always seemed to me gratuitous to regulate writing and writers via the contents of prompts and assignments, since a policy of coherence is already being "objectively" executed by assessing student writing on the basis of form and format: the grammar, spelling, diction, and punctuation

along with the thesis sentence, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Perhaps both are necessary, however, because while form identifies class interlopers (working-class ethnic and black students), content singles out class malcontents. While it seems to take longer in some cases than in others, composition instruction appears to have succeeded best at establishing in most people a lifelong aversion to writing. They have learned to associate a desire to write with a set of punishing exercises called writing in school: printing, penmanship, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary in nearly all cases; grammar lessons, thesis sentences, paragraphs, themes, book reports, and library research papers in college preparatory and advanced placement courses. (135–136)

Through subtle language cues, Brodkey sustains the smoking metaphor throughout the passage—and the rest of the chapter (indeed, the metaphor permeates the entire book, thanks to the title). Words like “designated areas” and “regulate” carry over the arguments Brodkey made about regulating smoking to regulating student writing. The allegory enables Brodkey to clarify what bugs her most about prevailing practices in composition classes: writing is reserved for one place, she argues, and that very place is tainted by our culture, marked as the “lower” training ground for other university classes. In this schema, untrained writers—like smokers—are seen as potentially dangerous, threatening, or at least irritating to middle- and upper-class standards, hence necessitating strict regulation. The allegory certainly does powerful work for Brodkey and makes her argument all the more compelling, or at least we think so.

RHETORICAL ACTIVITIES

1. Go on a trope hunt. Between now and your next class meeting, locate a whole host of different kinds of tropes. You may wish to consult broadly: popular magazines, newspapers, Web sites, billboards, and advertisements are all fair game. Once you record the trope, use the information in this chapter to name it. Be on the lookout for particularly rare or artful tropes. Be prepared to tell the class why you’ve categorized the trope as you have.
2. Try your hand at composing figures and tropes. Find a passage of your writing and examine it to see whether you unconsciously used any of the figures or tropes discussed in this chapter. Rewrite any of the sentences in the passage, inserting figures or tropes where they are appropriate. Approach this task systematically over a few days or weeks; your eventual goal is to use each kind of figure or trope discussed in this chapter.
3. Revise a passage you’ve written in the plain style so that it is appropriate for a more formal rhetorical situation. Use complex sentence constructions, longer words, and lots of figures and tropes. For models of

highly ornate prose styles, you can turn to the work of composers from earlier periods of history. John Donne's sermons are good examples, as are those composed by American preachers such as Jonathan Edwards or Martin Luther King Jr.

4. We also recommend that rhetors as a practice be on the lookout for professional speakers and writers' uses of the various figures discussed in this chapter. When you find figures or tropes that you admire, write them down in a commonplace book. Practice imitating them. A modern handbook of the figures is a very useful aid to composers. We highly recommend Richard Lanham's *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*.

IMITATION II: INHABITING THROUGH PRACTICE

In addition to reading aloud and copying, ancient rhetoricians encouraged their students to imitate the work of authors they admired. Imitation differs from simple copying; the imitator may borrow the structures used in the imitated sentence, supplying her own material, or she may try to render the gist of the original passage in other words. The latter exercise is more aptly referred to as **paraphrase**, and we will practice paraphrasing at the end of the next chapter.

Most authorities agree that the proper procedure for imitation involved copying the model, studying it carefully, and imitating its structures. Here are some sample sentences, all taken from the work of professional writers. Our imitations of the samples are fairly close in that they borrow the grammatical structures of the originals. The samples are arranged in order of increasing grammatical complexity.

Simple Sentence

John loves Mary.

A simple sentence has only one colon. Simple sentences can be expanded in all sorts of ways: for example, by the insertion of *commata* set off by punctuation (as is done by James and Marquez in the samples that follow) or by the addition of prepositional phrases (as in the sample from Tuchman).

Sample 1

London was hideous, vicious, cruel, and above all overwhelming.

—Henry James

Imitation

Ourtown was ugly, empty, cold, and above all forbidding.

Analysis

James inserted two one-word *commata* into this simple sentence. The *commata*, separated by punctuation marks, slow readers down and help them to feel London's overwhelming atmosphere.

Sample 2

He remembered much of his stay in the womb. While there, he began to be aware of sounds and tastes. . . . Yet he was not afraid. The changes were right. It was time for them. His body was ready.

—Octavia Butler, *Adulthood Rites*

Imitation

She planned most of her day in the morning. At home, she recognized familiar sounds and smells. Yet she was not at home. The feeling was all wrong. The time was not ripe. She was not ready.

Analysis

Butler composed a string of plain simple sentences to convey the impressions felt by a sensitive young child. Strings of simple sentences can also convey other ethical effects, such as intense concentration.

Some Simple Sentences to Imitate

A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by governments of policies contrary to their own interests.

—Barbara Tuchman, *The March of Folly*

The Antillean refugee Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, disabled war veteran, photographer of children, and his most sympathetic opponent in chess, had escaped the torments of memory with the aromatic fumes of gold cyanide.

—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*

Early in the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon proposed that science consisted in the elevation of the authority of experiment and observation over that of reason, intuition, and convention.

—Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism*

Out of the back of the truck the city of San Francisco is bouncing down the hill, all those endless staggers of bay windows, slums with a view, bouncing and streaming down the hill.

—Tom Wolfe, "Black Shiny FBI Shoes"

Complex Sentence

John loves Mary even though she reads Milton.

In a complex sentence, one or more dependent colons are attached to one or more independent colons. A colon is dependent if it doesn't make sense by itself; it depends on another colon to make it complete.

Sample 1

Writing, reading, thinking, imagining, speculating. These are luxury activities, so I am reminded, permitted to a privileged few, whose idle hours of the day can be viewed otherwise than as a bowl of rice or a loaf of bread less to share with the family.

—Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box"

Imitation

Aspen, sycamore, ponderosa, oak, laurel. These are the hardy trees, so I understand, classed among the privileged few, whose growth patterns in every season cannot be viewed otherwise than as a mere creeping along, a finely tuned adjustment to their surroundings.

Analysis

In this passage Minh-ha punctuated the first string of words as a sentence, even though a grammatical purist would deny them that status. In the second sentence, she interrupted the independent colon with another, brief independent colon ("so I am reminded") and attached a dependent colon at the end.

Sample 2

Cranes keep landing as night falls. Ribbons of them roll down, slack against the sky. They float in from all compass points, in kettles of a dozen, dropping with the dusk. Scores of *Grus canadensis* settle on the thawing river. They gather on the island flats, grazing, beating their wings, trumpeting: the advance wave of a mass evacuation. More birds land by the minute, the air red with calls.

—Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker: A Novel*

Imitation

Words keep crowding as sleep calls. Reams of them cram in, wound among the folds. Squeezed from the day's moments, in phrases and clauses, repeating with the broken fan. Hosts of figures dance in geometric shapes. They cluster on my end-table, calling, clacking their consonants, rounding: the condensed noise of a staged sit-in. More words tamp into seconds, the night thick with sense.

Analysis

The first three sentences build in complexity, beginning with two brief independent clauses joined by the word *as*. The next sentence has an independent clause to which a participial phrase is attached, and the next sentence adds yet another participial phrase ("dropping with the dusk"). The

passage then returns to a simple sentence. The fourth sentence is the most elaborate of the bunch, beginning with an independent clause (“They gather on the island flats”), then three participial phrases in quick succession, and then, surprisingly, an independent clause. The final sentence returns to the opening pattern: a simple sentence appended by a descriptive, dependent clause.

Some Complex Sentences to Imitate

His name was Domenico Scandella, but he was called Menocchio. He was born in 1532 (at his first trial he claimed he was fifty-two years old) in Montereale, a small hill town of the Friuli twenty-five kilometers north of Pordenone at the foot of the mountains. Here he had always lived, except for two years when he was banished following a brawl.

—Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*

The effect was exactly what one expects that many simultaneous crashes to produce: the unmistakable tympany of automobiles colliding and cheap-gauge sheet metal buckling, front ends folding together at the same cockeyed angles police photographs of night-time wreck scenes capture so well on grainy paper; smoke pouring from under the hoods and hanging over the infield like a howitzer cloud; a few of the surviving cars lurching eccentrically on bent axles.

—Tom Wolfe, “Clean Fun at Riverhead”

Compound Sentences

John loves Mary but Mary despises John.

A compound sentence has two or more *cola* that are independent of one another. That is, each could stand alone as a simple sentence. Usually, the *cola* in a compound sentence are linked together by *and*, *but*, or *or*. In order to produce a different effect, however, writers can omit the words that ordinarily connect *cola* in a compound sentence and substitute punctuation instead (thus producing the figure asyndeton).

Sample 1

She was traveling alone and was too short to wield her roll easily. She tried once, and she tried twice, and finally I got up and helped her. The plane was packed: I'd never seen a plane quite so crowded before.

—Audre Lorde, “Notes from a Trip to Russia”

Imitation

Mary was working hard and was too tired to deal with John well. She put it off, and put it off again, and finally she gave in and called him. The conversation was trying: she'd never known how to do this sort of thing.

Analysis

In the first sentence in this passage, Lord connected the two *cola* in the standard way, with *and*. In the second, however, she used both punctuation and a connecting word, thus creating the figure polysyndeton. In the third sentence in the passage, she used a punctuation mark to connect the compound *cola*. Compound sentences can be used to pile up images or assertions; this piling up yields a variety of effects.

Sample 2

My father was dead, my mother was dead, I would need for a while to watch for mines, but I would still get up in the morning and send out the laundry.

—Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

Imitation

The impatiens were blooming, the clematis was climbing, I would need to have someone look for weeds, but I would still rent a car tomorrow and leave for vacation.

Analysis

Didion's sentence begins with asyndeton (linking the first three clauses with commas only). The effect is a kind of litany, a heaping up of painful circumstances. The word *but* breaks up the pattern before the final two clauses, and those are separated by the word *and*.

Some Compound Sentences to Imitate

The late eighteenth century abounded in schemes of social goodness thrown off by its burgeoning sense of revolution. But here, the process was to be reversed: not Utopia, but Dystopia; not Rousseau's natural man moving in moral grace amid free social contracts, but man coerced, exiled, deracinated, in chains.

—Richard Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*

Orlando's fathers had ridden in fields of asphodel, and stony fields, and fields watered by strange rivers, and they had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and brought them back to hang from the rafters.

—Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

We called the waiter, paid, and started to walk through the town. I started off walking with Brett, but Robert Cohn came up and joined her on the other side. . . . There were many people walking to go and see the bulls, and carriages drove down the hill and across the bridge, the drivers, the horses, and the whips rising above the walking people in the street.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

Compound-Complex Sentence

John loves Mary and remains faithful to her even though she reads Milton.

A compound-complex sentence contains at least two independent colons and at least one dependent colon.

Sample 1

This work came together in a slow way. Always something would get in the way—relationships ending, exile, loneliness, some recently discovered pain—and I had to hurt again, hurt myself all the way away from writing, re-writing, putting the book together.

—bell hooks, *Talking Back*

Imitation

Always events would block our progress—equipment failing, travel, illness, some newly discovered glitch—and we had to think again, rethink our work all the way back to the beginning, tinkering, improvising, putting our plans aside.

Analysis

The first sentence in this passage is, of course, a simple sentence. In the compound-complex sentence that follows, hooks inserts a comma between the two independent *cola*, punctuating it with dashes. She then repeats the verb of the second independent colon (*hurt*) to create a dependent colon that concludes with three participial phrases (*writing, re-writing, putting*), thus creating the small parallelism that brings the sentence to a close.

Sample 2

In the nineteenth century, Parkinsonism was almost never seen before the age of fifty, and was usually considered to be a reflection of a degenerative process or defect of nutrition in certain “weak” or vulnerable cells; since this degeneration could not actually be demonstrated at the time, and since its cause was unknown, Parkinson’s disease was termed an idiosyncrasy or “ideopathy.”

—Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings*

Analysis

The first half of this sentence (before the semicolon) is a compound sentence. The second half begins with paired dependent *cola*, both beginning with *since*; these *cola* are attached to the independent colon that concludes the sentence.

Some Compound-Complex Sentences to Imitate

We all begin well, for in our youth there is nothing we are more intolerant of than our own sins writ large in others and we fight them fiercely in ourselves;

but we grow old and we see that these our sins are of all sins the really harmless ones to own, nay that they give a charm to any character, and so our struggle with them dies away.

—Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*

There was a man and a dog too this time. Two beasts, counting Old Ben, the bear, and two men, counting Boon Hogganbeck, in whom some of the same blood ran which ran in Sam Fathers, even though Boon's was a plebeian strain of it and only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible.

—William Faulkner, "The Bear"

Of course, imitation need not be limited only to sentences. Actually imitation works best with short passages, because you can study the techniques writers use to move from sentence to sentence. Here, for example, is an interesting passage from Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*:

[1.] At that time of day, during the middle of the week, word-of-mouth news just lumbered along. [2.] Children were in school; men were at work; and most of the women were fastening their corsets and getting ready to go see what tails or entrails the butcher might be giving away. [3.] Only the unemployed, the self-employed, and the very young were available—deliberately available because they'd heard about it, or accidentally available because they happened to be walking at that exact moment in the shore end of Not Doctor Street, a name the post office did not recognize. (3)

Imitation

At that time of year, during the middle of winter, four-wheel drives just crept along. Cars with chains were sometimes seen; cars without were left at home; and most residents were putting on their warmest clothes and getting set to go out and see the drifts that rifted across their doorways. Only the old, the bold, and the quick-tongued were excepted—deliberately excepted because of infirmity, or grudgingly excepted because they were good at finding reasons why they should not shovel the snow piling ever higher outside, a place that at the moment they did not recognize as relevant to their lives.

Analysis

When we copied this passage, we noticed several interesting things. The first sentence is periodic. The second sentence begins with two balanced cola. These are connected to a third, much longer colon that itself contains two balanced pairs (the verbs *fastening* and *getting*; and the rhyming "tails or entrails"). The faint rhyming echo of *tails* and *entrails* is picked up again in the third sentence with *unemployed* and *self-employed* and the repetition-with-variation of *available*. The third sentence ends with a final colon that seems like an irrelevance or a digression (in fact, the rest of the passage elaborates on it). This carrying of reference across sentences is unusual (it may be one distinguishing mark of Morrison's style); most writers would begin a new sentence to discuss the post office's failure to recognize Not Doctor Street.

As you can see, imitation does not necessarily produce great writing. It does, however, enable rhetors to recognize and use patterns that they might not otherwise notice. If you use these patterns regularly in your own writing, they rapidly become second nature.

IMITATION EXERCISES

1. Return to the imitations and compose sentences following the authors we have offered for imitation.
2. Select a lengthy (half-page to a full-page) passage from your favorite author and imitate the style and structure. The point of imitation is to follow the syntactic structures employed by the original author, but the choice of subject, the voice, attitude, and the rest is up to you. You might alter the focus of the scene, or the kinds of characters.

NOTES

1. Like ancient rhetoricians, we think that correctness and clarity are not truly rhetorical considerations, and so we don't pay much attention to them in this book. We also think that Americans' obsession with correctness and clarity has kept them from studying and enjoying the more complex uses of language that are addressed here. There are plenty of books available that discuss correctness and clarity. Any good handbook for writers will demonstrate the correctness rules of traditional grammar. We recommend *The St. Martin's Handbook* by Andrea Lunsford (sixth edition, 2007). Dictionaries of usage are also available; Fowler's *Modern English Usage* is the standard reference work. Writers who are interested in achieving a clearer style can consult Joseph Williams's *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (ninth edition, 2006).
2. Writers who are interested in practicing this kind of stylistic appropriateness can consult the ancient treatises written by Hermogenes of Tarsus, usually called *The Ideas of Style* or *The Types of Style*, as well as that by Demetrius of Phaleron, called *On Style*. These treatises give copious advice about how to achieve such effects as solemnity, vehemence, simplicity, force, and the like.

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