

Style: Schemes and Tropes*

Schemes

1. Schemes of Balance

Parallelism—similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases or clauses.

Emphasizes similarities and connections:

He tried to make the law, clear, precise and equitable.

...for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Protection, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor. (The Declaration of Independence)

Isocolon (ī-sō-cō-lon)—use of parallel elements similar not only in structure, as in parallelism, but in length (that is, the same number of words or even syllables). Addition of symmetry of length to similarity of structure contributes to the rhythm of sentences:

His purpose was to impress the ignorant, to perplex the dubious, and to confound the scrupulous.

Antithesis (an-tith-a-sis)—the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure.

Emphasizes dissimilarities and contraries; produces the quality of an aphorism:

Though studious, he was popular; though argumentative, he was modest; though inflexible, he was candid; and though metaphysical, yet orthodox. (Dr. Samuel Johnson on the character of the Reverend Zacariah Mudge, in the *London Chronicle*, May 2, 1769)

2. Schemes of unusual or inverted word order

Anastrophe (a-nas-trō-fē)—inversion of the natural or usual word order. Because deviation surprises expectation, anastrophe can be an effective device for gaining attention, though its chief function is to secure emphasis:

Backward run the sentences, till reels the mind. (From a parody of the style of *Time* magazine.)

Parenthesis (pa-ren-tha-sis)—insertion of some verbal unit in a position that interrupts the normal syntactical flow of the sentence. Allows the author's voice to be heard commenting or editorializing, thereby charging the statement with emotion:

But wherein any man is bold—I am speaking foolishly—I also am bold.... Are they ministers of Christ? I—to speak as a fool—am more. (St. Paul, 2 Cor. 11, 21 and 23.)

Apposition (ap-a-zish-en)—placing side by side two coordinate elements, the second of which serves as an explanation or modification of the first. Less intrusive than parenthesis, it allows for the insertion of additional information or emphasis:

John Morgan, the president of the Sons of the Republic, could not be reached by phone.

3. Schemes of Omission

Ellipsis (ē-lip-sis)—deliberate omission of a word or of words which are readily implied by the context. An artful and arresting means of securing economy of expression:

And he to England shall along with *you*. (*Hamlet*, III, iii, 4)

* From, Corbett, Edward P.J. and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student 4th Edn.*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Asyndeton (a-*sin*-da-ton)—deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses. Produces a hurried rhythm in the sentence:

I came, I saw, I conquered. (Julius Caesar)

4. Schemes of Repetition

Polysyndeton (pol-ē-*sin*-de-ton)—the opposite of asyndeton: polysyndeton is the deliberate use of many conjunctions. Suggests flow or continuity in some instances, special emphasis in others:

I said, "Who killed him?" and he said, "I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right," and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water. (Hemingway, "After the Storm")

This semester I am taking English and history and biology and mathematics and sociology and physical education.

Alliteration (a-lit-er-ā-shun)—repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words. Contributes to euphony of verse; sometimes used for humorous effect:

A sable, silent, solemn forest stood. (James Thomson, "The Castle of Indolence," l.38)

Tart, tingling, and even ticklish. (Caption from an ad for Sprite)

Assonance (as-a-nuns)—the repetition of similar vowel sounds, preceded and followed by different consonants, in the stressed syllables of adjacent words. Produces euphonious, onomatopoeic or humorous effect:

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn—mud from a muddy spring—
(Shelley, "Sonnet: England in 1819")

Anaphora (a-*naf*-a-ra)—repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive clauses. Always used deliberately, this scheme helps to establish a marked rhythm and often produces strong emotional effect:

The Lord sitteth above the water floods. The Lord remaineth a King forever. The Lord shall give strength unto his people. The Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace. (Psalm 29)

Epistrophe (a-pis-trō-fē)—repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses. Sets up a pronounced rhythm and secures a special emphasis:

Shylock: I'll have my bond! Speak not against my bond! I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond! (*The Merchant of Venice*, III, iii, 3-4)

Epanalepsis (e-pon-a-*lep*-sis)—repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause. Gives language an appearance of emotional spontaneity:

Blood hath bought blood, and blows have answered blows:
Strength match' with strength, and power confronted power.
(Shakespeare, *King John*, II, i, 329-30)

Anadiplosis (an-a-di-plō-sis)—repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause.

Labor and care are rewarded with success, success produces confidence, confidence relaxes industry, and negligence ruins the reputation which diligence had raised. (Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* No. 21)

Climax (klī-maks)—arrangement of words, phrases or clauses in an order of increasing importance.

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. (St. Paul, Romans, 5, 3-5)

Renounce my love, my life, myself—and you. (Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard")

I think we've reached a point of great decision, not just for our nation, not only for all humanity, but for life upon the earth. (George Wald, "A Generation in Search of a Future," speech delivered at MIT on March 4, 1969)

Antimetabole (an-tē-ma-tab-ō-lē)—repetition of words, in successive clauses, in reverse grammatical order. Produces the impressive turn of phrase typical of an aphorism:

One should eat to live, not live to eat. (Moliere, *L'Avare*)

Chiasmus (kī-az-mus)—reversal of grammatical structure in successive phrases or clauses (literally, "the criss-cross"). Like antimetabole, but without the repetition:

By day the frolic, and the dance by night. (Samuel Johnson, "The Vanity of Human Wishes")

Language changes. So should your dictionary. (Caption from an ad for *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*)

Polyptoton (pō-lip-ta-than)—repetition of words derived from the same root. Similar to word play, but the meanings of the words do not lose their literal meaning:

The Greeks are *strong*, and *skilful* to their *strength*.
Fierce to their *skill*, and to their *fierceness* valiant.
 (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I, i, 7-8)

Tropes

1. Tropes of Comparison

Metaphor (met-a-for)—an implied comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common; a comparison of two things without using the words "like" or "as".

Simile (sim-a-lē)—an explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common; a comparison of two things using either "like" or "as".

Synechdoche (si-*nek*-da-kē)—a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole.

All *hands* on deck.

- **genus** substituted for the species:
vessel for *ship*, *weapon* for *sword*, *creature* for *man*, *arms* for *rifles*, *vehicle* for *bicycle*
- **species** substituted for the genus:
bread for *food*, *cutthroat* for *assassin*
- **part** substituted for the whole:
sail for *ship*, *hands* for *helpers*, *roofs* for *houses*
- **matter** for what is made from it:
silver for *money*, *canvas* for *sail*, *steel* for *sword*

Metonymy (me-*tahn*-a-mē)—substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant.

crown for *royalty*, *mitre* for *bishop*, *wealth* for *rich people*, *brass military officers*, *bottle* for *wine*, *pen* for *writers*.

In Europe, we gave the *cold shoulder* to De Gaulle, and the *warm hand* to Mao Tse-tung. (Richard M. Nixon, speech, 1960)

2. **Tropes of Word Play**

Puns—generic name for those figures which make a play on words.

1. **Antanaclasis** (an-ta-*nak*-la-sis)—repetition of a word in two different senses.

But lest I should be condemned of introducing *license*, when I oppose *licensing*. (John Milton, *Areopagitica*, 1644)

2. **Paranomasia** (par-a-nō-*mā*-zha)—use of words alike in sound but different in meaning.

Neither hide nor hair of him had been seen since the day that Kwame Nkrumah had been *ostrichized*, accused of being the biggest *cheetah* in Ghana, but *safaris* anyone knew, no *fowl* play was involved. (Article in *Time*, April 8, 1966)

3. **Syllepsis** (si-lep-sis)—use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs.

There is a certain type of woman who'd rather *press* grapes than clothes. (Ad for Peck & Peck suits)

Zeugma (zoog-ma)—like *syllipsis*, except that whereas in *syllipsis* the single word is grammatically and idiomatically compatible with both of the other words that it governs, in a *zeugma* the single word does not fit grammatically or idiomatically with one member of the pair. N.B.: Zeugma is not considered a form of pun. If skillfully managed, *zeugma* can be an impressive display of wit, but often enough *zeugma* is nothing more than a faulty use of the scheme of *ellipsis*.

He maintained a *flourishing* business and racehorse.

Anthimeria (an-tha-mer-ē-a)—the substitution of one part of speech for another. In the example below, a noun is used as a verb. Dozens of examples are found in Shakespeare’s plays. Writers today must use anthimeria seldom and with great discretion. An apt creation can be witty and evocative.

The thunder would not *peace* at my bidding.
—Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV, vi, 103

Think of all the ways in which a word like *smoke* has been used since it first came into the language:

The smoke rose from the chimney.	The chimney smokes.
He smoked the ham.	He smokes.
She asked for a smoke.	He objected to the smoke nuisance.
She noticed the smoky atmosphere.	He tried smoking on the sly.
She smoked out the thief.	His dreams went up in smoke.
The Ferrari smoked along the wet track.	
Someday someone will say, if it hasn't been said already, "He looked at her smokily."	

Periphrasis (pa-rif-a-sis)—substitution of a descriptive word or phrase for a proper name or of a proper name for a quality associated with the name.

They do not escape *Jim Crow*; they merely encounter another, not less deadly variety. (James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*)

When you’re out of *Schlitz*, you’re out of beer. (Ad slogan for Schlitz beer)

Personification (Prosopopoeia) (pra-sō-pō-pē-a)—investing abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities or abilities. The way in which this trope gives its subject human qualities allows it to lend itself to emotional appeals.

He glanced at the dew-covered grass, and it winked back at him. (Student paper)

Apostrophe (a-pos-tra-fē)—addressing an absent person or a personified abstraction. Apostrophe imbues its subject with an emotional charge as personification does.

O eloquent, just and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world has flattered, thou only hast cast out the world and despised. (Sir Walter Raleigh’s *History of the World*)

3. Tropes of Exaggeration

Hyperbole (hī-pur-ba-lē)—the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect. Hyperbole can be a serviceable figure of speech if we learn to use it with restraint and for a calculated effect. Under the stress of emotion, it will slip out naturally and seem appropriate. Original and unique hyperboles will produce the right note of emphasis.

It’s really ironical...I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hairs. (Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*)

My left leg weighs three tons. It is embalmed in spices like a mummy. I can’t move. I haven’t moved for five thousand years. I’m of the time of the Pharaoh. (Thomas Bailey Aldrich, “Marjorie Dew”)

Litotes (*lī-ta-tēz*)—deliberate use of understatement, not to deceive someone but to enhance the impressiveness of what is stated.

To write is, indeed, no unpleasing employment. (Samuel Johnson, *Adventurer*, No. 138)

Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her appearance for the worse. (Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*)

Rhetorical Question (erotema) (*er-ot-a-ma*)—asking a question, not for the purpose of eliciting an answer but for the purpose of asserting or denying something obliquely. Rhetorical questions can be an effective persuasive device, subtly influencing the kind of response one wants to get from an audience, and are often more effective as a persuasive device than is a direct assertion.

Irony (*ī-ra-nē*)—use of a word in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word. Irony must be used with great caution: if the speaker misjudges the intelligence of her audience, she may find that her audience takes her words in their ostensible sense rather than in the intended opposite sense.

For Brutus is an *honourable* man;
So are they all, *honourable* men. (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III, ii, 88-89)

Fielder smiled, “I like the English, he said. “That gives me a *nice warm* feeling,” Leamas retorted. (John LeCarré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*)

Sarcasm (*sar-ka-zum*)—witty language used to convey insults or scorn.

No opera plot can be sensible, for in sensible situations people do not sing.
(W.H. Auden)

Ugliness is in a way superior to beauty because it lasts. (Serge Gainsbourg)

Onomatopoeia (*on-a-mot-a-pē-a*)—use of words whose sound echoes the sense.

Strong gongs *groaning* as the guns *boom* far. (G.K. Chesterton, *Lepanto*)

Oxymoron (*ok-sē-mor-on*)—the yoking of two terms that are ordinarily contradictory. By thus combining contradictories, writers produce a startling effect. If fresh and apt, oxymorons display the subtle and shrewd ability to see similarities.

O *miserable abundance*, O *beggarly riches*! (John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*)

Other examples include expressions like *sweet pain*, *cheerful pessimist*, *compicuous by her absence*, *cruel kindness*, *thunderous silence*, *luxurious poverty*, *abject arrogance*, *make haste slowly*, *jumbo shrimp*.

Paradox (*par-a-doks*)—an apparently contradictory statement that nevertheless contains a measure of truth. Paradox is like oxymoron in that both are built on contradictories, but paradox may not be a trope at all, because it involves not so much a “turn” of meaning in juxtaposed words as a “turn” of meaning in the whole statement.

Art is a form of lying to tell the truth. (Pablo Picasso)

The less we copy the reknowned ancients, the more we shall resemble them. (Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*)