

Rhetorical Devices and Rhetorical Fallacies

So, what distinguishes rhetoric from propaganda? Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference, and at times they may overlap. This may help you understand:

1. Rhetoric and propaganda have the same goal: to persuade people of something or to motivate people to action.
2. Rhetoric is about persuasion which is generally honest, aboveboard, and lacks a sinister intent.
3. Propaganda tries to manipulate by telling lies, suggesting falsehoods, stretching the truth, misrepresenting reality, and the like. It frequently does have sinister intent.
4. Rhetoric depends primarily on using “rhetorical devices” to make one’s writing or speaking more impactful.
5. Propaganda frequently makes intentional use of “rhetorical fallacies,” which are errors in logic.

Common Rhetorical Devices:

Metaphor

Simile

Allusion

Analogy

Anecdote

Syntax: Sentence structure.

Anaphora/Repetition

Polysyndeton/Asyndeton

Parallel Structure: repetition of similar forms within a sentence or in sentences near to each other:

“I came. I saw. I conquered.”

“He likes eating strawberries, throwing baseballs, and reading books.”

Hyperbole

Irony:

Situational

Dramatic

Verbal

Greek Appeals:

Pathos

Logos

Ethos

Paradox

Diction: Word choice

Imagery

Rhetorical Question

Common Rhetorical Fallacies/Propaganda Techniques:

NAME CALLING/AD HOMINEM: Using a derogatory term to create a negative emotional attitude for a person or thing. “Why buy a shapeless, styleless boat of a car when you could own a sleek new Jaguar?”

GLITTERING GENERALITY/HASTY GENERALIZATION: Using a shred of truth as the basis for a sweeping generalization. “My performance at my last job shows that I am competent, intelligent, and loyal.” (Of course you didn’t tell them about the other seven jobs where you were fired for laziness, incompetence, and sexual harrassment among other things.)

CARD STACKING/EQUIVOCATION: *Telling the facts for one side only.* “If you vote yes on the new Seahawk stadium proposal, you’ll keep the Seahawks in Seattle, keep downtown Seattle businesses healthy, and enjoy outdoor professional football inSeattle for the first time!” (You didn’t tell them it would mean tax increases.)

TESTIMONIALS: *Using the testimony of someone to persuade you to think as they do or to do as they have.* “I tried Caffeine-a-cola and I’ve never felt so pepped up in my life. It worked for me, so you too should try Caffeine-a-cola.”

PRESTIGE IDENTIFICATION/APPEAL TO AUTHORITY: *Using a well known figure to lend importance or prestige to a product.* (Joe Blow, superstar ice skater, is shown skating using a particular brand of ice skates, or Jane Doe, a famous actress, is shown wearing a particular brand of make-up.)

PLAIN FOLKS: *Using everyday people to make a connection to normal people like you and me.* (A normal looking mom with three kids is shown tooling around town doing errands in a practical, roomy, minivan. Thus, it is appropriate for all everyday, normal moms with kids to own a minivan.)

BANDWAGON: *Using the argument that everyone is doing it, so you should too.* “30 million Americans use this product; so it shuld be good enough for you.”

RED HERRING: *Highlighting a minor detial to draw attention from the important issue.* “Never-Wear cookware will look beautiful on your shelf with its classic shapes and designs.” (They don’t tell you how well it works on the stove.)

EXIGENCY: *Creating the impression that you must act immediately or you will lose an opportunity.* “Buy now, while suppies last!” or, “This offer won’t last forever, so act now!”

INNUENDO: *Hinting that another product or candidate may be hiding something or their might be something wrong.* “Of all the candidates, only John Doe has been seen with Fred Jones, a known felon and former Big Time Wrestler.)

FLAG WAVING: *Using patriotism to sell a product.* “Buy American-made clothes and keep Americans working”--while pictures of heroic American workers are shown smiling as they slave to make your clothes.

BEGGING THE QUESTION/CIRCULAR REASONING: *Any form of argument where the conclusion is assumed in one of the premises.* “God exists. It says so in the Bible, and God created the Bible.”

NON-SEQUITUR: When the conclusion does not follow from the premises. "People generally like to walk on the beach. Beaches have sand. Therefore, having sand floors in homes would be a great idea!"

SNOB APPEAL: Trying to make you feel like you are part of the elite if you use a particular product. (A woman drinking a particular type of bottled water is shown being driven around town in a limousine. You'll be in her elite class too if you only drink that bottled water too.)

TRADITION: Makes you feel a product is good because it's been around a long time. "Jackson Hardware Tools have been used since 1889. Anything that's been around that long has to be good."

NOSTALGIA: Appeal to the good old days. "Remember when you were a kid and nothing tasted better on a hot summer day than lemonade? Super-Sour Lemonade

STRAWMAN ARGUMENT: Substituting a person's actual position or argument with a distorted, exaggerated, or misrepresented version of the position of the argument.

FALSE DICHOTOMY: Giving the erroneous impression that there are only two options in a situation where there are clearly more. Typically gives two extreme options. "We must fight England! It is a question of freedom or slavery!"

FAULTY CAUSALITY: Suggesting a cause-effect relationship when one really does not exist. "Kids participating in mass shootings is the result of them playing violent video games."

FAULTY ANALOGY: Suggesting that two ideas/people/events/situations are similar when they really are not. "We should not invade Iraq. It would be like walking into the wrong classroom at school, a place where you really don't belong."

SLIPPERY SLOPE: Suggesting that dire consequences might result from relatively benign causes. "If you have cable TV, you will pay too much for TV, you will get upset, and you will end up having high blood pressure."

SENTIMENTAL APPEALS: Attempting to an oversimplified emotional response. "Vote for my candidate! (Pictures of the candidate holding puppies and helping old people cross the street.)"

SCARE TACTICS: Appealing to an irrational level of fear. "The North Koreans have tested long range missiles. We are on the brink of nuclear war!"

DOGMATISM: Assuming that your argument is beyond question—it can't be refuted. "Michael Jordan is the best basketball player ever. It's a fact. Everyone knows that!"

APPEAL TO IGNORANCE: Assuming that just because something has not been proven false, it must be true. "Well, we have no proof that John did not commit the crime, so he must be guilty."