



RHETORIC

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The study of rhetoric is the study of the **art of persuasion**. Rhetoric was the central topic of study in schools for 2500 years.¹ In the last generation, the study of rhetoric has shifted its focus—under the guidance of neo-Marxist, materialist theory—to “uncovering” the ideological forces in language that “construct” social identity, and ultimately to subvert any force deemed inconsistent with a narrow set of political and social ideals. But, classical rhetoric was mainly concerned with the tools of speaking and writing, *per se*. It’s up to you how you use them.

IA central premise of rhetorical study is that **substance and style are distinct**. In other words, you can say the same thing many different ways. If this premise is unclear to you, you won’t understand the use of rhetoric.

In an age when we are all considered walking opinions or instances of a demographic, we are told that our identity is fixed, and that how we dress and speak is a natural function of who we are. It may be that you are middle-class, so you dress in middle-class clothes. But it may also be that you are kind. How does a kind person dress? It may be that you are a farmer so you dress in work boots. But it may also be that you are honest. How does an honest person dress? Considered logically, dress cannot be a natural extension of your character. It is a choice. After all, you are an individual. How can you believe that you express that individuality in mass-marketed clothing? Perhaps *Fight Club* puts it best: “You are not your khakis.”



Just as you can choose to dress in different styles, so can you *dress your thoughts* in different styles. You can arrange your thoughts, accessorize them, pare them down, make them seem more complicated or simpler than they are—these are the uses of rhetoric. And just as some clothes are appropriate for work, so are some rhetorical styles; just as some clothes are appropriate for formal occasions, so are some rhetorical styles. How you dress your thoughts is just as important as how you dress yourself.

How do you dress your thoughts in different styles? Take the following example: “Jim likes ice cream. He likes vanilla. He eats it a lot.” Sounds a little childish, no? Simple-minded? Now, let’s add some rhetorical tropes, tropes that *don’t change the content* of a phrase, but that makes it **seem** intelligent. Let’s interrupt the normal pattern (Subject-Verb-Object) of an English sentence—that’s called *hyperbaton*. (Subject in red, verb in green, object in blue.)

Simple	Modified
Jim likes ice cream.	Ice cream is something that Jim likes.
He likes vanilla.	What he likes is vanilla.
He eats it a lot.	It is a lot of it that he eats.

Now, we add *appositive phrases* in *subordinate* positions, find some *synonyms*, and recast the

¹ Much of this information is found in Edward Corbett and Robert Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (Oxford University Press, 1999). See also the phenomenal resource “Silva Rhetoricae” by Professor Gideon Burton of Brigham Young University, <<http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>>.

sentences:

Ice cream is ~~something~~ one of the things that Jim ~~likes~~-enjoys a ~~lot~~ immensely. He ~~likes~~ is especially fond of ~~vanilla~~-ice cream flavored with vanilla, and, if one were pressed to say, it is also something that he eats a ~~lot~~ great deal of.

Compare that to our original set of sentences. Any difference in content? Not really. Both sets of sentences make the same three points. But the *style* is different. The longer version *seems* more intelligent, more perceptive, more informative. In fact, it isn't. But it *seems* that way. Our original, simple style is called the **Attic style**, and the longer, more complex style is called the **Ciceronian style**. Believe it or not, the Attic style is much harder to achieve.

II The first stage of speaking or writing is **inventio**, or *invention*. You must come up with your topic. If you don't have a point to make, why speak? First, consider **status** or **stasis**, a formula for determining the point at issue. Ask:

1. *An sit?* (Is it?) This concerns the evidence. Is the fact actually a fact? Did something alleged to have happened actually happen?
2. *Quid sit?* (What is it?) This concerns definitions. Was the death murder or manslaughter? Was the event intended or unintended? Is the fact relevant or not?
3. *Quale sit?* (What kind of thing is it?) This concerns context. What are the extenuating circumstances? What are the qualifying arguments?



Once you have your point, state it in a clear thesis. This is the **substance** of your speech.

Now, you must decide on a **style**. First, choose your **mode of persuasion**. Here is where you account for your *audience*. There are three modes:

1. **Logos**. Appeal to Reason.
2. **Ethos**. Appeal to Morality (or values).
3. **Pathos**. Appeal to Emotion.

They can be exclusive or combined. Most often, they are combined.

III LOGOS. At the heart of any logical appeal is a logical argument. This does not mean your argument *sounds* logical, but that it *is* logical (the difference is very important). Consult a book on logic to learn the structure of logical arguments.



For our purposes, there are a some terms that will be useful. The first is **premise**. A premise is a supposition, definition, observation, or statement from which your argument proceeds. 1) There are **universal** premises: *All men are mortal* or *all horses are mammals*. These two are positive, or **affirmative** premises. **Negative** universal premises include: *No men are immortal* or *no horses are fish*. In order to prove a universal premise, you have to prove it of all men, or all horses. 2) There are also **qualified** or particular

premises: *Some women are doctors* or *some animals have tusks*. In order to prove this premise, you only have to prove it of some women, or some animals.

There are two major approaches to logic: syllogistic and mathematical. Traditional rhetoric favors the syllogistic. A **syllogism** is a form for presenting premises and conclusions. It looks like this:

All men are mortal.	(major)
Socrates is a man.	(minor)
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.	(conclusion)

The first premise is called the **major** premise. The second premise is called the **minor** premise. And the third claim is called the **conclusion**.

Syllogisms come in four major flavors, called **propositions**. Two affirm, two negate. In Latin, “I affirm” is *affirmo*. “I negate” is *nego*. The first two vowels of each word give us the names of the four propositions: **A** (universal affirmation), **I** (qualified affirmation), **E** (universal negation), **O** (qualified negation). Consult a book on syllogisms for more (for example, by George Englebretsen).

Enthymemes are truncated syllogisms. We tend to use enthymemes in speeches and papers. For example, “Socrates is mortal because he’s a man” (which truncates the major premise: All men are mortal). Enthymemes, because they conceal parts of the argument, can only lead to tentative conclusions. In order to convince someone logically, you have to describe your argument fully.

To support your argument, you **deduce** or **induce** your conclusion. **Deduction** proceeds from general to particular. The general statement that *all men are mortal* moves to the particular claim that one particular man, Socrates, is mortal. **Induction** is the opposite: it proceeds from particular to general. By observing that Bob is mortal and Joe is mortal and Arnie is mortal and Clemens is mortal, we may induce that all men are mortal. Scientists induce general principles from specific examples.

Fallacies are errors in logic. If your opponent makes them, point that out loudly! Here is a list of common logical fallacies compiled by Jim Marchand:

argumentum ad baculum - argument to the stick - appeal to force.

argumentum ad crumenam - argument to the purse - appeal to money.

argumentum ad hominem - argument to the man.

argumentum ad misericordiam - appeal to pity.

argumentum ad ignorantiam - argument to ignorance - use of information either unknown or to which the other cannot be privy.

argumentum ad verecundiam - argument to awe or custom.

argumentum ad populum - argument to the populace, sometimes called **argumentum ad captandum vulgus** - argument to capture the vulgar mass.

argumentum ad iudicem - argument to the judge - getting on the judge's good side.

ipse dixit - he himself said - appeal to authority.

tu quoque - you (did it) too - two wrongs don't make a right.

non sequitur - it does not follow - irrelevant

argumentum ad hoc - ad hoc argument - argument made up to cover only the particular case at hand.

argumentum ad convenientiam - argument to convenience - if we did x we could not do y.

argumentum a contrario - argument from the contrary - used in general to indicate a

contradictio in adjecto - a self-contradictory

Some others are:

argument - e. g. “all generalizations are false.”

cui bono? - [who benefits?]

argumentum ad exemplum - argument to the example - arguing against a particular example cited rather than the question itself.

argumentum ad veritatem obfuscamam - obfuscatory argument - bringing up multiple irrelevant arguments.

non causa pro causa - a common medieval locution for **post hoc ergo propter hoc** - arguing that one thing is the cause of another merely on the basis of temporal sequence.

petitio principii - question begging argument, a mere restatement of the argument in other terms, sometimes called **circulus vitiosus** or **argumentum in circulo**.

ignoratio elenchi - irrelevant conclusion - coming to a conclusion other than that proposed or ignoring extenuating circumstances.

equivocatio - using a word sometimes in one meaning, sometimes in another.

accent - changing the original emphasis - also frequently applied to the misuse of words unfamiliar to the audience “Some dogs are spotted; my dog is spotted; my dog is SOME dog.”

divisio - what is true of the whole is true of each of the parts.

Either/Or. Offering only two options when there are more: black or white, Democrat or Republican, us or them, good or bad, Yankees or Red Sox. Probably the single most prevalent fallacy in American public discourse.

False Generalization. Jumping to a conclusion from too little evidence, irrelevant evidence, or unrepresentative evidence. The first is sometimes called **ex pedem Hercules**, where a statue of Hercules is affirmed from the evidence of a lone, remaining foot. “I saw her reading *Bleak House*, so she must love all English literature.” This fallacy is especially problematic in literature courses: “Three Old English sources illustrate loyalty to the death, so it was a feature of Anglo-Saxon warrior society”; “A ship’s log illustrates a tension between freedom and duty, so that tension characterized the seventeenth century”; and “Langland wrote in alliterative verse, so Medieval literature has a lot of alliteration.”

False Analogy. Using an inappropriate example to illustrate your argument. “Wealth is like a pie: there’s a limited amount that needs to feed everyone.” “Politics is a battlefield: either you win or you lose.”

Red Herring. To divert attention from the issue at hand. (The *ad hominem* argument is an example: “Who can support a tax policy written by an adulterer?”). “Maybe I turned my paper in late, but so did he!” (Changes the issue to someone else’s guilt, not yours.) This is a common tactic in political debate: “Yeah, but what about the scandal that *your candidate* was in!?” Also, to shift focus to an irrelevant detail, to change the subject.

Complex Question. Hiding premises in a question without addressing them. A form of begging the question. “Senator, when did you stop beating your wife?” (Assumes the senator beats his wife.) “Why did you skip my class?” (“Skip” assumes intent: perhaps you were sick.)

IVETHOS. The appeal to morality or to values (the difference between morals and values is one of philosophy: *morals* are ethical principles that don’t change even in the face of public opinion, *values* are post-Neitzschean ethical principles that change depending on what you and your community value.) You must convince your audience that **you are ethical**. The argument convinces because it comes from a presumably ethical person.



Here, you use various phrases and stylistic devices to imply your 1) common sense, 2) morality, and 3) kindness or philanthropy.

The phrases and devices you choose depend entirely upon your audience. Some common means today for an academic audience, for example, require awareness of typical academic values. For example:

- imply reluctance to assert a claim: *I think that X* rather than *X is so*; qualifying your statements with *may, might, could, presumably, purportedly*, and so forth—*it might be that X is so*;
- imply you are non-judgmental: *in my opinion*, which limits the effect of your claim on others; or explicitly, *I’m not making a value judgment*; etc.
- appeal to others: *I’m not sure what you think, but ...; we might all agree that ...*; etc.

- appeal to consensus: *we may want to think about*, as if you are a counsellor to their better judgments, rather than providing your own; etc.
- appeal to a common foe (sometimes becomes a **straw man**, a fictional enemy): existential, *we're all against ignorance*; political, *people who want to harm education*; social, *meaningless business-speak*; and so forth.
- describe perspectives: rather than assert a claim, describe various perspectives on a claim: *from another point of view ...; there are a number of ways of looking at this...;* etc.

Here is Abraham Lincoln: “But, fellow citizens, I shall conclude. Considering the great degree of modesty which should always attend youth, it is probable I have already been more presuming than becomes me. However, upon the subjects of which I have treated, I have spoken as I have thought. I may be wrong in regard to any or all of them; but, holding it a sound maxim that it is better only sometimes to be right than at all times to be wrong, so soon as I discover my opinions to be erroneous, I shall be ready to renounce them.” *Sangamon Speech*, 9 March 1832.

Strategies. Appeal to ethos if your opponent is using logos. And if your opponent is using ethos, appeal to logos. “Those facts may be true, but my concern is suffering, the suffering all around us. People are suffering!” Or, “I appreciate the sentiments of my opponent, but we must look carefully at the facts if we are to act reasonably.” Another strategy is to appeal to extremes if your opponent is balanced, and to appear balanced if your opponent is extreme. John Stewart of *The Daily Show* is very good at this: outrageous when mocking politicians (to imply his sense of humor), then asserting balance when interviewing a political extremist (to imply his own common sense). Finally, impute your own shortcomings to your opponent (a form of *ad hominem* and *tu quoque*). “I don’t talk to political activists because it’s hard to be reasonable with people who are so partisan.”

An ethical appeal requires you to examine the ethics of your audience carefully, and to appeal to those ethics indirectly.

V **PATHOS.** The appeal to emotion is the strongest appeal you can make. In fact, some rhetoricians believe that you will never convince anyone without an appeal to emotion. There are two directions of appeal: the carrot and the stick. Convince people to **desire** something (carrot), or convince people to **fear** something (stick). Of course, there are thousands of shadings and combinations of these two extremes. The best is a little of both.



Importantly, this appeal need not be nefarious. We rightly desire peace and prosperity, and fear disease and hunger.

Vivid example. Reducing complex reality to a single, vivid example. Several years ago at UMass, someone in student government drew a picture of a Klansman on a board. When asked recently about racism at UMass, a student cited that example as *proof* of prevalent racism. In November 2007, the Student government cited it as a reason to affirm a pro-diversity stance. In the intervening years, 50,000 people had moved through UMass, living with each other 24-7, going to classes, eating meals, studying, playing, and worshipping together. Yet, this one, lone example served to “prove” that *all* UMass is racist. That’s a vivid example. (It is also uncontextualized: whether the “artist” drew the picture in *opposition to* or in *support of* Klansmen isn’t clear.)

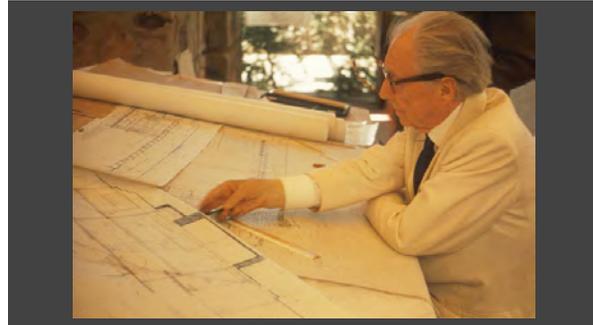
Often, an **anecdote** or **story** will serve as a vivid example. To rouse anger against poverty, for example, one might tell the story of a hard-pressed, troubled poor person. To rouse hatred of a political figure, describe a hated figure of history. In the *New York Times* (10/28/07), Françoise Furstenberg described the French Terror, led by Robespierre, in order to claim that President Bush's use of "terrorism" equates him with Robespierre, and that, in fact, President Bush is a terrorist. Such petulant, irrational sophism as Ms. Furstenberg's can backfire: her unreasonable claim arouses not a reasoned response, but hatred in equal measure. Because, one reasons, how can one argue logically against such an inflamed partisan? Fire begets fire.

Vivid language. The use of emotion-laden words in an otherwise unemotional account. "The senator was standing vacantly by the door" (*vacant* implies unthinking, and has no other function). "The President threatened to veto" (versus *promised* to veto: implies violent intent). *NYT* (10/26/07): "adamant, ideologically driven opposition of Mr. Bush" (as if all political opposition weren't ideological; versus *philosophical* opposition). *NYT* (10/28/07): "Many California residents are ruggedly obstinate about the choice they have made to live with the constant threat of fire" (*ruggedly obstinate*, *rugged* implies uncivilized and unsophisticated, *obstinate* implies unthinkingly stubborn, as if no Californian had considered this life-threatening issue carefully except a NYT reporter!). *Globe* (10/20/07): "The [antiwar] rally attracted many passersby, who stopped to learn what the loud music and large crowds were about" (*to learn*, as if a political rally were a classroom, and the loud protesters were teachers; implies the protesters were wise and philanthropic, rather than, say, loud and monomaniacal).

Strategies. Mix extreme appeals to pathos with logos, to imply balance. "There is a *war* going on against the poor. One in ten Massachusetts residents today lives in poverty." (*War* is an extreme claim, but it is tempered by the statistic, which sounds logical.) Always begin with an emphasis on logos, then move to pathos: it's hard to get an emotional audience to listen to reason. "10% of your neighbors live in poverty. 17% of all children in the United States live in dire circumstances. We live in a state where the median household income is \$51,000, and yet we have all this poverty. What explains this discrepancy? How do we make sense of this disparity? The only answer I can think of is my political opponent. His administration makes people poor! If you care about children, vote for me!"

VI DISPOSITIO or Arrangement.

Now that you've chosen your topic, and decided on your style, it's time to arrange your speech or paper. Like an architect, you must decide on what your audience will experience first, what they experience at each moment, which perspectives will attract them, and the structure of their overall experience.



There are five **parts** to the arrangement: *exordium*, *narratio*, *confirmatio*, *refutatio*, and *peroratio*. The bottom line is: tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them.

1. **Exordium.** Here, you introduce your audience to your topic broadly. Corbett and Connors offer the following five possibilities:

- **Introduction Inquisitive.** Ask a general question: "Why do Americans eat so few dogs?"
- **Introduction Paradoxical.** Present a seeming paradox. "The most useful thing the writer Oscar Wilde said was that all art is completely useless."

- Introduction Corrective. Correct some error or misconception. “Gardeners are not dirty people.”
- Introduction Preparatory. Explain what you’re about to do. “There are three approaches to this poem, and I will describe them in turn.”
- Introduction Narrative. Begin with a story, scene, or anecdote. “There was once a king who thought he was a chicken.”

Note that the exordium is the first and only chance you have to make a first impression. Appeal to your audience here however you think best. An appeal to ethos, for example (humility): “I’m not an expert on this topic, and many of you here will know more than I, but I hope my observations are of some interest.”

2. **Narratio**. This is the body of the essay or the speech. An important stylistic device here is **parallelism**. Arrange each part similarly. If you begin a paragraph with an adverb (“First,”), then begin the next with (“Second,”), and so forth. These signposts will help your audience navigate through your presentation.

Decide on the facts you will use (too many are boring). Decide on the examples (appropriate and compelling). Decide on the shifts in tone.

Tone and **tempo** are extremely important. Think of your paper or speech as a concerto or symphony. The opening must grab attention. But each movement, each part, must have a tone of its own. If your first part is *allegro*, fast, then your next part should be *piano*, soft and slow. For speed, choose short words (like these), pay attention to vowels (short and long intercalated), and **t**ime your **t**empo with consonants. **S**lowly means **l**ong **v**owels, **c**arefully **d**is**p**osed. Appositive phrases, Latinate words, and so forth.

3. **Confirmatio**. These are your arguments. Arrange them so that *the most powerful argument comes last*. It’s your show-stopper. It’s what your audience will go away remembering.

4. **Refutatio**. These are opposing views that you need to take care of. You don’t want to give them front billing, or they will dominate the minds of your audience. You want to dismiss them with facts, or with emotion, or with humor.

5. **Conclusio**. Wrapping up is hard to do. You can **recapitulate**, or remind your audience of your major arguments. You can also appeal to ethos, and try to remind the audience of how ethical or funny or friendly you are. You can appeal to emotion, and rouse your audience with an image, anecdote, or example. Another appeal is to authority—quote a famous line (but make sure you, not the author, has the last word).

If you're going to emphasize the importance of your argument, this is the place. If you've built your paper or speech well, it has reached a crescendo. Your best chance is here, as the cymbals are crashing and the drums are beating. **Tone** here is everything. If you leave your audience with a flippant remark, every serious thing you said will be forgotten. If you leave them in a fever pitch, your logic will be forgotten. If you leave them with a pithy thought, they will think you pithy.



VII STYLE. Style comprises the options you have about vocabulary, syntax, phrasing, tone, and meter. Like a piece of music, you want to consider introductions, movements, choruses, solos, tone, voicing, tempo, and so forth.

Most of these options have been discerned and named. They are called **figures** or **colors**. There are figures of the word, figures of the phrase, figures of the sentence, and figures of the paragraph and speech/essay.



First and foremost, you must employ **proper grammar** and an appropriate **vocabulary**. You may lose an argument simply by using the wrong word, or by making a grammatical error. It's ethos: how competent can you be if you don't even know your own language?

The most important element of style is **clarity**. If no one understands what you're saying, how can you convince them?

A. **Figures on words.** These apply most to formal poetry.

Prosthesis: adding a prefix to a word. *Beloved* vs. *loved*.

Epenthesis: adding an infix. *Abso-frikkin-lutely*

Proparalepsis: adding a suffix. *Suffixating* a word.

Aphaeresis: removing a syllable from the front of a word. *'Sup* versus *what's up*.

Syncope: removing a syllable from the middle of a word. *e're* versus *ever*

Apocope: removing a syllable from the end of a word. *Morn* for *morning*.
Metathesis: transposing letters. *Aks* for *ask*.

B. Figures on phrases.

(1) Schemes of Balance.

Parallelism. Parallel structure of words or syntax. “He bought a car, a dog, and a boat.” (*a car, a dog, and a boat: article + noun*; hear how clunky it sounds otherwise, “He bought a red car, a dog that’s called Rogue, and the boat over there.” If you must include all the other information, construct a parallel structure: *article + noun + “that” + descriptor*. So, “He bought a car that’s red, a dog that’s called Rogue, and a boat that’s over there.”

Again: “Her car was blue, fast, and expensive.” Three bare adjectives in a line.

Again: “I have a dream I have a dream I have a dream”

Antithesis. (*set against*) Parallel structure of opposite ideas. Dr. Johnson, “Though studious, he was popular.” Richard Nixon, “Those who have been left out, we will try to bring in.” JFK, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Shakespeare, *Lear* I.i, “Time shall unfold what plaited cunning hides.” *Hamlet* III.iv, “I must be cruel only to be kind.”

(2) Schemes of Inversion.

Anastrophe. (*turn back again*) Inversion of the natural word order. The natural word order in English is subject-verb-object. Inversion can include an interposed appositive phrase (a descriptive phrase). A subspecies of **hyperbaton**. Henry James, “I got, so far as the immediate moment was concerned, away.” (versus “I got away,”) Shakespeare, *Lear* I.i “Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.” *Lear*, II.iii, “Edgar I nothing am.”

Parenthesis. An appositive phrase with only an indirect connection to the subject, and grammatically incoordinate with its referent. “I spoke with Janet—she has the nicest shoes—about her dog.” “My opinion, and take it for what it’s worth, is that we should go.”

Apposition. (*placed next to* versus *opposed, against*) A descriptive word or phrase placed next to a grammatically coordinate element. “Bob Smith, fraternity president, called home.” (*fraternity president* is a noun phrase that is next to and explains the nouns *Bob Smith*.) Versus “Bob Smith is the fraternity president, and he called home.” The former is more compact, more usual in written English, and the latter lengthier, more usual in spoken English.

(3) Schemes of Omission

Ellipsis. (*to come short*) Deliberate omission of words. *Hamlet* III.iii, 4: “And he to England shall along with you” versus “And he to England shall *go* along with you.” “The Moral Majority is neither” versus “The moral majority is neither *moral nor a majority*.”

Asyndeton. (*without binding*) Deliberate omission of conjunctions. “Veni, vidi, vici” (I came, I saw, I conquered.) Has the effect of quick punches.

Polysyndeton. (*much bound*) Deliberate use of more conjunctions than usual. “He was good and kind and honorable.”

(4) Schemes of Repetition

Alliteration. Repetition of initial consonants in two or more words. “What a freakish, foul, and fearsome forest is this.”

Assonance. Repetition of similar vowels (half, not full rhyme). *Othello*, I.i, “My soul hath her content so absolute”

Anaphora. (*bring again*) Repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses. *Rich II*, “**This** blessed plot, **this** earth, **this** realm, **this** England,/ **This** nurse, **this** teeming womb of royal kings”

Epistrophe. Like anaphora, but a repetition of a word or phrase at the end of successive clauses. *Othello*, III.i, “Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I’ll **away**. Go, vanish into air; **away!**”

Epanalepsis. Like anaphora and epistrophe, but repetition of a word or phrase at both the end and the beginning of a sentence. “**Think** what you will, but I’ll not tell you what I **think**. **Say** what you will, but you’ll not hear a word I **say**.”

Anadiplosis. Repetition of the last word or phrase at the beginning of the next. *Richard II* V.i “The love of wicked men converts to **fear**, / That **fear** to **hate**, and **hate** turns one or both / To worthy danger and deserved death.” (Note the alliteration in the last phrase.)

Climax. Arranging things in increasing importance.

Antimetabole. Repetition, but with a reversal of grammatical elements.

Chiasmus. Greek letter *chi* is an X. Reversal of elements in successive clauses (AB, BA).

Polyptoton. Repetition of words derived from the same root. *Hamlet* II.ii, “Therefore, since **brevity** is the soul of wit, / And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, / I will be **brief**.”