



Center for Writing and Speaking

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Repetition as a Rhetorical Device

Speakers often forget the power of using repetition in speeches because of the negative stereotypes we have with being repetitive. Repetition means bounding, nagging, being redundant and boring. When our parents bound us about our dirty rooms, we respond, "You already told me!" Yet we forget that some of the world's best speeches have utilized repetitive rhetorical devices to reflect the natural rhythm of oral communication. When done stylistically, repetition helps the audience remember and recognize the importance of your message. Authority figures, politicians, and others use repetition as a stylistic device because they know how powerful it is in helping the audience to remember; but with power comes great responsibility. Keep the following stylistic devices in mind when you craft your next speech.

Repetition of letters, syllables, or sounds

Alliteration—repeat similar sounds, usually initial consonants, in two or more neighboring words or syllables.

- Example: Jesse Jackson, "Down with dope, up with hope!"
- Example: Why not waste a wild weekend at Westmore Water Park?

Assonance—repeat similar vowels, preceded and followed by different consonants, in the stressed syllables of adjacent words.

- Example: The sergeant asked him to bomb the lawn with hotpots.

Consonance—repeat consonants in words stressed in the same place (but whose vowels differ), or, repeat final consonants in nearby words

- Example: Deep Dark Dungeon
- Example: Fully Functional

Repetition of words

Anaphora—repeat a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences.

Example: Martin Luther King, *I Have a Dream*

- *I have a dream* that my four little children will ...
- *I have a dream* that one day on the red hills of Georgia ...
- *I have a dream* today!"

Repetition of clauses and phrases

Epistrophe—repetition at the end of a line, phrase or clause of the word or words that occurred at the beginning of the same line, phrase or clause.

- Example: Emerson, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny compared to what lies within us."

Repetition of ideas

Antithesis—set off two ideas in balanced (parallel) opposition.

- Example: Neil Armstrong, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind"
- Example: John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"

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