

Repetition and Redundancy

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Summary: Discusses the use of repetition for rhetorical effect and three specific types of repetition (isocolon, anaphora, epistrophe) and the need to avoid redundancy and two types of redundancy (rhetorical tautology and RAS syndrome).

Learning Objectives: To understand the difference between repetition and redundancy. To understand the different types of repetition and redundancy. To understand how repetition adds meaning to a sentence and why redundancy should be avoided.

There is a fine line between repetition and redundancy. Repetition, if used well, can be a good tool to use in your writing. It can add emphasis to what you are trying to say and strengthen a point. There are many types of useful repetition.

Redundancy, on the other hand, cannot be a good thing. Redundancy happens when the repetition of a word or idea does not add anything to the previous usage; it just restates what has already been said, takes up space, and gets in the way without adding meaning.

Repetition

There are many types of useful repetition, including isocolon, anaphora, and epistrophe.

Isocolon

Isocolon is a structural repetition technique that can give academic and business writing—as much as literature and speech—momentum, rhythm, and emphasis.

Essentially, isocolon involves repetition of the same grammatical structure in two or more phrases or clauses. This means that the grammatical structures are parallel forms, typically with the same number of words.



The easiest way to identify this form of repetition is to line up sentences or phrases vertically. Label each word according to its grammatical classification (article, adjective, noun, verb, adverb, etc.). If all the sentences match up in the number and class of words, the sentences use isocolon.

Ex. “...that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” –John F. Kennedy, *Inaugural Address*, January 20, 1961

The repetition pattern for this particular form is verb – *any* – noun:



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pay	<i>any</i>	price
bear	<i>any</i>	burden
meet	<i>any</i>	hardship
support	<i>any</i>	friend
oppose	<i>any</i>	foe

This use of isocolon strengthens Kennedy’s speech, not only because of the grammatical repetition and the rhythm that results, but also because of the increasing intensity of the nouns. *Price* changes to *burden*. *Burden* changes to *hardship*. *Hardship* changes to *foe*. *Friend* is thrown in, seemingly, to showcase the contrast between the two names (*friend* and *foe*) in order for *foe* to strike harder at the end.

Likewise, the verbs are similar in definition and intensity. *Pay*, *bear*, and *meet* all share the general definition of to suffer; undergo (dictionary.com). To use the repetition of these synonyms increases their intensity and drives forward the strength of the speech. *Oppose foe* and *support friend* intensify by contrast.

Isocolon can also mean two or more completely parallel sentences (independent clauses).

Ex. *Today, I will be working 'til midnight. Tomorrow, I will be sleeping 'til noon.*

Ex. *Bears wield their claws; cheetahs use their speed; snakes inject their venom.* Clearly, predation is action.

Anaphora

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the *beginning* of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences. Most often writers use this form of repetition for its dramatic effect in speech or writing. In fact, the most common examples of anaphora can be found in well-known speeches. While anaphora’s effectiveness may depend on its delivery in a speaking situation, remember that speeches are drafted in *writing*. Written anaphora has many of the same effects as spoken anaphora.

Ex. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...” –Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Notice the repetition of the opening phrases *it was the*, *we had*, and *we were all*. This is the powerful and famous opening of Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, illustrating that repetition in the form of anaphora can be used effectively.

In this instance, the use of contrasting words following the repeated elements strengthens the passage.

<p>It was the best of <i>times</i> – worst of <i>times</i> age of <i>wisdom</i> – age of <i>foolishness</i> epoch of <i>belief</i> – epoch of <i>incredulity</i> season of <i>Light</i> – season of <i>Darkness</i> spring of <i>hope</i> – winter of <i>despair</i></p> <p>we had <i>everything</i> – <i>nothing</i></p> <p>we were all going direct to <i>Heaven</i> – going direct the other way (<i>Hell</i>, implied)</p>

Notice that the italicized words in each paired phrase are opposites, but the other bits (with two exceptions) are repetitious (age and age, season and season). The two exceptions are *best* and *worst*, *spring* and *winter*, which contrast.

As a fun side note, notice that the movement of the words' transitions creates a type of intensity (and the end is always despair--*Darkness*, *Hell*, etc.). *Times* transitions to *age* which transitions to *epoch* (an epoch is an extended period of time characterized by a memorable series of events or development). Similarly, *season* transitions to *spring* and *winter*.

Anaphora can also be effective for listing, or writing in which you want to emphasize a subject (noun), an action (verb), or really, any word you'd like to stress. This can be effective when trying to make a point or to make sure a reader focuses on or remembers a particular word or phrase. Repetition naturally sears what is repeated into the readers' minds, so repeated content will both grab their attention and stick with them long after it is read.

Ex. Some tips for effective research papers:

- "Good" research papers include a clear thesis statement.
- "Good" research papers use a topic sentence in everybody paragraph.
- "Good" research papers make sure every sentence supports its paragraph's topic sentence and the paper's thesis.

Because of their primary placement and consistent wording, anaphoric words or phrases can ensure that a certain idea is driven into the reader's head, that a set of ideas are clearly tied together, or that a passage sounds more dramatic or poetic.

Epistrophe

Epistrophe is the repetition of a word or words at the end of a phrase or clause. Its placement in a sentence is the opposite of anaphora's placement of words or phrases. Quite similarly, though, its rhetorical function is to provide dramatic or poetic emphasis on an idea or a passage.

Ex. "...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." –Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

The repetition in this case is *the people*, which comes at the end of each clause.

Sometimes, it is quicker to avoid epistrophe and write in a simplified form, but in a paper of only a single style, this simplification may actually diminish the effectiveness of certain points.

For example, look back at Abraham Lincoln's address. Imagine it in simplified form.

Ex. "...government of, by, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Clearly, the sentence still makes sense, with each of the three prepositions corresponding to the shared object (the people). But what it lacks is the repetition that makes each prepositional phrase such an important element of the sentence.

(Note: Lincoln's sentence could also be used as an example for isocolon. Each clause is a prepositional phrase and follows the same pattern: preposition – *the* – *people*.)



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Sometimes, we use epistrophe naturally, not only in poetic or literary situations. Its usefulness in more formal writing situations, however, is to add that literary effect to writing that may otherwise sound plain.

Ex. If the bear population declines and the raccoon population declines, scientists fear a destructive increase in the number of fish migrating upriver.

There are several other forms of repetition, all of which can be equally successful in usage, such as *Epizeuxis*, the repetition of the same word without an interruption in between (“*Never, never, never quit*” –Winston Churchill). What they all have in common is that they emphasize meaning through repetition in such a way that the emotional power of the sentence is much stronger.

Redundancy

Redundancy is the repetition of a word or phrase that does not add anything to the previous meaning; it just restates what has already been said.

Ex. If we are going to see the movie on opening night, we will have to get there early. We have to get to the movie early, because it’s opening night.

Both sentences of this example say the same things, just with different words. This isn’t the only form of redundancy, however. Like repetition, there are many different types of redundancy.

Rhetorical Tautology

A tautology is a phrase that repeats a meaning with different words.

Ex. There was a *variety* of *different* foods at Thanksgiving.

Ex. As an *added bonus*, the food was all really good.

Ex. There was an *unconfirmed rumor* that the Superbowl was going to be canceled.

Ex. However, *past history* proved that it would continue no matter what.

Ex. But if it were true, the household would be far from a *safe haven*.

Notice the redundancy of the meanings. A rumor is a rumor because it is unconfirmed by definition. A haven is a haven because it is safe by definition.

RAS Syndrome

RAS syndrome stands for Redundant Acronym Syndrome syndrome. It is an example of what it defines: Acronyms or initials that are followed by a word that uses a word that is within the acronym.

Ex. Automated Teller Machine Machine (ATM Machine)

Ex. Personal Identification Number Number (PIN Number)

Notice that the final word following the acronym is redundant because it is already used within the acronym itself.

While there are many other types of redundancy, the ones listed here are the most common ones.



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