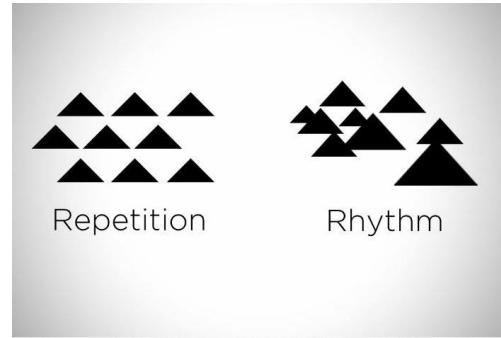


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5

Ways to Repeat Yourself (Again) Creating Patterns with your Words

Back in Elementary School, your teacher told you not to repeat yourself when you write. That was fine for back then, but, let me say it again, that was good for back then. Not now. Using Repetition in your writing opens the door for adding emphasis, meter, themes, parallelism, and rhyme. Great writers, and especially great speakers, use repetition to great effect, making words easier to understand and often, hard to forget. Repetition was mentioned in the Top 10 Techniques worksheet but here we repeat it to go into more detail.



1. Emphatic: The most common reason people add repetition is for the immediate effect. They want to emphasize a word or idea and so that word or idea simply gets repeated. One word may be repeated, or synonyms may be added for emphasis, such as:

“Rodney, get your dirty stinking feet off the table.”

“Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creep in this petty pace from day to day ...”

In the first example, dirty and stinking are synonyms, meaning roughly the same thing, and repeat the same idea to make sure Rodney gets the idea that you really want him to get his feet off the table. In the second example, from Shakespeare's Macbeth, the author repeats the same word over and over (like that – over and over) to emphasize how days keep on moving.

Or just think of the classic video clip from the movie *Cop Out* with Tracey Morgan sitting next to Bruce Willis in a car saying,



“No, no, uh-uh, mm-mm, no, no. No-no-no. No. Hell no. No, no. I refuse, no ... no.”

2. Grammatic: When grammar is repeated two parts of a sentence end up looking and sounding the same. This is known as parallelism. Think of two parallel lines in Math class. They are next to each other, going in the same direction, looking the same. Parallelism in writing is a very common technique, especially in speeches. Why? People tend to remember parallel lines. Indeed, some of the most famous lines you may remember were written with parallelism.

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The Bible

“That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” Neil Armstrong

“Science investigates; religion interprets. Science gives man knowledge, which is power; religion gives man wisdom, which is control ...” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Once you learn to recognize parallelism, you will begin to see it everywhere. That's because this form of repetition makes a large impact on readers, and can help readers remember your main point better. So, once you understand parallelism, you can start to see examples in other places; the final step is to start using it effectively in your own writing.

3. Thematic: Every author leaves clues to the deeper meaning of the text throughout that text. Those clues often appear as Literary Devices. Remember there are many, many literary devices, but they are not all equal in quality when it comes to using them as clues to the author's theme. Among the most important are motifs. **A motif is a repeated image, phrase, or idea in a text. Repeating a motif in a text is a good clue to the text's overall Theme.**

Some motifs are merely for fun – the way that every *Star Wars* movie has someone say, “I have a bad feeling about this,” or how every Marvel movie has a cameo by author Stan Lee in it. Other times, the motifs that can be found throughout a text give clues to a larger meaning.

For example, in “Macbeth” unnatural events from storms to odd-acting animals show us that evil itself is against nature. Or in “Hamlet,” the author uses a repeated motif of rot and decay, and an unweeded garden, as an image of evil. Or more famous of all, Hamlet is so often seen holding a skull, a motif of death in the play as Hamlet questions the meaning of life.

Repeating a phrase or an image makes that image into a motif. Use motifs throughout your writing to offer readers a chance to understand your deeper message.



4. Rhythmic: Words have a sound to them, something we see very clearly in poetry. However, in prose – that is, in writing that is not poetic – words can be brought together in order to create pleasing rhythms. Again, this becomes more noticeable in speeches, but can also be effective in written word. Rhythm can be seen at the level of syllables (parts of words) or the level of individual words, or in the pattern of sentences in variety and length.

Notice the rhythmic difference between these two texts:

She went to the shop. She bought ingredients. She prepared Beef Rendang. She let it simmer for 5 hours. The house filled with exotic smells. She cooked rice. She waited for her husband. They ate a delicious dinner. She thought life was good.

She went to the shop to buy ingredients. And when she prepared the Beef Rendang in the afternoon, exotic smells wafted through the house. After dinner, she whispered to her husband: "Life is good."

One trick is to use long panoramic sentences to describe actions taking place over a period of time. Short, quick sentences next to one another can describe fast actions, one coming after the other. Notice how these techniques are used in this example from "The Sniper":

His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then clattered on the pavement.



Notice how the sentences get longer and more detailed, describing the action as it slowly unfolds, as the man struggles, falls, dropping his rifle, and then down to the sidewalk. It's all as if the action is seen in slow motion. That's very different than the "Rat-a-tat" action (as it is called) from another part of the story. Here the sentences are fast and short. They have a beat to them, almost like the fast heartbeat of the person in the story:

The turret opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted toward the side street. The sniper fired again. The woman whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

5. Audible: Here the repetition in your writing is something others can hear. Audible means something that you notice with your ears. And even though we are focused on writing, the words all have sounds, sounds which the author can play with to create an effect. Poets use can use Rhyme to match the final sounds of words. But there are other ways to use audible repetition.



For instance:

Rhyme *"I will not eat them on a log, I will not eat them with a frog."*
 Word endings sound the same or similar

Alliteration *"Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers."*
 Words begin with the same or similar sound

Assonance *"He finds it fun to flick the sticks of lighted matches at you."*
 Words contain similar vowel sounds (here the short "i")

Consonance *"He liked to collect the odds and ends of his dad's hobbies."*
 Words contain similar consonant sounds (here the "ds")

Diction *"A government of the people, by the people and for the people ..."*
 Phrases somehow end up have a pleasing sound to them