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Special FX for Authors

How to create memorable scenes

Movies move at a fast pace these days, making those old black and white dramas from the classic years of Hollywood seem slow and dull. Or watch an old movie that attempts to show monsters or space travel, and the visual effects leave you laughing. Today's movies depend on CG (Computer Generated) shots and all kinds of Special Effects (FX) to capture the audience's imagination. And guess what? There are plenty of Special Effects that authors can use too. Only be careful. Use too many of these and the reader will notice. Use the same trick too many times and the reader will see through your trick. Then the reader will stop reading your text and start simply looking for your next Special Effect. However, used only as needed, these effects can have an impact leaving the reader with a memorable scene.



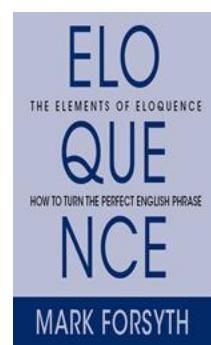
These Special Effects have been used and handed down for thousands of years. So why use them? What makes them special? Many authors no longer use these subtle and sophisticated tricks, relying on more in-your-face tactics to grab attention. But you do not need explosions and sex and swearing and nudity to grab a reader's attention. Instead, try one or two of these.

HINT 1: Read over the list and become a little familiar with some of these. Then, look for them as you read other texts. See if you can recognize them in use by other famous authors.

HINT 2: Find one or two that you like and write them out on a card or a Post-it Note. Keep it handy to use when you write ... and want something a bit extra.

HINT 3: Do not use a bunch of these together, or repeat the same trick too often. Less is more when it comes to Special Effects in writing.

The following descriptions and examples have been adapted from a book called "Elements of Eloquence" by Mark Forsyth, who states: "*There is more to life than the figures of rhetoric; I just don't think there is much more.*" Some of the examples will be familiar to you from our study of Literary Devices. Others may be brand new – though when you think about it, you may recognize that you have heard them before. Authors have been pulling these tricks on you for a long time, and you may have never noticed. Now the time is for you to tricky.



1. Adynaton (ad-in-art-on) – An impossibility.

“When pigs fly.”
“Hell will freeze over.”

2. Alliteration (uh-lit-uh-rey-shuh n) – It is surprisingly simple to add alliteration, and people are suckers for it.

“Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.” -- Dickens

3. Anadiplosis (an-uh-di-ploh-sis) – The repetition of the last word of a sentence at the start of the next sentence.

“Suffering breeds character, character breed faith; in the end faith does not disappoint.” -- Paul, *The Bible*
“For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime.” -- Milton

4. Anaphora (uh-naf-er-uh) – Starting each sentence with the same words or phrase.

*“We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be,
We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds,
We shall fight in the fields and in the street, we shall fight in the hills,
We shall never surrender.”* -- W Churchill

5. Antithesis (an-tith-uh-sis) – First you mention one thing, then another. It's not that hard, but rather simple ...

*“You’re hot and then you’re cold. You’re yes and then you’re no.
You’re in and then you’re out. You’re up and then you’re down.”* -- Katy Perry

6. Aposiopesis (ap-uh-sahy-uh-pee-sis) – “Becoming silent,” this device is signaled in English by three periods ...

*“No, you unnatural hags, I will have such revenges on you both,
That all the world shall ... I will do such things ...
What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be the terrors of the earth.”*
-- Shakespeare, “King Lear”

7. Assonance (as-uh-nuh ns) – the repetition of an internal vowel sound.

“A stitch in time saves nine.” -- Proverb

8. The Blazon (bley-zuh n) – A listing of body parts with similes attached, usually in verse, and often very odd.

*“Hark you that list to hear what saint I serve:
Her yellow locks exceed the beaten gold;
Her sparkling eyes in heaven a place deserve ...”* -- Thomas Watson (1582)

9. Catachresis (kat-uh-kree-sis) – A sentence which is so startling wrong, it is right, like this:

“I will speak daggers to her ...” -- Shakespeare, Hamlet about his mother
However, no one can actually speak daggers ...
“Curiouser and curiouser!” -- Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

10. Chiasmus (kahy-az-muh s) – It’s all about symmetry, whether in a phrase or a paragraph or in a longer text, where the beginning and the end are connected.

“Tea for two, and two for tea. Me for you, and you for me.” -- in *No No Nanette*
“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” -- President J F Kennedy

11. Congeries (kon-juh-reez) – A list. That’s about it.

*“The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action: and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust ...”* -- Shakespeare

12. Diacope (die-ack-oh-pee) – A verbal sandwich, in which a word or phrase is repeated after a brief interruption.

“Fly, my pretties, fly.” -- Wicked Witch of the West, in *The Wizard of Oz*
“Bond. James Bond.” -- Guess who ...
“Alone, alone, all all alone.” -- Coleridge, “The Ancient Mariner”

13. Enallage (e-nall-aj-ee) – A deliberate grammatical mistake.

“*We was robbed.*” -- Joe Jacobs, manager to Max Schmeling

“*Mr. Kurtz – he dead.*” -- J Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

“*Do not go gentle into that good night*” -- Dylan Thomas

14. Epanalepsis (ep-uh-nuh-lep-sis) – A phrase that begins and ends with the same word.

“*The king is dead, long live the king.*”

“*Man’s inhumanity to man.*” -- Robert Burns

15. Epistrophe/Epiphora (ih-pis-truh-fee) – When a clause, sentence, paragraph or stanza ends with the same word.

“*Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’ — I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build — why, I’ll be there.*”

-- Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*

16. Epithets (ep-uh-thet) – Transferred Epithets occur when an adjective that is supposed to be applied to one noun is applied to another instead.

“*The nervous man smoked a cigarette*”

becomes “*The man smoked a nervous cigarette.*”

“*The ploughman homeward plods his weary way.*” -- Wilfred Owen

17. Epizeuxis (ep-ee-zoox-is) – A figure of speech in which you repeat a word immediately in the same sense. It can be done with a single repetition, but is more forceful when following the rule of three.

“*The first rule of Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club. The second rule of Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club.*” -- in *Fight Club*

“*Ask me my three main priorities for government and I tell you: education, education, education.*” -- Tony Blair

“*I’m shocked, shocked to find gambling is going on here.*” -- *Casablanca*

18. Hendiadys (hen-dahy-uh-dis) – Substitution of an adjective and adjective for a phrase originally having an adjective and a noun.

“I love your beautiful eyes” becomes “I love your beauty and eyes.”

“For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory” may actually refer to a “glorious and powerful kingdom.” Or not. You never know with hendiadys what the author really meant because it remains hidden.

19. Hyperbaton (hahy-pur-buh-ton) – Placing words in an odd order, something which is very hard to do in English where word order is everything (Unless like Yoda you are speaking)

Adjectives: (opinion-size-age-shape-color-origin-material-purpose-noun)

Ablaut reduplication: repeating words with different vowels: I A O

Alternating stress patterns: indicate whether related words are nouns with first syllable stressed or verbs with second syllable stressed ... (see: convict/insult/subject)

“Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage ...” -- R. Lovelace

20. Hyperbole (hahy-pur-buh-lee) – Exaggeration. Overstatement.

“I was so hungry I could have eaten a horse.”

21. Hypotaxis (hahy-puh-tak-sis) – A sentence within a sentence, within ... A sentence with many clauses (and causes). Also known as a Cumulative Sentence when studying grammar.

22. Isocolon (ahy-suh-koh-luh n) – Two clauses which are grammatically parallel and structurally the same.

“Float like a butterfly; sting like a bee.” -- Cassius Clay/Mohammed Ali

“Where I’m going, you can’t follow. What I’ve got to do, you can’t be any part of.” -- from Casablanca

23. Litotes (lahy-tuh-teez) – An affirmation of something by denying its opposite.
Understatement.

“Ireland is no ordinary country.” actually means “it’s special”

“Geoffrey, this isn’t rocket science.” actually means “it’s easy”

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” means “they’re similar”

24. Merism – It looks like antithesis, but it's where you name all the parts of what you don't name.

"I take you to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, til death do us part." Or: "Always, in any situation." -- BCP 1979
"Ladies and Gentlemen ..." Or: "People!"

25. Metonymy (mi-ton-uh-mee) – Two things are connected to each other because they are physically connected.

26. Synecdoche (si-nek-duh-kee) – An extreme form of metonymy in which a body part steps in to represent the whole ...

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships ...?" -- Dr. Faustus
"The pen is mightier than the sword." -- E B Lytton

This second saying has two Metonyms: "Pen" stands for "the written word, and "Sword" stands for "military aggression." The next examples show synecdoche:

"The farmer needed to bring on some hired hands." Hired hands = workers
"What's the headcount for next week's party?" Head = whole person
"I'm looking forward to breaking bread with you." Bread = whole meal
"Let's take my new wheels out for a spin." Wheels = the whole car

27. Paradox – Hard to define but easy to see, a paradox is a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement that when investigated or explained may prove to be true.

"The sound of silence." -- Paul Simon
"The first shall be last and the last shall be first." -- Jesus, *The Bible*
"Youth is wasted on the young." -- Oscar Wilde

28. Parataxis (par-uh-tak-sis) – A sentence with a normal word order of Subject-Verb-Object -- because English is uninflected and linear.

29. Periodic Sentences – A long sentence that is not complete until the end.

*"Every breath you take, every move you make
 Every bond you break, every step you take, I'll be watching you."* -- Sting

30. Personification – The attribution of human characteristics or actions to animals, inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

“O beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on” -- Shakespeare, in “Othello”

31. Pleonasm (*plee-uh-naz-uh m*) – Using extra words where they are not needed.

“To be or not to be, that is the question.” -- Shakespeare, in “Hamlet”

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God to join together this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony ...” -- BCP, Marriage Service

32. Polyptoton – The repeated use of one word in different parts of speech or forms.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” -- Jesus, *The Bible*

“I have been a stranger in a strange land.” -- Moses’ wife, *The Bible*

33. Polysyndeton (*pol-ee-sin-di-ton*) – Using lots of conjunctions in a sentence**34. Asyndeton** – Not using a lot of conjunctions in a sentence

“And Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’” -- Mark (polysyndeton); Jesus (asyndeton)

35. Prolepsis (*proh-lep-sis*) – Using a pronoun in a sentence or paragraph before the noun which should be its antecedent (to which the pronoun refers).

“Nobody heard him, the dead man, but still he lay moaning.” -- S. Smith

“There were three of them. He’d known that all along. But why had she sent them? He thought of telling them he didn’t have it anymore ...”

36. Rhetorical Questions – A question for which an answer is not expected. Well, actually there are 16 different kinds of unanswerable questions, according to the Greeks, who also named each of them with totally forgettable names. I mean do you really want to know them?

“So what kind of an idiot do you think I am, anyway?”

“Does anybody really know what time it is?” -- Chicago (band/rock lyrics)

37. Scesis Onomat on (*skee-sis o-no-mat-on*) – A sentence lacking a main verb. A fragment, written on purpose. Like that. Just like that in fact.

“Space. The final frontier.” -- Star Trek introduction

“London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall.” -- Dickens, *Bleak House*

38. Syllepsis (*si-lep-sis*) – Phrase using one word in two incongruous ways, on purpose.

“The trouble with Ian is that he gets off on women because he can’t get on with them.” -- famous quote about Ian Flemming

“Mr. Pickwick took his hat and his leave.” -- Charles Dickens

“He fell into a barrow and fast asleep.” -- Charles Dickens

39. Synesthesia (*sin-is-thee-zhuh*) – A description in which one sense is described in terms of another sense.

“She sounded the way the Taj Mahal looks by moonlight.” -- Raymond Chandler

40. Tricolon – In place of a duality (two items) you can establish a pattern and break it with three. Or you can count on three as the magic Rhetorical device known as “The Rule of Three,” since the pattern of three items has been found to be more memorable than two or four.

“Wine, women, and song” *“Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”*

“The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly.” *“Truth, justice and the American way.”*

“It’s a bird. It’s a plane, No, it’s Superman.” *“... every Tom, Dick, and Harry.”*

Winston Churchill once tried a tetracolon with his famous: *“blood, toil, tears and sweat”* However, this was unmemorable and changed to the simpler, *“Blood, sweat and tears.”*

41. Zeugma (*zoog-muh*) – When clauses all use the same verb, but the verb is left out of the subsequent clauses and kept only in the first. Not a useful thing in English, but still used ...

“For contemplation he and valour formed,

For softness she and sweet attractive grace;

He for God only, she for God in him.” *-- Milton, Paradise Lost*

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” -- *The Bible*