Figures of rhetoric for GCSE

Many rhetorical devices have the effect of **emphasising** a point. Always consider **WHY** a word/phrase is being emphasised – discuss the context and the meaning.

In order to avoid repeatedly using the words ‘emphasise’ + ‘emphatic’ [!] try the following (but not all at once):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| accentuateindicatestresspoint outunderlinereiteratere-emphasise!highlight | pinpointput in the foregroundspotlight dwell on make the point make clearmake much ofreinforce/ amplify (©Rufus Guy/George Robson 2016) |

Polyptoton

In inflected languages polyptoton is the same word being repeated but appearing each time in a different case. *otium/otio* in your Catullus poem.

Other than the function of emphasising ideas, the use of polyptoton as a rhetorical device adds (i) rhythm to a work as well as making it (ii) easier to remember.

It can be used of verbs, too.

***Judge*** *not, that ye be not* ***judged***  Gospel of Matthew 7:1

*"Who shall watch the watchmen themselves (***Quis custodiet ipsos custodes***?)?"* Juvenal

*"The Greeks are* ***strong****, and* ***skillful*** *to their* ***strength****,*

*Fierce to their* ***skill****, and to their* ***fierceness*** *valiant."*

Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida I. i. 7-8

*“We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the* ***oppressor****; it must be demanded by the* ***oppressed****.”*

Anaphora

Anaphora (Greek: ἀναφορά, "carrying back, repeating") is a rhetorical device that consists of repeating a sequence of words at the beginnings of neighbouring clauses, thereby lending them emphasis.

Other than the function of emphasising ideas, the use of anaphora as a rhetorical device adds (i) rhythm to a work as well as making it (ii) more pleasurable to read and (iii) easier to remember.

Anaphora serves the purpose of delivering an artistic effect to a passage. It is also used to appeal to the emotions of the audience in order to persuade, inspire, motivate and encourage them. In Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech, he uses anaphora by repeating "I have a dream" eight times throughout the speech.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***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

***We shall not*** *flag or fail.* ***We shall go*** *on to the end.* ***We shall******fight*** *in France,* ***we shall******fight*** *on the seas and oceans,* ***we shall fight*** *with growing confidence and growing strength in the air,* ***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 streets,* ***we shall fight*** *in the hills.* ***We shall*** *never surrender.*

— Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 4 June 1940

Asyndeton

Asyndeton (from the Greek: ἀσύνδετον, "unconnected") is a figure of speech in which one or several conjunctions (e.g. AND, BUT, AND THEN...) are omitted from a series of related clauses.

Examples are *veni, vidi, vici* and its translation "I came, I saw, I conquered".

Its use can have the effect of speeding up the rhythm of a passage and making a single idea more memorable. Or making a statement punchy and forceful, bringing out e.g. emotion, anger.

"...and that government **of the people, by the people, for the people** shall not perish from the earth".

Abraham Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Pleonasm

Pleonasm (from Greek πλέον pleon "**more, too much**") is the use of more words or parts of words than is necessary or sufficient for clear expression: examples are *black darkness, burning fire*, or *people's democracy*. In many ways it is almost the same as tautology, *saying the same thing*.

Pleonasm sometimes serves the same function as ‘repetition’—it can be used to reinforce an idea, contention or question, rendering writing clearer and easier to understand.

"I will be brief: your noble son is **mad**:

**Mad** call I it; for, to define true **madness**,

What is't but to be nothing else but **mad**?"

— *Hamlet* (Act 2, Scene 2)

"Let me tell you this, when social workers offer you, **free, gratis and for nothing**, something to hinder you from swooning, which with them is an obsession, it is useless to recoil ..."

—Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*.

Chiasmus

*Chiasmus* (Latin term from Greek χίασμα, "crossing", from the Greek χιάζω, chiázō, "to shape like the letter Χ") is the figure of speech in which two or more clauses are related to each other through a reversal of structures in order to make a larger point.

Chiasmus was particularly popular in the literature of the ancient world, including Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, where it was used to articulate the balance of order within the text.

The elements of simple chiasmus are often labelled in the form A B B A, where the letters correspond to grammar, words, or meaning. For example John F. Kennedy said, "ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country".

*Chiasmus* derives its effectiveness from its symmetrical structure and serves to emphasise (that word again!) a point. It may also give a line a pleasing rhythm.

A good example is the aphorism:

 *quod cibus est aliis, aliis est venenum*,

"What is food to some, to others is poison."

The pattern is: **noun, verb, pronoun; pronoun, verb, noun.**

The neatness of this aphorism makes it memorable (as in the JFK phrase above).

There is a virtuoso double chiasmus in Horace’s tale of the town mouse and country mouse. The effect is to use a grand figure of speech to ennoble two humble mice. Brilliant or ...? Why yes - BRILLIANT!

'olim

**rusticus** urbanum murem **mus** paupere fertur

accepisse cavo, **veterem** vetus hospes **amicum**...

Hyperbaton

Hyperbaton is a figure of speech in which normally associated words are separated. The separation of connected words for emphasis or effect is possible to a much greater degree in highly inflected languages, where sentence meaning does not depend closely on word order. In Latin and ancient Greek, the effect of hyperbaton is usually to emphasize the **first** word.

From your Ovid selection:

virginibus **cupidas** iniciuntque **manus**.

“And they throw their **lustful** **hands** upon the maidens”

\*\*The lustful part is stressed by coming before MANUS and being separated from the word by INICIUNT-QUE.

"Bloody thou art; **bloody** will be thy **end**"

— William Shakespeare in Richard III, 4.4, 198.

*Bloody* is separated from *end* to stress how horrible the death will be.

Enjambment

The running-over of a sentence or phrase from one poetic line to the next, without terminal punctuation; the opposite of end-stopped. It can be used to suggest someone is rushing along/emotional/angry, that the action is fast; to highlight the word that begins the new line...

In reading, **the delay of meaning** creates a tension that is released when the word or phrase that completes the syntax is encountered.

William Carlos Williams’s “Between Walls” is one sentence broken into 10 *enjambed* lines:

 the back wings

 of the

 hospital where

 nothing

 will grow lie

 cinders

 in which shine

 the broken

 pieces of a green

 bottle

The start of *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot:

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire...

1. Delivered on August 28, 1963: he calls for an end to racism in the United States. Delivered to over 250,000 civil rights supporters from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, the speech was a defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It was delivered by Lincoln during the American Civil War, on the afternoon of Thursday, November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)