

Portugal, Nicholas
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AP Language

“Get Instant Cleverness” OPR

Monty Python’s remarkably entertaining, persuasive “treasury of wit” excerpt from the book *Thank You For Arguing*, titled *Get Instant Cleverness*, describes how using rhetorical figures of speech can assist writers in showing their humorous side and assume a greater degree of understanding or expertise in their subject. The various rhetorical devices he discusses include the following: coyness, dialogue, speak-around, repeated first words, multiple yoking, idioms, self-answering questions, tropes, metaphors, irony, metonymy, synecdoche, giving expression a twist, surprise endings, literal interpretation, chiasmus, dialysis, antithesis, self-editing aloud, litotes, climax, verbing, and anthimeria. To justify his reasons for the importance of each device, Python tends to call forth a plethora of his own experiences and is quick to make generalizations, such as, “Remember, things sound much more clever when you say them aloud than they do on paper” (Python, pg. 67). In this sense, he attempts to establish a personal connection with the readers, which keeps him from appearing to have a laundry list of devices, but demonstrates good structure and rhythm. After reading this discourse of wittiness, three rhetorical devices I would mostly employ to improve my writing may include idioms, litotes, and verbing.

Compared to the other rhetorical devices, idioms appear to be the most unique, because the words utilized in the creation of an idiom involve the combination of words in a manner of which maintains its own distinct qualities. An example of an idiom in today’s society would be, “Break a leg.” In theater jargon, this sentence would signify “Good luck;” however, if literally interpreted would be rather intense for readers to comprehend. Depending on who is reading the work, using idioms may stimulate connections with certain people who’ve had greater exposure with what they practice. Furthermore, litotes appears to be one of the more complicated forms of rhetorical devices, because if not directly specified, it isn’t readily detected unless the phrase is as simple as “We are not unamused.” What results from the employment of litotes is an ironic understatement, which could be both beneficial when responding to unintellectual questions or demonstrating how the affirmative is reached by inserting both negative words, which will make the presenter hold a sense of authority on his/her project. One could detect if litotes is present by determining the words that are polar opposites of each other, such as “not exactly;” which, if continued, can result in a well-executed cliché. Last, verbing is pertinent when it comes to explaining the difference as to how certain verbs are already done, while others they simply just don’t make sense. According to Python, Shakespeare used “verbing to form bet, compromise, drugged, negotiate, puking, secure, torture, and undress” (Python, pg. 70). It tends to be useful in offering comic relief during really serious conversations and showing a sense of humor, which is always something extra to have to score jobs during interviews or in college application essays.

In order to craft exceptional stories, articles, plays, or novels, writers must understand the significance and impact of everything they write, especially when employing rhetorical devices. Rather than making the text dull and mundane, more people would pay attention if the wording of a presentation were more humorous and comic relieving. Shakespeare was noted for his usage rhetorical devices throughout his works, to achieve an array of effects, such as rhythm, pathos, logos, dialogue portrayal of personalities, etc. In conclusion, finding a way to make overly used clichés clever can at first be difficult, but using techniques such as providing the expression a twist, literal interpretation, chiasmus, or verbing can profoundly enhance one’s arguments.