

## Rhetoric: Some Definitions

(note that one of these things is not like the others...)

**Gorgias:** Persuasion by speech is like abduction by force. And: “The power of speech [*logos*] over the constitution of the soul can be compared with the effect of drugs on the bodily state: just as drugs by driving out different humours from the body can put an end either to the disease or to life, so with speech: different words can induce grief, pleasure or fear; or again, by means of a harmful kind of persuasion, words can drug and bewitch the soul.”

**Socrates/Plato:** “Rhetoric” is “an art of guiding the soul by means of words” (*technê psychagôgia tis dia logôn*) in any kind of discourse (Phaedrus)

**Aristotle:** Rhetoric is an antistrophes to dialectic. “Let rhetoric [be defined as] an ability [dynamis], in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion.” “Rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic” — an art of practical civic reasoning, applied to deliberative, judicial, and “display” speeches in political assemblies, lawcourts, and other public gatherings.

**Cicero:** "Rhetoric is one great art comprised of five lesser arts: inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronuntiatio." Rhetoric is "speech designed to persuade." Rhetoric is a general art of speech that joins “wisdom and eloquence” (*sapientia et eloquentia*), and that ranges over the whole realm of human concerns, but applies especially to practical civic discourse.

**Quintillian:** "Rhetoric is the art of speaking well." Actually, it's “the good *man* speaking well.”

**George Campbell:** [Rhetoric] is that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end. The four ends of discourse are to enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passion, and influence the will.

**Wayne Booth:** Rhetoric of assent “creates meaning.” And: “Rhetoric is the art of discovering warrantable beliefs and improving those beliefs in shared discourse” (*Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*).

**Kenneth Burke:** "Rhetoric is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic and continually born anew: the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols." And: “The most characteristic concern of rhetoric [is] the manipulation of men's beliefs for political ends....the basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 41).

**Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar:** Rhetoric is "a general art consisting not of knowledge about substantive fields but a flexible system of formal and prudential devices—topics, tropes and figures, inferential schemes, probabilities, prudential rules, and so on. At the same time, however, this general art is functionally implicated in managing and transforming common opinion for persuasive ends."

**Andrea Lunsford:** "Rhetoric is the art, practice, and study of human communication."

**Sonja and Karen Foss:** "Rhetoric is an action human beings perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another . . . , [and it] is a perspective humans take that involves focusing on symbolic processes."

**James J. Murphy:** A rhetorician is someone who provides his fellows with useful precepts or directions for organizing and presenting his ideas or feeling to them.

**George Kennedy:** Rhetoric in the most general sense may perhaps be identified with the energy inherent in communication: the emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, the

physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message.

**Lloyd Bitzer:** In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action.

**Douglas Ehninger:** [Rhetoric is] that discipline which studies all of the ways in which men may influence each other's thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols. And: "I described the rhetoric of the classical period as a pragmatically oriented art of oral persuasion . . . and the rhetoric of the present time as a socially oriented art aimed at promoting healthy and productive human relationships."

**Ross Winterowd:** "Rhetoric is the study of honest, effective communication."

**Gerard A. Hauser:** Rhetoric is an instrumental use of language. . . . One person engages another person in an exchange of symbols to accomplish some goal. It is not communication for communication's sake. Rhetoric is communication that attempts to coordinate social action. For this reason, rhetorical communication is explicitly pragmatic. Its goal is to influence human choices on specific matters that require immediate attention.

**Steven Mailloux:** "Rhetoric [is] the political effectivity of trope and argument in culture. Such a working definition includes the two traditional meanings of rhetoric—figurative language and persuasive action" (*Rhetorical Power*)