



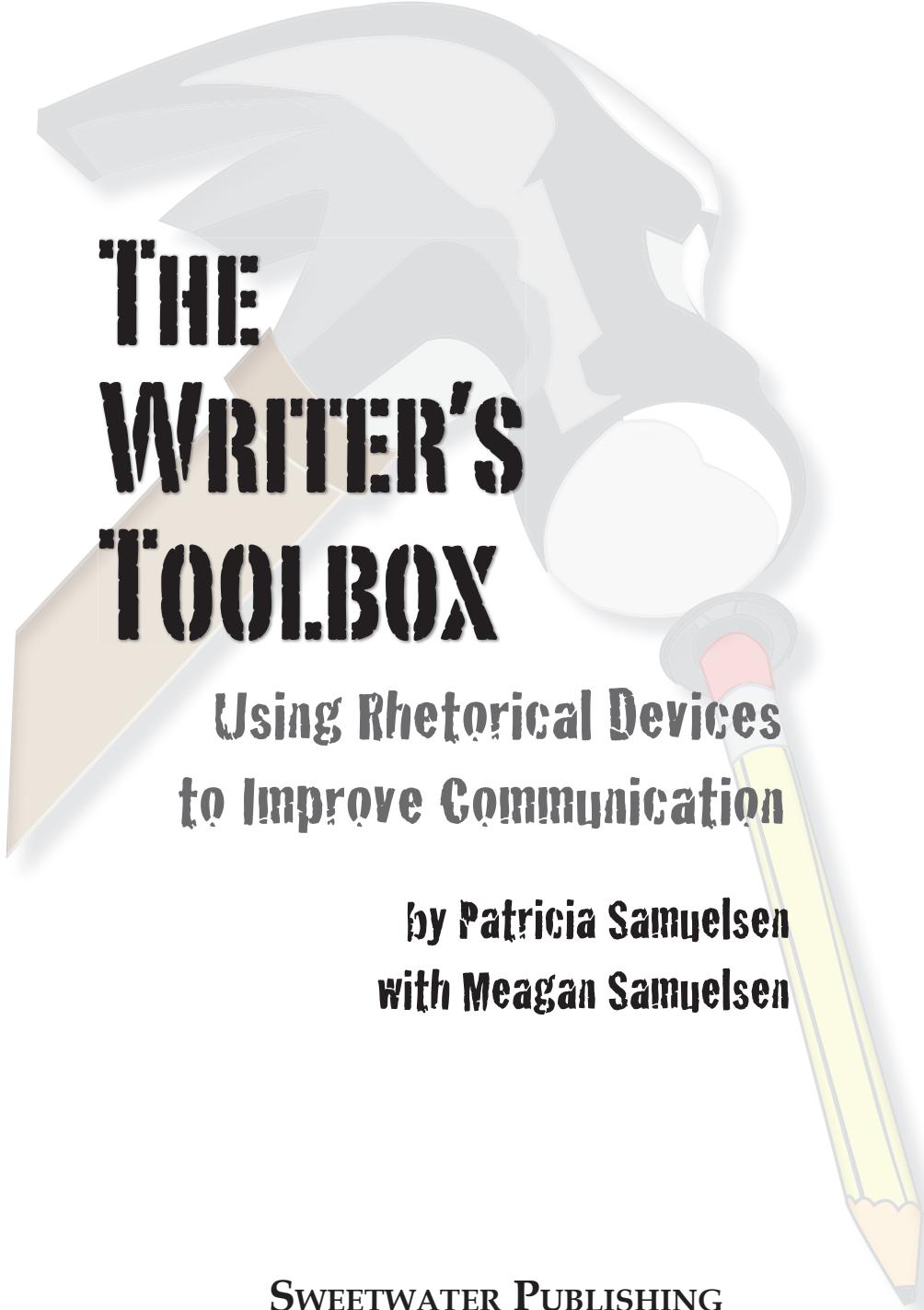
# THE WRITER'S TOOLBOX

Using Rhetorical Devices  
to Improve Communication

by Patricia Samuelsen  
with Meagan Samuelsen

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Patricia Samuelsen with Meagan Samuelsen

*The Writer's Toolbox: Using Rhetorical Devices to Improve Communication*

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# Preface

Rhetoric is ubiquitous. We all experience and use it everyday—when we watch a commercial, when we write an essay, even when we converse around the dinner table. Rhetoric is simply the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing. Over its 2500-year history, the study of style (especially the use of the devices we study in this book) has been an integral component of the study of rhetoric. We can let the academics decide whether rhetorical devices are necessary to the thinking process or simply serve as added ornamentation, but speakers and writers for thousands of years have agreed that these tools give clarity and beauty to our communication.

*The Writer's Toolbox* focuses on the use of rhetorical devices. While not a complete writing curriculum, *The Writer's Toolbox* helps you understand, recognize, and practice some valuable tools of clear and effective communication. Rich in examples from famous authors and orators, this book can act as an unintimidating introduction to the rhythms of well-crafted writing. We want you to understand that words matter, and that using words skillfully is one of the joys of life.

*The Writer's Toolbox* is a great addition to any writing, public speaking, or debating program, and can be used in a classroom setting or at home. Anyone interested in the ways words work will enjoy these lessons and examples from literature and oratory. Whether you are fifteen or fifty, *The Writer's Toolbox* helps you improve your writing without a large time commitment. Each lesson takes no more than 20 to 30 minutes to complete, and you can easily finish the book in a school year by completing one lesson every week. For use in the classroom, we have included a few group review games in the appendices.

This book was written for (and with the help of) the 2009/10 Primer students in The Great Conversation class at Schola, a meeting place for teachers and pupils, in Sugar Land, Texas. Without these special students and their enthusiasm for the “writing magic” in rhetorical devices, we would never have made it past the first lesson! Thanks to Marcella, Maria, Michela, Faith, Anna, Hannah, Rachel, Andrew, Chris, Susanna, James, Dylan, and Tim for their excitement and encouragement. Many thanks to Meagan for bringing her own insights and “writing magic” to this endeavor, to Amanda for her careful eye for detail, and to Zing for a final polishing. Any errors are my own.

— Patricia Samuelsen

August, 2010



# INTRODUCTION

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Over 2500 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote *The Art of Rhetoric*, in which he discussed various aspects of communication as it was practiced by the great orators of his day. The first two sections of his work concentrated on the invention and arrangement of an argument. In the last section he delved into style, including a discussion of what we call rhetorical devices.

So, what are rhetorical devices? Well, let's compare the process of writing to the process of building a house.<sup>1</sup> Let's say that you already have your blueprint, your overall structure. In writing, we might call that an outline. Let's also say that you have your materials at hand. For us that means the supports for your argument—or, perhaps, the plot elements of the Great American Novel you have in your head! Now you are ready to do the heavy construction work. But how? How will you bring your material and your design together?<sup>2</sup>

This is when you need some tools—a hammer and some nails, an axe, a chisel or two.<sup>3</sup> In your writing, rhetorical devices are your tools.<sup>4</sup> They help you work the details: the order of your words, the use of conjunctions, the rhythm of each individual phrase.<sup>5</sup> They allow you to craft your writing on a micro-level, sentence by sentence, manipulating your materials to fit into your larger plan.

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1 Simile

2 Rhetorical Question

3 Asyndeton

4 Metaphor

5 Asyndeton

It is useful to note that everyone uses rhetorical devices in speech and writing. They are an integral part of everyday communication, some of them so common that we may miss them. But, like the tools in your grandfather's workshop, they can be used clumsily and without knowledge, or skillfully with an understanding of their power.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge of your rhetorical tools will make your writing structurally sound and beautiful.

The goal of this book is three-fold: to help you identify, appreciate, and use rhetorical devices. Every lesson begins with a simple explanation of one of the rhetorical devices along with examples from literature, oratory, and real life. The lesson closes with suggestions on the best way to begin using the device. After each lesson are exercises where you can try out the tool for yourself. The answers for the exercises are at the back of the book along with some useful appendices.

Be sure to continue reviewing the devices you've already studied in order to master their definitions and uses. Look for examples of the devices in literature, newspapers, comics, commercials, billboards.<sup>7</sup> Each time you recognize a rhetorical device, you will better understand the tools at your disposal.

These tools are as old as the lever, as powerful as the hammer, and as sensitive to the touch of the craftsman as the chisel and lathe.<sup>8</sup> The only way to learn how to use a tool is to practice. So, what are you waiting for?<sup>9</sup> Open the toolbox, try out each device, see what it does best.<sup>10</sup> You'll become an expert craftsman of sentences and paragraphs, a master builder of ideas.<sup>11</sup>

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6 Antithesis

7 Asyndeton

8 Parallelism

9 Rhetorical Question

10 Asyndeton

11 Metaphor



# **DEVICES OF ASSOCIATION**



# LESSON 1

Oliver had fallen behind on his algebra homework. Now polynomial factoring loomed over his weekend like a dark cloud threatening to spoil the fun.

Wait a minute. What does a dark cloud have to do with algebra homework? It's true that algebra and clouds are two unlike things, but they do have at least one thing in common: they can both spoil a fun weekend as quickly as a list of Saturday chores from your mother.

Welcome to the world of similes. When you compare two unlike things, you use the characteristics of one to help you describe the other. The resulting word picture is more vivid and interesting than a simple description.

One of the most familiar similes is by the poet Robert Burns:

My love is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June.

When Burns says that the girl he loves is like a red rose, he doesn't mean that she has thorns or roots or needs to be watered. He might mean that she is young and beautiful. He might even mean that she smells nice. That's part of the fun of similes. When you read a simile, you have to figure out which characteristics are being transferred from one subject to the other.

Similes have primary and secondary subjects. The primary subject is the thing that the poet is actually talking about (in this case, "my love"). The secondary subject is the thing to which the poet is comparing the primary subject ("a red, red rose").

## simile

**SIM-uh-lee**

From Latin  
*similis* "a like thing"

An explicit comparison of two unlike things, often employing "like" or "as."

Most similes use the comparative words “like” and “as” to compare their primary and secondary subjects. Look at these examples:

Mint ice cream is like a cool breeze on a hot day.

He swims as fast as a fish.

Other similes (the sneaky ones!) do not use “like” or “as.” In the following examples, for instance, the comparative word is an adjective.

His speech was smoother than butter...

-Psalm 55:21 (NASV)

“I’m happier than a tornado in a trailer park.”

-Tow Mater, Cars

Sometimes, it might not be clear to us what the objects being compared have in common. Then the comparison can be elaborated, as you can see in the following examples:

And money is like muck, not good except it be spread.

-Francis Bacon

Life is like an onion:

You peel it off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep.

-Carl Sandburg

Use similes to emphasize a certain characteristic of the thing being described. When you use a simile, your reader or listener can form a mental picture of the comparison, helping them understand what you’re trying to communicate. Similes help you to think carefully about your subject and add spice to your writing.

## I. Appreciating Similes

### A. Explain the following examples of simile.

1. "I feel thin . . . like butter scraped over too much bread."

-Bilbo Baggins in J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

- a. What is being described?
- b. What is it being compared to?
- c. How are the two subjects alike?

2. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

- a. What is being described?
- b. What is it being compared to?
- c. How are the two subjects alike?

3. How like the winter hath my absence been.

-William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 97"

- a. What is being described?
- b. What is it being compared to?
- c. How are the two subjects alike?

4. In the light of a king's face there is life,  
and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.

-Proverbs 16:15

- a. What is being described?
- b. What is it being compared to?
- c. How are the two subjects alike?

5. He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

-Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Eagle"

- a. What is being described?
- b. What is it being compared to?
- c. How are the two subjects alike?

6. From the camp  
the troops were turning out now, thick as bees  
that issue from some crevice in a rock face,  
endlessly pouring forth, to make a cluster  
and swarm on blooms of summer here and there,  
glinting and droning, busy in bright air.

-Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, Book 2, Lines 98-103

- a. What is being described?
- b. What is it being compared to?
- c. How are the two subjects alike?

## II. Writing Similes

A. Write similes by completing the following sentences. Many similes are clichés (phrases that are overused and show a lack of original thought). Try to write original similes that are fresh and interesting. Think about what part of the primary subject you want to emphasize. Then think of something that is “like” that.

1. Her smile is like \_\_\_\_\_.

2. The library is like \_\_\_\_\_.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ is like a volcano.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ is like a bubbling brook.

5. He eats like \_\_\_\_\_.

6. These cookies taste like \_\_\_\_\_.

7. The celebration was as \_\_\_\_\_ as

\_\_\_\_\_.

8. The sun was as \_\_\_\_\_ as

\_\_\_\_\_.

**B. Write your own similes.**

1. You have a huge dog. Use a simile to describe how huge.
  2. You've done a great job cleaning up your room. Use a simile to describe how it looks now.
  3. You've been working on your math homework for six hours already. Use a simile to show how worn out you are feeling.
  4. You're spending a whole week with your favorite cousins at the beach. Use a simile to show how you feel about it.

# LESSON 7

## I. Identifying Rhetorical Devices

A. Match the rhetorical devices to their definitions:

1. Attributing human qualities to something that is not human:

---

2. A reference to an object or concept by using a word closely related to or suggested by the original word:

---

3. An implied comparison made by referring to one thing as another:

---

4. A representation of the whole by naming one of its parts, or vice versa:

---

5. A short, informal reference to a famous person or event:

---

6. An explicit comparison of two unlike things, often employing “like” or “as”:

---

## Review

Allusion

Metaphor

Metonymy

Personification

Simile

Synecdoche

## II. Recognizing Rhetorical Devices

### A. Identify the rhetorical devices used in the following examples.

1. Wisdom cries aloud in the street,  
in the markets she raises her voice.

-Proverbs 1:20

2. "The burger and fries left without paying," complained the waitress.

3. When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,  
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field . . .

-William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 2"

4. "Shall I keep your hogs, and eat husks with them? What prodigal portion have I spent, that I should come to such penury?"

-Orlando in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 1, Scene 1

5. Like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled.

-Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

6. From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent.

-Winston Churchill, 1946

---

B. Read the following passages and identify the rhetorical devices you find.

1. Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

## 2. A Book

Emily Dickinson

He ate and drank the precious words,  
His spirit grew robust;  
He knew no more that he was poor,  
Nor that his frame was dust.

He danced along the dingy days,  
And this bequest of wings  
Was but a book. What liberty  
A loosened spirit brings!

The author says a book is

\_\_\_\_\_ , and

\_\_\_\_\_ .



## THE WRITER'S TOOLBOX FEATURES:

- Thirty engaging lessons
- Clear explanations
- Examples from literature and oratory
- Exercises with answer key
- Review lessons and games

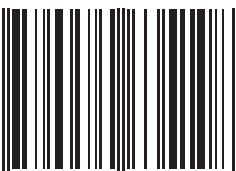
## DISCOVER THE JOYS OF WORD-CRAFT!

Whether you are a teacher, a student, or simply a lover of words, *The Writer's Toolbox* will help develop your appreciation for the well-crafted phrase using time-tested tools called rhetorical devices. Rhetorical devices were first examined by the rhetoricians of ancient Greece. Writers and speakers have been honing these devices ever since in their search for clarity and beauty in language. Discover these tools for yourself in thirty short, enjoyable lessons in *The Writer's Toolbox*.

*Words matter, and using words skillfully  
is one of the joys of life.*

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