

**English Rhetoric**

**英语修辞学**

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## 前言

修辞学是研究提高语言表达效果的一门学科。它是一门既古老又年轻的学科。修辞学的研究源远流长，古希腊时代的亚里斯多德及古罗马时代的西塞罗等语言大师都对修辞艺术有过精辟的论断；我国修辞研究也有悠久的历史，早在《左传》中就有“言之无文，行而不远”的说法。现代修辞学研究从心理学、社会学、人类学、语义学等领域中汲取研究成果，丰富自己的学说，修辞学发展至今已成为一门有效地使用语言的综合性学科。

多年的英语教学实践使我们深感修辞教学的必要性，我们教精读、翻译、写作、报刊选读的同事也经常谈起学生这方面的知识很欠缺。学生通常能理解字、词、句的意思及作品的主要内容，但不会对作品进行分析和评价；学生说、写能力的提高也由于缺乏修辞知识受到影响。本书致力于向学生展示语言的感染力，激发和调动他们学习英语的积极性。在阅读方面，它将帮助学生进行语言分析，使学生了解作者的语言技巧和写作风格，加深对作品的理解，从而得到美的艺术享受；在运用语言方面，它指导学生正确选词炼句，布局谋篇，从而提高说、写能力。

本书注重修辞的实践性，各章节都从分析、比较、修改语言实例入手，例句选自经典名著、名人名言、报刊杂志、商品广告等各种语体。作者参阅了国内外多部优秀的修辞著作和教材，摘引了不少名言佳句，在书后参考书目中逐一列出了作者及出版单位，在此向各位专家及相关出版社表示诚挚的谢意。

本书文字简洁，通俗易懂，不仅适用于英语专业的学生，对于没有经过系统写作训练的非英语专业学生也大有裨益。

# Part I Introduction

## 1 Background and Field of Rhetoric

### 1.1 Historical Background of Rhetoric

Rhetoric is one of the oldest subjects treated in the world of literature. Early in the 4th century B.C, during the time of Aristotle in Greece, rhetoric was considered as one of the few important branches of learning. In Athens, the center of western civilization, great orators, by exercising their rhetoric, gained following and support, and eventually political power.

Of course the field of rhetoric was then rather limited. Aristotle, in his famous book *Rhetoric*, defined rhetoric as “the art of persuasion”. Rhetoric was originally applied only to oral expressions, constituting mainly what we call today the Argumentation. This oral nature of rhetoric was quite a historical one; it remained so all through the Middle Ages. Even down to about the beginning of the 18th century it was not much changed. John Locke, the noted English philosopher of the latter part of the 17th century, was quoted to have said that rhetoric was the science of oratory; the art of speaking with propriety, elegance, and force. This is not to be wondered at, for the root of rhetoric, whether considered from the Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, or Italian, all means *to speak*.

The shifting of emphasis from the oral side to the written in rhetoric is more a matter of circumstance rather than preconceived design. With the dawn of the 19th century printing became so popular and so convenient that when people wished to communicate thoughts with others they found it easier to write, and so the old rhetorical principles as applied in speech naturally were also adapted to written literature. This led to the so-called artificial eloquence of rhetoric as revealed through the pamphlets and treatises of the early modern period. Today there are still people who equate rhetoric with ornate, showy language, or with figures of speech.

With the quickened tempo of life, efficiency and efficacy are

increasingly stressed. Languages are means of communication. More and more people come to regard rhetoric as the art of using language effectively. Furthermore, rhetoric tends to be connected more with writing than with speech, and more with prose than with verse. Rhetoric today is often used as an equivalent of “effective composition”.

## **1.2 Rhetoric and Grammar**

The grammar of a language is a systematic account of how that language functions to provide intelligible discourse. But rhetoric also is concerned with intelligible discourse. What is then the distinction between grammar and rhetoric? Perhaps it can be put most clearly by using an analogy with the game of football. The rules that govern the play of football may be called the grammar of the game. In order to play the game of football, one must observe the rules; but a mere keeping of the rules would not ensure that the team necessarily plays well or that it wins any games. The rhetoric of football, then, would be a knowledge of strategy and maneuver that leads to effective play and a winning game. To play the game correctly would not necessarily be to play it effectively, though effective play would have to conform to the rules of the game.

To see the difference between rhetoric and grammar, let’s compare two sentences:

- (1) He said he was very hungry that day and ate four big cakes within two minutes.
- (2) He said he was starving that day and wolfed down four big cakes within two minutes.

Both sentences are correct grammatically. But the second sentence is more effective because two figures of speech—metaphor and hyperbole—are involved. So grammar is the law of language; rhetoric is the art of language. Grammar tells what is right; rhetoric tells what is effective. Francis Christensen, an American French rhetorician, once said: “Grammar maps out the possible; rhetoric narrows the possible down to the desirable and effective.”

### 1.3 Communicative Rhetoric and Aesthetic Rhetoric

Rhetoric consists of two basic aspects: communicative rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric.

Communicative rhetoric deals with the choice of words, the selection of sentence patterns, the organization of paragraphs, and the arrangement of the whole essay. It emphasizes clearness, accurateness and appropriateness.

Aesthetic rhetoric stresses the vividness and gracefulness in expressing one's ideas by artistic approaches like the use of figures of speech so as to increase the emotional appeal of one's speech or writing. The famous Chinese rhetorician Mr. 陈望道 in his 《修辞学发凡》 put forward two corresponding aspects of rhetoric. They are 消极修辞 and 积极修辞. They correspond to communicative rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric respectively.

### 1.4 Rhetoric as a Practical Study

Rhetoric is not a decorative art; it is a practical one. It is not sufficient that the readers remember a few canons of some rhetoric textbook. They must study the subject with a determination to know, to learn, and to practice. Like Robert L. Stevenson, who made up his mind to be a writer by carrying note-books in his pocket all the time and writing down in them whenever he learned anything that would help to achieve his object, so all those who wish to be good speaker and forceful writer, must study rhetoric carefully until they know all sides of the subject, and can apply the principles they have thus learned.

### 1.5 Five Levels of Rhetorical Operations

Rhetorical operations can be broken down into five levels. They are rhetoric as practiced with **sounds**, rhetoric as practiced with **words**, rhetoric as practiced with **sentences**, rhetoric as practiced with **paragraphs** and rhetoric as practiced with **essays**.

### 1.5.1 Rhetoric as practiced with sounds

All good writing has a strong sense of “voice”. Effective prose, no less than successful poetry, is attractive to ear and eye alike. Writing that is pleasing has a natural rhythm and melodiousness, qualities that characterize a pleasant speaking voice; in addition, the presence of good “voice” automatically renders one’s writing more personal, warmer and clearer.

All good writing *sounds* equally good when read aloud; and all good talking will *read* well if transcribed.

### 1.5.2 Rhetoric as practiced with words

The *New York Times* once reported the result of a poll in which a random sample of Americans were asked about their views of abortion in several different ways. The first question was phrased this way: “Do you think there should be such an amendment to the Constitution *prohibiting abortions*, or shouldn’t there be such an amendment?” 62 percent of the respondents were solidly opposed to such an amendment. But when the question read, “Do you believe there should be an amendment to the Constitution *protecting the life of the unborn child*, or shouldn’t there be such an amendment?” Fully one-third of those who had opposed the amendment when it had been presented as “prohibiting abortions” supported it. Wording makes a big difference.

In Chinese we have such sayings as “一字之失，一句为之蹉跎”，and “语不惊人死不休”. Many lines in poems are very popular because of their diction, for example, “春风又绿江南岸” and “红杏枝头春意闹”.

So the choice of words, or diction, is an important level of rhetorical operation.

### 1.5.3 Rhetoric as practiced with sentences

A sentence is a group of words that you use to communicate your ideas in writing or in speech. It is a complete, independent unit of thought.

Look at the following sentences:

- (1) My best friend in high school was our literature teacher. Her name was Alice. She taught us literature for three years.

In the above example, the idea of one unified sentence is chopped into several short sentences, and the idea gets confused. Actually we can improve the writing by combining the short sentences into a unified one with proper subordination.

- (2) My best friend in high school was our literature teacher, Alice, who taught us for three years.

The improved sentence is clearer and more effective. So we can see the structuring of sentences is another important level of rhetorical operation.

#### **1.5.4 Rhetoric as practiced with paragraphs**

It is not enough to say that a paragraph is a group of sentences. How do these sentences relate to each other? How does a paragraph begin and where does it end? What constitutes a good paragraph? These are all questions that we hope to answer in this level of rhetorical operation.

Compare the two paragraphs below:

- (1) Surviving Cancer

Progress is gradually being made in the fight against cancer. In the early 1900s, few cancer patients had any hope of long-term survival. In the 1930s, less than one in five cancer victims lived more than five years. In the 1950s, the ratio was one in four. Currently, the ratio is down to one in three. The gain from one in four to one in three represents about 58,000 lives saved each year.

- (2) Surviving Cancer

Progress is gradually being made in the fight against cancer. In the early 1900s, few cancer patients had any hope of long-term survival. But because of advances in medical technology, progress

has been made so that currently one in three cancer patients survives .It has been proven that smoking is a direct cause of lung cancer. However, the battle has not yet been won. Although cures for some forms of cancer have been discovered, other forms of cancer are still increasing. Heart disease is also increasing.

Both paragraphs discuss the same topic. But the first paragraph is unified, while the second lacks unity. The last few sentences break the unity either by introducing a new idea or by being “off the topic.”

From the above examples we can see that how to develop a paragraph is an important part of rhetoric.

### **1.5.5 Rhetoric as practiced with essays**

An essay is a group of paragraphs that develops one central idea. How are the paragraphs organized in an essay? How many paragraphs are there in an essay? How does an essay begin and end? These are questions this part will answer.

The following is an introductory paragraph of an essay. The sentences of it are not in incorrect order.

(1) The heavy traffic problem can be solved by building rapid transit systems from the suburbs to the cities, by improving public transportation systems within the cities, and by forming car pools. (2) Traffic congestion is caused by the thousands of cars that come into the cities from the suburban areas as well as from the thousands of cars within the city limits. (3) One of the most serious problems that most big cities are faced with is traffic congestion. (4) This mammoth problem must be resolved before it gets worse.

The introductory paragraph should begin with the most general statement. Then more specific sentences follow, and the thesis statement comes last. So the order of the sentences should be (3), (2), (4), (1). From this example we can see that the writing of an introductory paragraph is an art of rhetoric.

## Part II Rhetoric as Practiced with Sounds

### —Phonetic Rhetoric

*Sometimes when I am writing, the music of the words I am trying to shape takes me far beyond the words.* —Stephan H. Spender

*Words have weight, sound and appearance; it is only by considering these that you can write a sentence that is good to look at and good to listen to.* —W. Somerset Maugham

*The sound must seem an Echo to the Sense.* —Alexander Pope

Good English should have a pleasing sound. We read with our ears as well as our eyes. Orators in ancient times already knew how to use the sounds of their language for maximum rhetorical effect. Modern writers also orchestrate the musical quality of vowels and consonants through the words they use. In this part we'll look at these phonetic devices, which may be classified into two aspects, namely **phonemic patterning** and **rhythmic patterning**.

## 2 Phonemic Patterning

Phonemes can be patterned in different ways. The most important types of patterning in English literature are: **onomatopoeia**, **alliteration**, **assonance**, **consonance**, **homoeoteleuton** and **rhythm**. These are features of language poets and prose writers exploit to create effects such as beauty or emphasis in their writing. In this chapter we'll discuss each of these features respectively.

### 2.1 Onomatopoeia

The use of sounds that supposedly echo or suggest the meaning is called **onomatopoeia**. It is a device that uses words which imitate the sounds made by an object (animate or inanimate), or which are associated with or suggestive of some action or movement.

The following nursery rhyme imitates the cries of different animals.

- (1) *Bow-wow*, says the dog,  
*Mew-mew*, says the cat,  
*Grunt, grunt*, says the hog,  
And *squeak* goes the bat.  
*Tu-whu*, says the owl,  
*Caw, caw*, says the crow,  
*Quack, quack*, says the duck,  
And what cuckoos say you know.

Onomatopoeia is a device much used in **poetry** to add vividness or vitality to description and narration. Look at the following stanza:

- (2) Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king;  
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,  
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do thing,  
*Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!*  
(Thomas Nash, *Spring*)

The words in the final line are all onomatopoeic. Each of them is an imitation of the sound that a particular bird makes. They thus form a happy, harmonious chorus in the sweet spring.

Let us look at some further examples in the stanzas below:

- (3) I *chatter* over stony ways,  
In little sharps and trebles,  
I *bubble* into eddying bays,  
I *babble* on the pebbles.  
(Alfred Tennyson: *The Brook*)

The three onomatopoeic words *chatter*, *bubble* and *babble* give a vivid description to the sounds and motion of the brook. They have brought great immediacy to the scene, and made us feel as if we were right there by the brook. The description is further highlighted by the recurring sounds /l/ (6times) and /b/ (7times). The sound /l/ belongs to a class of sounds called liquid which is fluid sounding and the sound /b/ is a plosive resembling the sound of the bubbles. Therefore, their repeated presence makes the text sound more bubbly and stream-like.

- (4) How the pretty ladies talk  
*Tittle tattle, tittle tattle!*  
Like their patters when they walk—  
*Pittle pattle, pittle pattle.*  
(Erasmus Darwin)

The writer imitates the sounds of pretty ladies' talking and walking.

- (5) The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It *cracked* and *growled*, and *roared* and *howled*,  
Like noises in a swound!  
(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*)

In the third line the poet uses four onomatopoeic words to describe the magnificent views of the icy ocean.

Onomatopoeia is also widely used in **prose**. The following description is vivid and beautiful by imitating the cries of different animals:

- (6) In the morning of my hometown, birds *twitter*, chicks *cheep*, hens *chuck*, geese *gaggle* and dogs *yaps*, and even cows *moo*, horse *whinny* together with an ass *hee-haws*...

Another example is taken from Henry Patrick's speech:

- (7) There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their *clanking* may be heard on the plains of Boston!  
(Patrick Henry *Give me liberty or give me death*)

The application of the onomatopoeic word *clanking* greatly enhanced the rhetorical effect of the speech. The listeners could hear the injustice as though they were facing the real situation of slavery.

The following paragraph from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* makes a full use of onomatopoeia to describe the imminent storm:

- (8) My souls, how the wind did scream along! And every second or two there'd come a glare that lit up the white-caps for a half a mile around, and you'd see the islands looking dusty through the rain, and the trees thrashing around in the wind; then comes a *h-whack!—bum! bum! bumble-umble-umbum-bum-bum*—and the thunder would go *rumbling* and *grumbling* away, and quit—and then *rip* comes another flash and another sockdolager.

There are many simple and short sentences containing onomatopoeic words, as the following sentences show:

- (9) The car *screached* to the halt.  
(10)The train *hooted* in the distance.  
(11)The door *banged* open.  
(12)The taxi *chugged* with difficulty up the winding road.  
(13)The leaves *rustled* in the breeze.  
(14)The breeze *murmured* in the pines.  
(15)The rain *splashed* on the window.  
(16)The rain fell *pitter-patter* on the window.  
(17)As you approach it (copper-smith's market), a *tinkling* and *banging* and *clashing* begins to impinge on your ear.  
(18)The moment the hawker rushed in, the white geese set up an excited *quacking*, to be joined by hens *chucking*, dogs *barking*.

English sounds, the vowels and consonants, can also have some sensory qualities which suggest certain impressions. These sensory qualities are not the product of any systematic or scientific study or theory; rather, they are recognized through long association between the sounds of words and the meaning of words. As such they are subject to wide and varied individual interpretation.

For example, the short, lax and spread vowel /i/ is supposed to convey bright, light, fleet, happy impression. In example (2) *Spring* above, the words *spring, is, king, thing, in, ring, sting, pretty* and *sing* contain this vowel.

The rounded vowels, on the other hand, often bear solemn and dignified features, as the following stanza shows:

(19) The curfew *tolls* the knell of parting day,  
The *lowing* herd wind *slowly o'er* the lea,  
The ploughman *homeward plods* his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.  
(T. Gray, *Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard*)

The glottal /h/ is produced by a closure of the glottis, followed by an explosive release of breath, so it suggests being hurried and using force, as in the words: *haste, hasten, hurry, heavy, heave, huge* and *hoist*.

The fricative /s/ is the first phoneme of *snake* and *serpent*, and thus reminds us the sound made by snakes.

Many people feel the consonant cluster /r/ suggests unpleasantness, as in *groan, growl, grumble*, and *grunt*; /sl/ implies slippery: *slick, sleek, slide, slip, slush, sloppy, sluice, sludge, slimy* and *slither*; /v/ gives out light: *gleam, glare, glimmer, glisten*, and *glow*; /fl/ symbolizes the sparkle of light: *flame, flash, flicker*, or the moving in the air: *fly, flap, flatter*.

The sensory qualities of these sounds have been called **symbolic onomatopoeia** and exploited by poets and prose writers. Look at the following poem:

(20) A little black thing among the snow,  
Crying "'weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!  
"Where are thy father and mother, say?"  
"They are both gone up to the church to pray."

“Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil’d among the winter’s snow,  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.”

“And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury,  
And are gone to praise God and His Priest and King,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.”

(William Blake *The Chimney Sweeper*)

The little chimney sweeper, who was made black by sweeping in the chimney, was walking in the snow, crying “sweep! sweep!” for people to hire them to sweep their chimneys. The sound “sweep! sweep!” is very like “weep! weep!”, so the poet deliberately omits the /s/ sound for the symbolic effect.

## 2.2 Alliteration

The repetition of the same sounds in the first accented syllables of words is called **alliteration**. Since the sound repeated is usually the initial consonant sound, it is sometimes also called **front rhyme**.

It should be pointed out that it is the first *stressed* syllable of a word that carries the alliteration, not necessarily its initial syllable. *Long* alliterates with *unlovely* in Tennyson’s “Here in the *long unlovely* street” (*In Memoriam*).

We are familiar with the **tongue twisters** like “*Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper*” and “*She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore*”, where alliteration is used humorously to practice certain sounds.

Alliteration is frequently found in **proverbial and idiomatic expressions**. For example:

- (1) Many a little makes a mickle.

- (2) Many men, many minds.
- (3) Money makes the mare go.
- (4) A fair face may hide a foul heart.
- (5) Love me, love my dog.
- (6) Want of wit is worse than want of wealth.
- (7) No sweet without some sweat.
- (8) Penny wise, pound foolish.
- (9) Practice makes perfect.
- (10) Speech is silver, silence is gold.
- (11) Time and tide wait for no man.
- (12) tit for tat.
- (13) with might and main.
- (14) safe and sound.

These expressions are short, emphatic and easy to remember.

Alliteration is also a feature of many **advertisements**. Here is an example:

- (1) Sea, sun, sand, seclusion—and Spain.

This hotel advertisement describes a beautiful and romantic scenery in only a few words. Another advertisement is like this:

- (2) Hi-Fi, Hi-Fun, Hi-Fashion, only from Sony.

In this example, the repeated sounds “hi” not only give us a deep impression and make it memorable, but also emphasize the high quality of the product at the same time.

Other good examples are:

- (3) BETA Builds It Better. ( Furniture ad )
- (4) One man’s disaster is another man’s delight. The sale is now on.

*Disaster* alliterates *delight*, forming a contrast. The advertisement also involves a **parody** of the idiom “One man’s meat is another man’s poison.”

It seems that **newspaper** and **magazine** journalists especially like alliterations. A statistical analysis indicates that in one issue of *Time* eleven titles out of the total thirty-four articles involve alliteration. The following article is taken from *Time*. You will find alliteration in every sentence.

- (5) Super Savings in the Skies  
—Airlines say “Happy New Year” with a *rousing round of price rollbacks*  
The *spark* for the latest *skirmish* is People Express, the fastest-growing airline in the *annals* of *aviation*. Economists admire Donald Burr and People Express for bringing tough *competition* to a once *clubby* and *complacent* industry. People Express’s low prices have kept its profits *slim*, and many Wall Street investors *shun* its *stocks*. And critics of the airline’s *Spartan service* have dubbed the carrier People Distress. However, controllers in the tower of Chicago’s O’Hare International continue to guide *People pilots* through busy *takeoffs* and *touchdowns*. From Boston to Houston to Newark, a *panoply* of *People passengers* produce both *grins* and *grimaces* as they learn to *fly* without *frills*. *Love* it or *loathe* it, almost everyone agrees that People Express has *turned* the airline industry *topsy-turvy*.

Look at more examples from newspapers and magazines:

- (6) Hong Kong—A *Capitalist Citadel* at China’s Doorstep  
—A *booming bastion of business* (*Reader’s Digest*)  
(7) The *crunch* of people *crushes city* and *country* alike. (*Time*)  
(8) *China’s cities*, after decades of *bolted* doors and *barred* windows, are suddenly being opened to sweeping changes. (*Newsweek*)  
(9) EEC officials have been struggling for years to harmonize national standards on goods ranging from *mayonnaise* to *microchips*. (*Time*)  
(10) Schultz’s First Year: Some Success, Some Silence (*New York Times*)  
(11) Bye, Bye, Balanced Budget!

(12)Next to health, heart, home, happiness for mobile Americans depends upon automobiles.

Journalists like alliteration so much as if they got an alliteration mania. Though most of the alliterations are used effectively, some are not very appropriate. Take, the title of an article from *Economists*, for example:

(13)Can the *Democrats Defy Decline*?

It sounds clumsy. If we substitute *check* or *face out* for *defy*, i.e., inserting a voiceless consonant between the two heavy sound /d /, the sentence will be pleasant to the ear.

Some writers use alliteration in the **titles** of their novels, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Winds of War*, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Alliteration appears in **prose**, too:

(14)Predictably the *winter will be snowy, sleety and slushy*.

(15)The *flakes* were *falling* thick and hard now, *pouring past* the *window*, a *waterfall* of mystery.

Alliteration is also a favorite means of **orators**. Winston Churchill, when encouraging English people to fight against German fascists, makes full use of this device:

(16)*Let us learn the lessons* already taught by such cruel experience. *Let us redouble our exertions*, and *strike* with united *strength* while life and power remain.

Robert Green Ingersoll, in his *A Vision Of War and a Vision of the Future*, uses alliteration effectively:

(17)I see a *world without* a slave. Man at last is free. Nature's forces have by science been enslaved. *Lightning* and *light*, *wind* and *wave*, *frost* and *flame*, and all the *secret, subtle* powers of earth and air are