

Epistrophe

Definition of Epistrophe

Epistrophe is derived from a Greek word that means “turning upon,” which indicates the same word returns at the end of each sentence. Epistrophe is a stylistic device that can be defined as the [repetition](#) of phrases or words at the ends of the clauses or sentences. It is also called “[epiphora](#).” Epistrophe examples are frequently found in literary pieces, in persuasive writing, and in speeches.

The Difference Between Anaphora and Epistrophe

[Anaphora](#) is the opposite of epistrophe, and means the repetition of the same phrase or word at the *beginning* of successive sentences, such as in this example:

Five years have passed;
Five summers, with the length of
Five long winters! and again I hear these waters ...

However, in epistrophe, the repetition of phrases or words is at the *end* of successive sentences such as in this example:

“Hourly joys be still upon you! Juno sings her blessings on **you** ...
Scarcity and want shall shun **you**,
Ceres’ blessing so is on **you**.”

Examples of Epistrophe in Literature

Poets have written a number of poems in regular meters, and epistropheic [meter](#) is widely used in several of them.

Example #1: *The Rebel* (By D. J. Enright)

“When everybody has short hair,
The rebel lets his hair grow long.
When everybody has long hair,
The rebel cuts his hair short.
When everybody **talks during the lesson**,
The rebel does’n say a word.
When nobody **talks during the lesson**
The rebel does’n say a word.
When nobody talks during the lesson,
The rebel creates a disturbance.
When everybody wears a uniform,
The rebel dresses in **fantastic clothes**.
When everybody wears **fantastic clothes**
The rebel dresses soberly.
In the company of dog lovers,
The rebel expresses a preference for cats.
In the company of cat lovers,
The rebel puts in a good word for dogs.
When everybody is praising the sun,
The rebel remarks on the need for rain.
When everybody is greeting the rain,
The rebel regrets the absence of sun.
When everybody **goes to the meeting**
The rebel **stays at home and reads a book**.
When everybody **stays at home and reads a book**,
The rebel **goes to the meeting**.
When everybody **says, yes please!**
The rebel **says, No thank you**.
When everybody **says: No thank you**,
The rebel **says, yes please!**
It is very good that we have rebels
You may not find it very good to be one.”

Here the phrases are repeated in consecutive lines throughout the poem.

Example #2: *The Unnamable* (By Samuel Beckett)

“Where **now**? Who **now**? When **now**?”

Examples of epistrophe abound in Beckett’s works. In this excerpt, the word “now” is repeated three times to place emphasis, as well as making the line memorable. It also creates [cadence](#) and [rhythm](#).

Example #3: *Julius Caesar* (By William Shakespeare)

BRUTUS:

“Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; **for him have I offended**. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; **for him have I offended**. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; **for him have I offended ...**”

Again, Shakespeare is at his best in using this stylistic device. The repeated phrase at the ends of sentences is “for him have I offended.” It appears three times in this excerpt. This shows the importance of the phrase.

Example #4: *The Grapes of Wrath* (By John Steinbeck)

“Then I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where – wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, **I’ll be there**. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, **I’ll be there ...** An’ when our folk eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build – why, **I’ll be there ...**”

In the following excerpt, Steinbeck has employed the phrase “I’ll be there” again and again as epistrophe. The phrase is creating a sense of connection and familiarity, and focuses the attention of readers on these words.

Example #5: *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (By Robert Penn Warren)

“The big sycamore by the creek **was gone**. The willow tangle **was gone**. The little enclave of untrodden bluegrass **was gone**. The

clump of dogwood on the little rise across the creek — now that, too, **was gone ...**”

In this novel, the phrase “was gone” is used as an epistrophe. These words act as common threads throughout the paragraph. It is also giving a regular [rhyme](#) and rhythm to the text.

Function of Epistrophe

The rhetorical function of this stylistic device is to give a striking emphasis to an idea, a thought, or a passage. The repetition helps in making the words memorable and pleasurable, due to the regular [rhyme scheme](#). Also, it furnishes artistic effect, both in [prose](#) and in poetry. In addition, it lends rhythm to the text, and appeals to the emotions of readers.