

# Paralipsis

## Definition of Paralipsis

Paralipsis is from the Greek word *paraleipein*, which means “to omit,” or “to leave something on one side.” It is defined as a rhetorical device in which an idea is deliberately suggested through a brief treatment of a subject, while most of the significant points are omitted. It is explained through the use of this device that some points are too obvious to mention. Also, paralipsis is a way of emphasizing a subject by apparently passing over it.

This is one of the finest contemporary examples of paralipsis:

“I’m not saying I’m responsible for this country’s longest run of uninterrupted peace in 35 years! I’m not saying that from the ashes of captivity, never has a Phoenix [metaphor](#) been more personified! I’m not saying Uncle Sam can kick back on a lawn chair, sipping on an iced tea, because I haven’t come across any one man enough to go toe to toe with me on my best day!”

(*Iron Man 2* by Justin Theroux)

## Features of Paralipsis

Paralipsis is a literary device in which a [speaker](#) pretends to hide what he exactly wants to say and enforce. It is a type of [irony](#) in which an outline of a message is conveyed in a manner that seems to suppress the exact message. Paraliptic strike-through is a form of paralipsis. It is a standard rhetorical device in journalism and print media.

## Examples of Paralipsis in Literature

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### Example #1: *The Knight's Tale* (By Geoffrey Chaucer)

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“The music, the service at the feast,  
The noble gifts for the great and small,  
The rich adornment of Theseus’s palace  
**All these things I do not mention now.**”

In the example above, paralipsis is used wonderfully. Though all the important points are mentioned clearly, Chaucer seems to pretend in the final line that he has not given any significance to these points.

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### Example #2: *A Modest Proposal* (By Jonathan Swift)

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“Therefore, **let no man talk to me of other expedients**: of taxing our absentees ... of using neither clothes, nor house hold furniture ... of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming, of learning to love our country...”

This excerpt is a good example of paralipsis, as Swift briefly suggests the idea of expedients, while trying to show that this idea is not of much significance and should be passed over.

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### Example #3: *Blue Shoes and Happiness* (By Alexander McCall Smith)

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“Ssh,” said Grace Makutsi, putting a finger to her lips. “It’s not polite to talk about it. SO I won’t mention the Double Comfort Furniture Shop, which is one of the businesses my fiance owns, you know. **I must not talk about that.** But do you know the store, Mma? If you save up, you should come in some day and buy a chair ...”

Here, the orator emphasizes the point by passing over it, saying, “I must not talk about that.” The nullifying statement is mentioning the furniture shop. The paralipitic line is in bold

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#### Example #4: *Julius Caesar* (By William Shakespeare)

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“Have patience, gentle friends, **I must not read it.**

It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.

You are not wood; you are not stones, but men;

And, being men, hearing the will of Caesar,

It will inflame you, it will make you mad ...

For if you should—oh—what would come of it! ...

But here’s a parchment, with the seal of Caesar;

I found it in his closet. ‘Tis his will.

Let but the commons hear this testament—

Which, pardon me, **I do not mean to read**— ...”

This is one of the most famous paralipsis examples. Here, Mark Antony provokes the public by talking about the will of Caesar; meanwhile, he suppresses the matter without directly mentioning the subject.

#### Function of Paralipsis

The purpose of the employment of paralipsis is to deliberately emphasize or assert an idea by pretending to ignore or pass over it. Paralipsis examples are very common in literary works, journalism, and political speeches. The orators use this device to draw the attention of readers towards a sensitive matter, while the orator ostensibly seems detached from it. Often, descriptive works that lack the direct meaning of an idea use paralipsis. Besides, as a rhetorical device, its approach is ironic because the intentions of writers are different. However, writers use paralipsis in order to keep themselves away from unfair claims, though they bring them up quite often.