

Enumeration

Definition of Enumeration

Enumeration is a rhetorical device used for listing details, or a process of mentioning words or phrases step by step. In fact, it is a type of [amplification](#) or division in which a subject is further distributed into components or parts. Writers use enumeration to elucidate a topic, to make it understandable for the readers. It also helps avoid [ambiguity](#) in the minds of the readers.

Examples of Enumeration in Literature

Example #1: *I Have a Dream* (by Martin Luther King)

“[W]hen we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’ “

In this example, if we remove commas, apostrophes, and quotation marks, it would be difficult to understand the text.

Example #2: *Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation* (by Jonathan Swift)

“[A]mong such as deal in multitudes of words, none are comparable to the sober deliberate talker, who proceedeth with much thought and caution, maketh his preface, brancheth out

into several digressions, findeth a hint that putteth him in mind of another story, which he promiseth to tell you when this is done; cometh back regularly to his subject, cannot readily call to mind some person's name, holding his head, complaineth of his memory; the whole company all this while in [suspense](#); at length says, it is no matter, and so goes on. And, to crown the business, it perhaps proveth at last a story the company hath heard fifty times before; or, at best, some insipid adventure of the relater."

In this example, by using enumeration, Swift describes a sober, deliberate talker, and then adds details of his qualities, making his message clear to understand.

Example #3: *Elegy for Jane* (by Theodore Roethke)

"I remember the neckcurls, limp and damp as tendrils;
And her quick look, a sidelong pickerel smile;
And how, once startled into talk, the light syllables leaped for
her,
And she balanced in the delight of her thought ... "

In the above lines, the [speaker](#) recalls how Jane – a dead student – looked. He gives details by remembering her smile, her hair, and her beautiful spirit.

Example #4: *The Atlanta Compromise Address* (by Booker T. Washington)

"Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South. Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy your

surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories.”

Booker describes people by adding their qualities one by one, which helps the [audience](#) to gain a real understanding of the writer’s ideas.

Example #5: *Address to the Jury during the Anti-Conscription Trial in New York City, July 1917* (by Emma Goldman)

“We say that if America has entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America. How else is the world to take America seriously, when democracy at home is daily being outraged, free speech suppressed, peaceable assemblies broken up by overbearing and brutal gangsters in uniform; when free press is curtailed and every independent opinion gagged.”

Emma Goldman discusses how America can save democracy while waging war. She lists details about what might happen if America does not make it safe at home.

Function

By using enumeration, writers lay emphasis on certain ideas to elaborate them further. In fact, enumeration easily creates an impression on the minds of the readers. The details and listing make it easy for them to convey the real message they want to impart. However, if there is no use of enumeration in a text, it might become difficult for the reader to get the true meanings of ideas.