

# Tricolon

## Definition of Tricolon

Tricolon is a rhetorical term that consists of three parallel clauses, phrases, or words, which happen to come in quick succession without any interruption. The origin of this rhetorical device is traced to the Greek word *tricolon*, meaning “section of a sentence.” These three parallel words, phrases, or clauses have almost the same length, though this condition is not strictly followed.

It also refers to a collection of three lines, paragraphs, chapters, or stanzas. For instance, William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* uses it in his famous speech in ascending order as, “*Veni, vidi, vici (I came, I saw, [and] I conquered.*”) The purpose of tricolon is to give a greater sense of roundness, completeness, and wholeness, whereas the third part brings in a surprising effect in the sentence.

## Popular Examples of Tricolon in Presidential Speeches

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**Example #1: Barack Obama speaks in Memorial Service for Nelson Mandela, December, 10, 2013**

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“After this great liberator is laid to rest, and when we have returned to our cities and villages and rejoined our daily routines, let us search for his strength. Let us search for his largeness of spirit somewhere inside of ourselves. **And when the night grows dark, when injustice weighs heavy on our hearts, when our best-laid plans seem beyond our reach,** let us think of Madiba and the words that brought him comfort within the four walls of his cell ...”

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**Example #2: *President Dwight Eisenhower, “The Chance for Peace.” Speech delivered to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April, 1953***

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**“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired** signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending **the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.**”

The lines above, highlighted in bold, present examples of tricolon. First is presented by the incumbent President Obama in his 2013 speech, while the second one was given by President Eisenhower in his speech delivered in 1953.

### **Examples of Tricolon in Literature**

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**Example #1: *The Wizard in The Wizard of Oz* (By L. Frank Baum)**

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“You are talking to a man who has laughed in the face of death, sneered at doom, and chuckled at [catastrophe](#).”

The use of three phrases makes the [speaker](#) – or the author – appear knowledgeable, simple, and catchy. It combines clauses to create a powerful impression, emphasizing the point in a memorable and pithy way.

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**Example #2: *Pirates of Caribbean* (by Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio)**

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“I actually feel rather good about this. I think we’ve all arrived at a very special place, eh? Spiritually, ecumenically, grammatically.”

Here the last three words present the use of tricolon. This serves as a

clauses make the readers think they are going in one direction, while the third part introduces a surprising twist in it.

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### **Example #3: *The Naked Civil Servant* (by Quentin Crisp)**

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“If you describe things as better than they are, you are considered to be a romantic; if you describe things as worse than they are, you will be called a realist; and if you describe things exactly as they are, you will be thought of as a satirist.”

The use of tricolon has made this example interesting, funnier, satisfying, and memorable by emphasizing the lines.

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### **Example #4: *Call for the Dead* (by John le Carré)**

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“They liked his diffidence when he apologized for the company he kept, his insincerity when he defended the vagaries of his subordinates, his flexibilities when formulating new commitments.”

This is another excellent example of tricolon. The use of three equal structures makes it rhythmic and appealing, while also making it more likely the readers will remember the given information.

## **Function of Tricolon**

Tricolon is not only found in poetry, novels, and short stories, but also in oral storytelling, advertising, films, and photography. In writing, it helps readers absorb the idea, and remember it more effectively. Sometimes, writers use tricolon for creating a humorous effect. In [comedy](#), it is known as a “comic triple,” where it creates a surprising effect for the [audience](#). Besides, many public information slogans and advertising campaigns use it to create a memorable and captivating display of information. However, the most useful aspect of this literary device is its effectiveness in making the idea memorable.