

Using Grammar Rhetorically (from Martha Kolln's *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*, 6th Edition, 2009)

Imagine that you are writing a text message to a friend about where (s)he is going to eat lunch. Your text message might look something like this:

r u goin to eat lunch where r u gonna to eat

Your friend will receive and probably understand what it is that you are asking of them, even if the message does not contain the proper or “correct” grammar¹ and punctuation².

While the grammar and punctuation in this example text message might be acceptable in this setting, it would not be adequate, for instance, to use that kind of grammar and punctuation in a handout about grammar and punctuation.

One of the most important things to remember is this: There is NO TRUE “proper” or “correct” grammar and punctuation, however, there are certain times and situations when you will need to clearly make an argument or present a message to an audience or reader.

You must be ready to address any kind of audience or reader; therefore, you must be ready to convey your argument or message clearly, syntactically³ and semantically⁴.

So, what does it mean to use “grammar rhetorically?” In order to use grammar rhetorically, there are three important areas to start with: **Words**, **sentences**, and **paragraphs**. Using “grammar rhetorically” DOES NOT mean doing it the “right way,” what it does mean is effectively addressing formats, conventions (styles), and consistency in a piece of writing.

- **Words (vocabulary)**: Choosing the right words to convey your argument or message to an audience is important because it lets them know what you mean. When using certain words in an argument, it is important to define or describe them to let your audience and readers know how you are using them within your writing. While using synonyms (words that mean the same thing) is a good idea, only use synonyms when it is necessary to emphasize or convey a meaning that another word cannot.
- **Sentences (semantics)**: A “rule of thumb” when writing a rough or first draft is to keep your sentences simple. Remember, you can always go back and restructure, add-in, or take out, or replace words in later drafts, but a good goal to have when writing a first draft is to convey your argument or message effectively and clearly to your audience.
- **Paragraphs (“walls of bricks”)**: Metaphorically speaking, you can think of a paragraph as a “wall of bricks,” with the words as the bricks and the grammar and punctuation as the mortar that holds the bricks (words) together. Once all of your paragraphs are together in one document, that is your blueprint to the argument or message you are trying to convey to a reader and/or audience. The paragraph is one of the most visible things that a reader sees when (s)he reads your writing. One way to approach writing out your paragraphs is to have each one have a “topic sentence” (i.e. a sentence that introduces what it is that you plan to discuss or address within that paragraph). Then, connect each sentence to the ideas in the topic sentence or in the sentences that come before it and follow suit with each sentence that follows it.

When writing your arguments, remember the 4 C's:

- **Clarity** – Define or describe complex terms or concepts, clearly express your ideas as best as possible
- **Consistency** – If you use one font style of size, maintain it throughout a piece of writing, this also applies for formatting (i.e. use of bullets, line spacing) and conventions (i.e. MLA, APA)
- **Creativeness** – Catch your reader's attention and interest in the very first sentence or paragraph and keep it throughout the whole document and argumentation process
- **Communication** – One of the most important aspects of your argument is that you clearly and effectively convey it to your audience and/or readers to the best of your ability

¹ Grammar – Syntax; sentence structure; language rules

² Punctuation – Use of mechanics in sentence structure and language for effectiveness and clarity

³ Syntactically - Grammar and word choices in speaking and writing

⁴ Semantically – Use of words and punctuation in sentence structure and language for effectiveness and clarity