

## Scholarly Definitions of Rhetoric (from the American Rhetoric Website)

**Plato:** [Rhetoric] is the "art of enchanting the soul." (The art of winning the soul by discourse.)

**Aristotle:** Rhetoric is "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion."

**Cicero:** "Rhetoric is one great art comprised of five lesser arts: inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronuntiatio." Rhetoric is "speech designed to persuade."

**Quintilian:** "Rhetoric is the art of speaking well" or "...good man speaking well."

**Francis Bacon:** The duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will.

**George Campbell:** "[Rhetoric] is that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end. The four ends of discourse are to enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passion, and influence the will."

**Henry Ward Beecher:** "Not until human nature is other than what it is, will the function of the living voice—the greatest force on earth among men—cease...I advocate, therefore, in its full extent, and for every reason of humanity, of patriotism, and of religion, a more thorough culture of oratory and I define oratory to be the art of influencing conduct with the truth set home by all the resources of the living man."

**I. A. Richards:** Rhetoric is the study of misunderstandings and their remedies.

**Richard Weaver:** Rhetoric is that "which creates an informed appetite for the good."

**Erika Lindemann:** "Rhetoric is a form of reasoning about probabilities, based on assumptions people share as members of a community."

**Philip Johnson:** "Rhetoric is the art of framing an argument so that it can be appreciated by an audience."

**Andrea Lunsford:** "Rhetoric is the art, practice, and study of human communication."

**Kenneth Burke:** "The most characteristic concern of rhetoric [is] the manipulation of men's beliefs for political ends....the basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents."

**George Kennedy:** Rhetoric in the most general sense may perhaps be identified with the energy inherent in communication: the emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, the physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message.

**Lloyd Bitzer:** "...rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action."

**Douglas Ehninger:** "[Rhetoric is] that discipline which studies all of the ways in which men may influence each other's thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols."

**Gerard A. Hauser:** "Rhetoric is an instrumental use of language. One person engages another person in an exchange of symbols to accomplish some goal. It is not communication for communication's sake. Rhetoric is communication that attempts to coordinate social action. For this reason, rhetorical communication is explicitly pragmatic. Its goal is to influence human choices on specific matters that require immediate attention."

**C. H. Knoblauch:** "...rhetoric is the process of using language to organize experience and communicate it to others. It is also the study of how people use language to organize and communicate experience. The word denotes both distinctive human activity and the "science" concerned with understanding that activity."

**John Locke:** "[Rhetoric,] that powerful instrument of error and deceit."

**Charles Bazerman:** "The study of how people use language and other symbols to realize human goals and carry out human activities...ultimately a practical study offering people great control over their symbolic activity."

**Michael Hyde and Craig Smith:** "The primordial function of rhetoric is to 'make-known' meaning both to oneself and to others. Meaning is derived by a human being in and through the interpretive understanding of reality. Rhetoric is the process of making known that meaning. Is not rhetoric defined as pragmatic communication, more concerned with the contemporary audiences and specific questions than with universal audiences and general questions?"

**Alfred North Whitehead:** "The creation of the world -- said Plato -- is the victory of persuasion over force. The worth of men consists in their liability to persuasion."

**Samuel M. Edelman:** "Rhetoric can be defined as the art or method of reconciling...individual and systemic goals and constraints." (JCR Sept 2003)

**Andrew King and Jim Kuypers:** "The strategic use of communication, oral or written, to achieve specifiable goals." (*The Art of Rhetorical Criticism*, 2004)

**Thomas B. Farrell:** Rhetoric is an acquired competency, a manner of thinking that invents possibilities for persuasion, conviction, action, and judgments." (*The Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 1993)

**Richard E. Vatz:** "This [is the] *sine qua non* of rhetoric: the art of linguistically or symbolically creating salience. After salience is created, the situation must be translated into meaning." (*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1973)

**Michael E. Eidenmuller:** "Rhetoric is a rational study and artful practice of human symbol use (especially if not exclusively with words) when and where those symbols target identifiable communities of interest to create, enhance, undermine, or otherwise influence human belief, attitude, emotion, judgment, behavior." (*Voice of America* Interview, 2011, and modified for print)