

Device: Anaphora

Origin: From the Greek ἀναφορά (anaphora), meaning “to bring back” or “to carry back”.

In plain English: Repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses.

Effect:

- Key words or ideas are emphasized, often with great emotional pull.
- Repetition makes the line memorable.
- The speaker’s words have rhythm and cadence.

Notes:

- In English, an active sentence (“We developed the plan.”) is more effective than a passive sentence (“The plan was developed by us.”). Thus, anaphora is particularly effective when one wishes to emphasize the subject of an action.
- Anaphora, like any rhetorical device, can be overused.
- Speakers should be careful to limit the number of times a word or phrase is used in a single anaphora. For most speeches and presentations, three is an ideal number. Beyond three, a speaker risks sounding affected, theatrical or bombastic.
- The examples below from Churchill, Kinnock and King are exceptions, delivered by exceptional speakers in exceptional circumstances. The examples from Jobs and Aylward are better suited for most presentations.
- The counterpoint to anaphora is epistrophe (we’ll look at this one next week).

Examples: (notice how some of the examples also use last week’s device, *asyndeton*)

- **“I came, I saw, I conquered.”**
— Julius Caesar, shortly after the Battle of Zela, 47 BC
- **“We shall fight** in France, **we shall fight** on the seas and oceans, **we shall fight** with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. **We shall fight** on the

beaches, **we shall fight** on the landing grounds, **we shall fight** in the fields and in the streets, **we shall fight** in the hills ...”

— Winston Churchill, House of Commons, London, England, 4 June 1940

- “**I have a dream** that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.” **I have a dream** that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. **I have a dream** that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. **I have a dream** that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. **I have a dream** today.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr., Washington, D.C., 28 August 1963

- “If Margret Thatcher wins, **I warn you not to be** ordinary, **I warn you not to be** young, **I warn you not to** fall ill, **I warn you not to** get old.”

— Neil Kinnock, Bridgend, Wales, 7 June 1983

- “As you know, **we’ve got the** iPod, best music player in the world. **We’ve got the** iPod Nanos, brand new models, colors are back. **We’ve got the** amazing new iPod Shuffle.”

— Steve Jobs, Macworld 2007 Keynote Address

- “**We have a new** vaccine, **we have new** resolve and **we have new** tactics.”

— Bruce Aylward, TED Talk, March 2011