# On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse Study Guide

## On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse by Aristotle

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# Plot Summary

Rhetoric is defined as "the faculty of observe in any given case the means of persuasion" (24) and, therefore, is used by all arts and sciences in order to persuade audiences of some specific point. Rhetoric is used in three specific fields: politics, the legal system, and ceremonially. Each of these fields makes different demands upon the rhetorician's arguments and style.

Rhetoric is neither an art nor a science, which means that it does not have its own particular subject of study. Rather, it is used by all other arts—like medicine, architecture, and so on—in order to convincingly present conclusions. Rhetoric, unlike dialectic or logic, is not primarily concerned with speaking the truth, but with providing a convincing argument. Those who use rhetoric for dishonest purposes, therefore, are still considered rhetoricians, while a person who attempts to misuse logic to make his arguments is not really a dialectician, but a sophist. Rhetoric is generally used for three different purposes: political, forensic or legal, and ceremonial or epideictic. Political rhetoric is used when trying to convince a legislature or ruler about some particular course of action. It is distinguished from the other forms of rhetoric particularly by its emphasis on the future. Forensic or legal rhetoric is used when arguing in court over some particular criminal charge and is used both on behalf of and against the person charged. Since a criminal trial is always concerned with some action that is believed to have already happened, forensic rhetoric is particularly concerned with the past. Ceremonial or epideictic rhetoric is the least argumentative of the three fields. It is used to either praise or denounce some figure. Though the subject of one's discussion may be some past figure, the epideictic speaker usually is concerned with someone who is still living.

As the rhetorician's chief concern is not the truth but being persuasive, he must be aware of all the ways in which people are convinced of an argument. This means that he must be well-versed in valid argumentation, but he should also be sensitive to the emotions of his audience, which, especially when dealing with uneducated people, can be more powerful than reason. He should know the nature of all of the emotions, their typical causes, and how people experiencing those emotions are likely to act and think. By manipulating his audience's emotions, the rhetorician will make his task of persuasion much easier. The character of the speaker himself is also an important part of any speech, as people are more willing to believe someone they believe to be good and sensible. As such, the rhetorician should know how to effectively portray himself as someone deserving of trust and, conversely, how he can prejudice the audience against his opposition.

A rhetorician must also be a master of style, for knowing what to say will not be enough if one does not say it well. A good style is, first of all, clear, for no speech can be effective if the audience does not know what is being said. Therefore, the speech should largely mirror ordinary speech, though it ought to distinguish itself in some ways to make it appear lofty and special. A successful rhetorician will adapt the style of his speech to the proper setting. A political speech should generally be simple and direct,

for the audience is unlikely to be swayed by rhetorical flourishes. A ceremonial speech, on the other hand, which usually addresses a general audience, should avoid complex reasoning as much as possible and make everything simple and clear for the listeners. Structurally, a speech is divided into two parts: the statement of the argument and its proof. In some cases, it is acceptable to place an introduction and epilogue at the beginning and end, respectively.

# Book I, Chapters 1-3

## Book I, Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: Rhetoric is neither an art nor a science, since it is it not concerned with any specific subject, but rather with how to persuade people of the subjects of other arts. It is related to the dialectic, which is concerned with proper and valid argumentation. Rhetoric is useful in situations where dialectic would be inappropriate, like when speaking to a group of people who are either too stupid or too uneducated to understand a complicated logical argument. Rhetoric is also useful for the refinement of one's own beliefs, because it allows one to make good cases for both sides of a question. If one sees a question from multiple angles, he will best be able to find the truth and, in the future, will be able to defend his position more forcefully.

Chapter 2: Rhetoric is defined as "the faculty of observe in any given case the means of persuasion" (24). This means that a rhetorician is one who is capable of adapting his speech, tone, and style to the given situation so as to make his claims most persuasive. Rhetoric uses three modes of persuasion. First, there is the ethical appeal, or appeal to the speaker's character. With this method, the speaker attempts to convince the audience of his own virtue or authority and thereby make his claims more credible. Second, there is the emotional appeal, whereby the speaker attempts to move his audience not through reason but through their feelings. This kind of appeal can take a variety of forms. A speaker might try to make his audience angry, for example, in order to incite them against some country he would like to fight. He may, on the other hand, attempt to incite their admiration in order to convince them that some popular figure is a good man. The third appeal is the logical appeal, whereby the speaker addresses the subject directly and attempts to provide a sound argument to demonstrate his point. The logical appeal is where rhetoric most closely resembles dialectic, but the methods used are different. Dialecticians use syllogism—a formal proof with explicit premises and a conclusion—while rhetoricians use enthymemes, less formal arguments which omit, for simplicity's sake, one of their premises. The omitted premise should always be something obvious which the audience will assume in their hearing. Thus, for example, one might try to prove the statement that "Mike is an evil man" by saying that "Mike is a murderer." There is an implicit and unspoken premise that the audience will understand, namely, "Anyone who is a murderer is evil."

Chapter 3: Rhetoric is divided into three areas. First, there is political rhetoric, which is concerned with convincing a legislature or ruler to take (or not to take) some particular course of action. Second, there is forensic or legal rhetoric, which is concerned with convincing a judge or jury that a certain person did or did not commit an injustice. Finally, there is epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric which is concerned with eliciting the praise (or blame) of the audience toward some figure.

# Book I, Chapters 4-9

## Book I, Chapters 4-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4: Political oratory is concerned with five different subjects. First, it must deal with ways and means, that is, with the resources, financial and otherwise, available to the government. Second, it is concerned with matters of war and peace. Third, it deals with national defense. The distinction between these last two is subtle. War and peace deals with relationships with other countries and the preparedness of one's army. National defense seems to deal with things like fortifications. Fourth, a political orator must be knowledgeable about his country's imports and exports. Finally, and most importantly, the political rhetorician must concern himself with the act of legislation.

Chapter 5: In order to convince his hearers to accept his proposal, the political rhetorician must show that his proposal is in line with their happiness. This happiness, it should be understood, is not individual happiness, but rather the general happiness, or prosperity, of the entire state. Happiness is comprised of many different goods, including things like virtue, wealth, good children, good reputation, and honor.

Chapter 6: Since the chief concern of political rhetoric is what is useful, and since utility is a kind of good, the political orator must also be able to speak knowledgeably about the good and, specifically, the useful. The good is composed of many different things. What is good and what makes one happy are related, for what is good always makes one happy and one is happy on account of having good things. Happiness, then, is included among the goods, as are many of the things which were listed as constituents of happiness, like money. The good is defined as that which is sought for its own sake. Thus, something which is merely instrumental to something else cannot be good.

Chapter 7: The political orator must not only deal with goodness absolutely, but with its degree, since some things are better than others. In order to convince his audience of his plan, he must show not only that his proposal is good, but that it is the best out of all possible course of actions. There are many ways in which one thing can be better than another. For example, that which is sought for its own sake is better than that which is sought for the sake of something.

Chapter 8: Political rhetoric also requires a knowledge of the various forms of government. These are divided into democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, monarchy, and tyranny. These are all distinguished in accordance with what end or goal they seek. The goal of democracy, for example, is the freedom of its citizens, while the goal of aristocracy is the excellence of the nation. One must understand the way in which governments break down and turn into other forms of government in order to know what courses of action to avoid.

Chapter 9: The epideictic speaker, who is concerned with convincing his audience that a certain person is virtuous, noble, or otherwise admirable, obviously must be familiar with

the virtues. The virtues include such personality traits as justice, which is concerned with only enjoying one's own property and not that of others, liberality, which regulates how one spends one's money, and temperance, which avoids overindulging in pleasures. Virtue is always a mean between two extremes and, therefore, each virtue has two opposite vices which represent each of the extremes. Thus, a liberal person is one who spends money neither too miserly nor too freely. Virtues are greater or lesser depending on certain circumstances. Thus, a virtue that comes naturally to a person is greater than one that does not come naturally.

An epideictic rhetorician must at times speak about people who are not particularly virtuous, but his goal remains the same, namely, to elicit the admiration of the audience. Thus, the rhetorician may amplify or exaggerate certain traits of the person, especially those traits which he knows his audience will like. He will also compare him to others, and always favorably, for people are naturally inclined to admire someone who is superior to someone else, even if the inferior person is not particularly good.

# Book I, Chapters 10-15

## Book I, Chapters 10-15 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10: Since the forensic or legal rhetorician is concerned with either proving or disproving wrongdoing, he needs to be familiar with the law and what wrongdoing is. The law can be divided into two types, the special and general. Special law includes all of the explicit statutes of a political body. The general law refers to the unwritten laws of justice which all humanity must obey. Wrongdoing, then, is to voluntarily cause injury to another person by breaking either of these types of laws. As not all actions are voluntary, the legal speaker must know what does and does not make an action voluntary. There are seven causes of human action: chance or luck, nature, compulsion, habit, reasoning, anger, and appetite. The first of these three are involuntary and, therefore, anyone who commits a crime because of them is not culpable. The remaining four are voluntary. All voluntary actions aim at some apparent good or pleasure.

Chapter 11: What the good is has already been considered in Book I, Chapter 6, but the forensic speaker still must know what is pleasurable. The most basic cause of pleasure is some kind of action in accordance with one's nature. Since compulsion is contrary to one's nature—one is, by nature, a free create—compulsion is always unpleasant. Fulfilling any appetite is always pleasant, as appetites direct one toward such ends as the preservation of the body or the production of children. Thus, eating, drink, and sex are all pleasant. Completing some difficult task is pleasant, too, because, as was shown in the discussion of the good, what is difficult to get is always better than what is easy to get. The avoidance or cessation of pain can be considered a kind of pleasure, too, just as the removal of some evil is a kind of good. What is unpleasant is simply whatever is opposite to any of the things that have been determined to be pleasant.

Chapter 12: The forensic speaker must understand the specific causes and circumstances that lead men to commit crimes or to be victimized. As has been shown already, the end of any voluntary action is the acquisition of some apparent good or pleasure. Therefore, one will tend to commit a crime when one believes that the reward to be gained from it outweighs the risk of punishment. Thus, if one believes that one will probably not be caught or, at least, will not be convicted of a crime, then one is more likely to commit a crime. This is an especially strong temptation for someone who has already committed a crime and has not been caught. Certain weak-willed individuals are more likely to commit crimes because usually a crime involves the immediate possession of a good, while punishment will be remote and far off. Criminals will tend to choose their victims by determining both how vulnerable they are and how valuable the crime will be. Thus a very weak man who can offer little resistance is a prime target, as is a very rich man from whom one could steal a lot of money.

Chapter 13: Just and unjust actions are classified according to several distinctions. First, the law can be considered either from the point of view of the victim or from the law. That is, one can consider injustice simply as breaking a law or, alternatively, as

wronging some specific individual. Regarding the law, as has been discussed, there are two types, the special and the general or universal. The universal law is a higher law than the special law, because unlike the latter it never changes. Therefore, if there is an apparent contradiction between the two, the universal law must always prevail. However, if this argument would not be in one's favor, one must convince the jury that it is not their role to question the justness of the law.

Chapter 14: Unjust actions vary according to how unjust they are. Generally speaking, the worst kinds of actions are those which are done from the worst intention. The badness of intention can be determined in several ways. First, if one has committed several crimes of similar nature, then such should count against that person, because it shows that he has an evil character. Likewise, if he has once been convicted of some particularly heinous crime, like temple sacrilege, that should be taken into account when judging his disposition in committing some other future crime.

Chapter 15: There are five so-called "non-technical" means of persuasion. These are all things which do not strictly belong to rhetoric but which are useful for forensic oration nonetheless. They include the law, witnesses, contracts, torture, and oaths. The topic of law has already been discussed at some length, but the forensic rhetorician must always attempt to cast it in some light favorable for his case. Thus, if the law seems to tell against his case, he should urge the jury to ignore it in favor of some higher law. Witnesses can be of two types, ancient and recent. An ancient witness is some long-dead poet or writer on whose authority one can prove the justice or injustice of an action. They are especially useful since they cannot be tampered with or accused of partiality. Recent witnesses are witnesses in the normal sense of the world, people who saw or otherwise had knowledge of the facts in question. Contracts are a kind of lesser form of law which bind only between two individuals. Like laws, one must always use contracts to one's advantage in court. Thus, if a contract seems to work against one's case, one can argue that it was not legitimate since it was unjust or illegal in the first place. However, if the contract is favorable to one's case, one must insist on its binding nature. Torture is often used to extract testimony from criminals or witnesses, but it is not a generally useful or advisable method, as people are likely to tell lies simply to get the torture to end. Oaths are useful for convincing the jury that one believes what one is saying, and when one refuses to take an oath on some specific point, one must always justify it some way favorable to one's case, lest it be a sign of weakness.

# Book II, Chapters 1-11

## Book II, Chapters 1-11 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: The orator's chief goal is not to give a sound argument on behalf of his position, but to convince his audience to make whatever decision he is proposing. Making a sound argument, then, is subordinate to this goal, but it is not the only means by which this goal can be achieved. The speaker must also present himself in such a way that inspires the trust of his audience, for if they believe him to be stupid or wicked, they will not tend to believe what he says. He must also manipulate the emotions of his audience to put them into a frame of mind conducive to making the decision that he desires.

Chapter 2: Anger is an emotion that is felt whenever one feels one has been wronged and desires revenge. Since one only desires what one believes is possible, it follows that one is only angry at those again whom one feels one is capable of avenging himself. Anger, further, is always directed at a specific person. It makes no sense to be angry at humanity in general, because it is not possible for all of humanity to have wronged a single person, nor is it possible to exact revenge on all of humanity. Anger is useful in oratory to diminish the effect of one's opponent's arguments or to incite the audience to go to war with some perceived enemy.

Chapter 3: Calmness is the opposite of anger. It is felt toward those whom one has no occasion to feel injustice against, and this feeling can arise from several causes. First, it is felt toward those by whom one has been helped, for no one would ever get angry at one's benefactor. Second, it is felt toward those with whom one has had little contact, for if a person just meets someone, he has no reason to feel that he has been victimized by them. Third, it is possible to feel calmness toward someone who has even been the cause of some harm if it is mitigated by certain circumstances. For example, it might be that the harm was caused unintentionally or that he treats everyone in the same way, including himself.

Chapter 4: Friendship is defined as the feeling one has toward a person upon whom one wishes good, not for one's own sake, but for the sake of the friend. In the state of friendship, this feeling is reciprocal, that is, each friend wishes good for the other. It follows, then, that two friends will perceive the same things as good and evil. One tends to choose friends who are equals to himself in terms of social and economic status but who also possesses certain good qualities, like virtue or honor. Moreover, one feels friendly toward those who praise him, especially when they praise him for virtues he himself is not sure that he possesses, for this makes him feel better about himself and gives him pleasure. The nature of enmity, the opposite of friendship, can be deduced from the nature of friendship. Unlike anger, enmity is not caused necessarily by any action of the person who is hated, but perhaps simply by their character or even by association with some class. One may, for example, hate all thieves or all Spartans.

Chapter 5: Fear is a certain kind of pain felt upon the perception of some imminent evil or pain. One does not fear what is very remote; for example, for most people, death is very far off, and thus there is no cause to fear it, even though it is the greatest physical evil. Confidence is the opposite of fear and it is caused by the absence of any evil, or at least the remoteness of it. Confidence is inspired especially when one feels one can overcome any possible evils. For example, a person may be confident sailing in a storm because he believes that his sailing expertise will allow him to prevent any catastrophe.

Chapter 6: Shame is the feeling that is inspired by the knowledge that others have perceived something disgraceful about oneself. This is especially true of moral disgraces, thus one wants to avoid having his vices publicly known. Shame only arises when certain people have knowledge of one's disgraces. One does not care, for example, about some foolish person's opinion. Instead, one is afraid to have one's weaknesses revealed to his friends, to those he admires, and especially to those who admire him, for it is painful to lose the respect of someone. Shamelessness is the opposite of shame, and it is usually caused by a disrespect for the opinions of those to whom one's disgrace has been revealed.

Chapter 7: Kindness is a sort of good will which seeks no compensation. That is, it an unqualified desire to do something good for another person. Kindness is inspired often by being first treated kindly, for one wants to reward a person who has done something good to him.

Chapter 8: Pity is a sadness inspired by the perception that someone else has suffered some evil which they do not deserve. One does not feel pity, therefore, for someone who receives a punishment that they deserve, like when a murderer is executed for his crime.

Chapter 9: Indignation is, in some ways, the opposite of pity, for it is a kind of anger or outrage at the good fortune of another which seems to be undeserved. One can feel indignant toward a person regardless of their relative social position, that is, one can feel indignant toward a poor person who has received more than he deserves or toward a rich person. One can even feel indignant toward the gods. Indignation is especially felt toward those who came into possession of their good suddenly, like the newly rich.

Chapter 10: Envy is a distress caused by the possession of some good by a person that is one's equal. It is different from indignation because the envious person feels that he deserves the goods instead of the person of whom he is envious. The envious person desires that the person he is envious of lose his goods.

Chapter 11: Emulation is the opposite of envy. It is, like envy, inspired by the perception that an equal has goods, but instead of desiring that the other person lose his goods, the emulative person desires to get the same goods for himself.

# Book II, Chapters 12-22

## Book II, Chapters 12-22 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12: The feelings which men are likely to have, and the virtues which they are likely to possess, depend in great deal upon their circumstances, like their age, good or bad birth, wealth, and power. The lifetime of a man can be divided into three general periods, namely, his youth, the prime of his life, and his old age. Young men, generally speaking, tend to be active and forward-looking, for they have not had a life long enough to look back on. They tend to be especially sensitive to carnal pleasures, especially of the sexual variety, and are often overly bold and courageous because they have not yet discovered how difficult life can be.

Chapter 13: Old men, on the other hand, are in many ways the opposite of young men. Their minds are constantly stuck in the past because there is little left for them. They tend to value their lives very highly and, therefore, become very selfish. They worry less about honor and the opinions other have about them and care only about what is useful to them. Very often, they are cynical because they have been, so to speak, beaten down by life and believe everything to be difficult. Between their cynicism, physical frailty, and selfishness, they tend to be cowardly and avoid any kind of danger as much as possible.

Chapter 14: The characteristics of men in their prime tend to be directly between those of the young and the very old. They are not as naive as young men, and so do not think that the world is easily conquered, but they are not so cynical as old men and do not think that success impossible. They tend to have a correct view of money, having matured out of the prodigality of their youth but have not yet become so selfish that they will not spend it on others.

Chapter 15: The most significant effect of good birth on a person is that it sets up great expectations for them and, therefore, should make them ambitious, lest they should bring dishonor upon their familys' good name. It is sometimes the case that good men will have good children, but it seems that the general trend in successive generations is to lose the good traits of their ancestors. Thus, for example, Socrates was a great man, but his progeny are foolish and inconstant.

Chapter 16: Wealth tends to make a man think that he controls the world, for he feels that he has everything that he wants. Since he thinks that the only good thing in the world is money, he also thinks everyone else feels the same. Therefore, he believes he is happier than and superior to the vast majority of men who lack what he has.

Chapter 17: Powerful men tend to have many of the same characteristics of wealthy men, but they are also generally more virtuous. A powerful man, by virtue of his power, tends to have the power to do what he wants, and therefore his existence has a more active, manly character.

Chapter 18: The different fields of rhetoric and the different qualities of men have been discussed so far in order to provide the rhetorician with the tools needed to achieve his particular rhetorical goals. Each of the fields of rhetoric—political, forensic, and epideictic—use different kinds of argument. Political argumentation is concerned with future events since the political orator is proposing some particular line of action, and therefore he is concerned with proving what is and is not possible as well as the likelihood of certain future facts. The legal orator is concerned with proving past facts. The ceremonial orator is concerned with amplification or exaggerating the traits of the subject of his praise or censure.

Chapter 19: There are several ways to demonstrate what is and is not possible. Like many of the topics considered so far, what is impossible can be deduced from what is possible. Now, if there are two contraries, and one of the contraries is possible, it follows that the other contrary is possible. For example, if a man can be cured, it logically follows that he can also be injured. Likewise, if something is possible that depends on something else, what it depends on must also be possible. For example, in order to become a man, one must be a child. Therefore, if it is possible to be a man, it must also be possible to be a child. Past facts can be deduced in similar ways. For example, if something happens which could only happen if something else happened before it, what must happen first logically has to happen. Thus, thunder can only occur after lightning; therefore, if there is thunder, there must have been lightning. Arguments about future facts are more probable, but proceed in a similar way. It happens that often, one thing is the cause of another, therefore if the cause has occurred, it is likely the effect will occur. Thus, if there is lightning, there will be thunder. The subject of amplification and degree has already been discussed in relation to the good in Book I, Chapter 7. Since all oratory deals with some form of the good, that discussion will suffice.

Chapter 20: Rhetoricians, as has been mentioned previously, use two different forms of argument: example and enthymeme. Examples are divided into two types, actual facts and invented facts. Actual facts can be adduced in order to provide a parallel with some present situation. Thus, for example, if it happened that a certain conqueror once took over Egypt before invading Greece, that fact might be used to support a plan for proactive action against another conqueror who has just conquered Egypt. As historical parallels are sometimes difficult to come by, it is often necessary to invent scenarios. These inventions are not lies, as the audience is aware the speaker is merely using them for illustration. The invented facts fall into two categories. First, there are illustrations, which create some imaginary scenario in order to demonstrate a point. Thus, for example, Socrates compared democracy to a ship in which the captain is chosen not by skill but by chance. The second type of invented parallel is the fable, which uses fantastic imagery in order to convey some point. These are particularly useful for popular settings because they tend to resonate well with uneducated people.

Chapter 21: A maxim is some short statement about practical conduct. It is always somehow related to an enthymeme, though the best maxims are self-contained enthymemes. Young or inexperienced men should not use maxims, because the authority for them comes from wisdom, which the young man does not yet possess.

Chapter 22: Enthymemes, the reader will recall, are shortened versions of syllogisms. In order to make the argument presentable for a general audience, they generally admit whatever assumptions they make that are completely obvious. Enthymemes are, generally speaking, more persuasive than examples.

# Book II, Chapters 23-26

## Book II, Chapters 23-26 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 23: There are twenty-eight general forms for enthymemes. The a fortiori argument, to give an example, proves something in a circumstance in which it is less likely to be true in order to show that it must be true in the circumstance in which it is more likely, or vice versa. Thus, for example, one might argue that a person is the kind of person who would hit his neighbor because he has already hit his father, a more serious act. One can also argue from definition. Thus, Socrates once proved the existence of God by pointing out that his audience already believed in the supernatural. The supernatural, he said, is either God himself or the works of God, and if one believes in the works of God, one must also believe in God. A refutative enthymeme, an enthymeme which refutes the opponent's belief, is generally considered more effective since it tends to be more concise and, therefore, more elegant. An enthymeme also tends to be more effective when the conclusion is not obvious from the premises, for there is a certain satisfaction in having a new, sound conclusion revealed where it was not obvious.

Chapter 24: There are several fallacious ways to create an enthymeme. An example of such would be to mistake the whole for the part or vice versa. Thus, to give an example that is patently false, one might say that since a crowd is large, all of the people in the crowd must also be large. One also might equivocate on the meaning of words. Thus, for example, some sophists have argued that "not an animal," or something similar, must exist, because some might say "a tree is not an animal," as if the tree's positive existence were described by the phrase "is not an animal."

Chapter 25: Objections can be raised against an argument in four ways. First, one can attack the statement directly and try to refute it. Second, one can make a similar appeal which contradicts it. Thus, if one's opponent uses a common saying to prove his point, an objection might be raised against him by using another common saying. Third, one can prove the opposite of his argument. Fourth, one can appeal to the authority of some respected writer or judge.

Chapter 26: Regarding the preceding, there are two common errors. First, the use of amplification and deprecation—the modes of rhetoric wherein the speaker magnifies or diminishes something, like the good a certain political plan will bring about or the virtues of some public figure—do not constitute enthymemes, since they are not logical arguments. Second, though refutative enthymemes are more effective rhetorically, all enthymemes are equally sound.

# Book III, Chapters 1-9

## Book III, Chapters 1-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: The preceding chapters have dealt with what the successful rhetorician ought to say, but it is also necessary for the rhetorician to be able to say it in the correct way. Ideally, this would not be needed; people should be convinced simply by sound arguments. However, many people are too uneducated to be properly swayed by these arguments and are more easily reached through non-logical means, like a convincing delivery or eloquent style. Orators will always write and speak prose and should be careful to avoid becoming overly poetic. Speeches should have a rhythm, for arrhythmic prose is too unrestricted and meandering, but they should avoid having a strict meter, for such would make their speech too poetic.

Chapter 2: The stylistic rules for poetry and prose are much the same. First of all, any writing or speech ought to be clear, and it should accomplish this goal by using words whose meanings are obvious. In order to distinguish oneself from a mere commoner, a speech should occasionally use unusual or complex words, for what is unusual tends to have a greater effect on an audience than what is normal and expected. Compound words should generally be avoided, but metaphors can be useful, as these are frequently used in common speech.

Chapter 3: There are four common mistakes in prose. First, some writers misuse or overuse compound words which weigh down their whole speech or even make it unintelligible. Second, bad writers over use foreign words which the audience cannot understand. As has been mentioned, these should be used to distinguish one's speech from ordinary speech, but only sparingly. Third, bad writers often misuse the epithet by applying it to inappropriate subjects. For example, to talk about a "queenly fig-tree" is inappropriate because it applies an extraordinary adjective to a very ordinary noun. Finally, poor writers often use inappropriate metaphors to express their meanings. The things compared often to share the same kind of dignity; thus, it would be wholly inappropriate to use a metaphor of a donkey to attempt to praise a prince.

Chapter 4: A simile is similar to a metaphor. It is differentiated by the use of a connecting word—"like" or "as"—and they tend to be more involved and complex. The same rules that apply to metaphors should apply to similes.

Chapter 5: One essential element of clarity and good style in general is a mastery of the mechanics of language. One should always use words in proper ways and the structure of one's sentences should be clear, always keeping in mind that the hearer cannot see the punctuation marks in the text and, thus, relies on audible clues to keep track of what is being said.

Chapter 6: There are several ways to make one's speech impressive. For example, one can use a description—"a figure which extends equally in all directions from a point"—instead of a simple name—"a circle."

Chapter 7: Any good speech should be appropriate for its audience and subject matter. One should not make jokes during a funeral eulogy nor be excessively grave when praising some public hero.

Chapter 8: The paean is the ideal rhythm for prose. It is neither too grand like the heroic nor too ordinary like the iambic. The paean is rhythmic but avoids having a definite meter, which limits the speech just enough.

Chapter 9: Prose should take two forms, either free-running or periodic. Free-running prose has fallen out of fashion, and thus periodic is the better option of the two. In periodic prose, the structure of the text is conveyed by the flow of the words and the tone of the orator's voice. One should avoid having sentences which seem to run on forever or sentences which stop too abruptly.

# Book III, Chapter 10-12

## Book III, Chapter 10-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10: Effective prose will express its important points with succinct, elegant sayings. These sayings are characterized by antithesis, metaphor, and vividness. Antithesis is the grouping of two opposite qualities in order to make a point especially striking. For example, one might say that a certain public figure is "not a savior, but a traitor"—in one short phrase, the audience is forced to imagine two completely opposite extremes. Metaphors are useful because people take pleasure in new ideas and they are the best vehicles for conveying them. Simple words convey what people already know and complex, foreign words only confuse them. Vivid speech—speech which, so to speak, draws a picture for the audience, is very effective.

Chapter 11: Vivid descriptions should always draw a picture of something that is in activity. One might truthfully liken the virtuous man to a square, since both are perfect, but the metaphor is boring. It would be better to compare him with a blossoming flower, a more beautiful and also more familiar object. A skilled rhetorician will try to surprise his audience with his speech, for a listener who is surprised is more likely to remember what has been said. Surprises can take many forms, like riddles, puns, and other word-plays.

Chapter 12: The specific application and context of rhetoric should determine the style one employs. Written prose will tend to vary from spoken prose, for example, because it tends to be more stylized and complicated. A speech in written form will often appear boring and simple because it is meant to be enlivened by the voice of a skilled speaker. Epideictic rhetoric is most likely to deal with large crowds of uneducated people and, as such, should focus less on proper argumentation and more on an effective presentation. Forensic rhetoric should be more conservative and mix good argumentation with an effective style. Political rhetoric is the most austere of all of them and should focus the most on sound argumentation.

# Book III, Chapters 13-19

## Book III, Chapters 13-19 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13: There are two essential parts to a speech, the statement of the argument and the proof of the argument. As circumstances require, one might also add an introduction and epilogue, but for simple purposes these are excessive.

Chapter 14: The purpose of an introduction is to clarify the purpose of the speech. In some cases, an introduction is also useful for manipulating the prejudices of one's audience. Thus, for example, in a trial, the forensic orator, if he is defending a man accused of a crime, ought to try to make the jury or judges think favorably of his client; otherwise, their prejudices might skew their perception of the facts when the trial proceeds. However, a prosecutor should probably wait until the end of the case to try to prejudice the jury against the defendant so that it will be fresh in their minds.

Chapter 15: Prejudice can be excited or diminished in several ways. For example, if a person has been accused by their opponent of some misdeed, he can deny that the misdeed ever occured, admit that it occurred but deny that it did any harm, or even admit that it caused harm but was, nonetheless, not unjust. One might also point out the positive consequences of the supposed misdeed.

Chapter 16: Narration, the part of the speech which relates some actions or events which have actually occurred, is not used in every field of speech. In political rhetoric, for example, there is little need to narrate events, for politics is concerned with the future. At most, one might narrate some past events in one's examples. However, narration is important both to epideictic speech and forensic speech as both are concerned with the actions of men.

Chapter 17: Each field of rhetoric must argue their main point in different ways. In forensic oratory, one must either dispute the facts as they have been presented or dispute the justice or injustice of the act. In epideictic oratory, the facts are usually taken on trust from the speaker and thus require little in the way of proof or reasoning. In political oratory, one must defend one's proposal against charges of being inexpedient or unjust. Forensic oratory is particularly well-suited for the enthymeme, but should be used in moderation so as to not spoil their effect. It is difficult to use enthymemes in political oratory, as it is difficult to demonstrate anything about the future. Therefore, political rhetoricians mainly make use of examples.

Chapter 18: When interrogating one's opponent, one should try one's best to expose any contradictions or falsities in his speech. Even if these errors are found in parts not crucial to his main point, by discrediting him in one spot, the audience will discredit him generally. A person being interrogated ought to always provide justifications for his answer so as to prevent the interrogator from drawing his own conclusions. Jokes can be used effectively at times in rhetoric, but the kind of joke should be appropriate both

for the speaker and the subject matter. The types of jests were enumerated in a now-lost portion of the "Poetics."

Chapter 19: The epilogue should summarize the argument and dispose the audience in one's favor. At that point, the rhetorician's work is done and he should then defer to the judgment of his audience.

# Characters

## The Political Rhetorician

The political rhetorician is primarily concerned with passing a law or otherwise convincing a legislative body (whether it be senate, monarch, or any other arrangement) of some particular course of action, like signing a treaty or going to war. The chief concern of any political body is usefulness, that is, whether or not a given course of action will further the goals of the nation. Therefore, the political rhetorician must focus on this, and questions of justice should come later. The political rhetorician needs to be familiar with political science, history, and the constitution of his own state. History is especially useful in political rhetoric because it is by way of examples of the past that one can guess what will happen in the future, and the future is the chief concern of the political process. He should also know about the different forms of government and how one kind of government transforms into another, for such information will guide how he argues for his own proposals. For example, he might argue against an opponent's proposition by citing the example of some similar that were passed in some other state right before the democracy dissolved into a tyranny.

Stylistically, the political rhetorician should be the least ornate of all of the political rhetoricians because his audience, lawmakers, will tend to be highly educated and, therefore, most responsive to logical argument. The political rhetorician makes the least use of enthymemes because it is difficult to demonstrate anything about the future. Instead, he will mainly appeal to examples from the past in order to show what will probably result from his proposed actions in the future.

## The Forensic Rhetorician

The forensic (or legal) rhetorician is concerned with making a case in a court of law in favor or against some person accused of a crime. His audience can be a jury of citizens, a judge, or several judges, and his form of rhetoric should be adapted to the particular circumstances he faces. The chief end of any criminal trial is justice, and, as such, the forensic rhetorician should make every other consideration secondary to justice in his orations. The rhetorician himself does not need to be committed to justice—for sometimes a prosecutor is charged with the task of prosecuting a man who is not guilty of a crime—but his arguments must always be aimed at convincing the court that justice is on his side. It should be obvious, then, the forensic rhetorician has to be familiar with the principles of justice. Justice is defined as the enjoyment of one's property and not that of others, but this definition should be interpreted in a sufficiently broad way such that it includes such obvious crimes as murder and rape. The rhetorician also has to be familiar with the law, which comes in two forms, namely, the special and the general or universal. The special law is the straightforward sense of the word "law"—those statues explicitly passed by the government of a region. The universal law are those unwritten laws of justice which ought to have force in any court. The forensic rhetorician ought to

use this distinction to his advantage in court. For example, if he is defending a man who has clearly violated a statute of the law, he might say that the law has no power in this case because the universal law, which is higher and nobler, contradicts it. Conversely, if he is the prosecutor in such a case, he might argue that it is not for the jury to decide whether the special law is in conformity with the universal law; such is the task of the legislative power.

## The Epideictic Rhetorician

The epideictic rhetorician is a rhetorician whose speeches focus on either praising or denouncing some well-known figure. As such, he should be familiar with what is praiseworthy or blameworthy in a person's character. His form of rhetoric is the most sensitive to questions of style and presentation, since of all the forms of rhetoric, it can rely the least on complex argumentation.

## Sophist

A sophist is a generally derogatory term for a person who abuses his argumentative and rhetorical skills in order to convince people of false propositions.

## Homer

Homer was a Greek poet whose two epic poems—the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey"—were authorities on almost every matter in ancient Greek society.

## Sophocles

Sophocles was an ancient Greek playwright. His plays are quoted occasionally in order to prove or illustrate some point.

## Plato

Plato was a Greek philosopher and Aristotle's teacher. He is quoted at various points in the "Rhetoric" to illustrate or prove certain points.

## Socrates

Socrates was perhaps the most famous and beloved philosopher in ancient Greece. He was famously put to death for, supposedly, corrupting the Athenian youth.

## Isocrates

Isocrates was a Greek playwright whose works are occasionally quoted to illustrated proper rhetorical style.

## Protagoras

Protagoras was an ancient Greek philosopher and, according to Plato, Aristotle, and others, a sophist.

## Hesiod

Hesiod was a Greek writer who recorded many of the traditional myths. One of his most well-known works, "Works and Days," is quoted at several points in the course of the text.

# Objects/Places

## Rhetoric

Rhetoric is defined as "the faculty of observe in any given case the means of persuasion" (24). Aristotle is clear on the point that rhetoric is not an art, but rather a tool used by the arts in order to persuade others of their conclusions.

## Dialectic

Dialectic is the study of proper argumentation. In dialectic, the chief concern is producing a sound argument and this distinguishes it from rhetoric, which is primarily concerned with producing a persuasive argument.

## Virtue

Virtue is a habit or characteristic which helps a person perform good works.

## Good

The good is that which all things naturally seek. When a person acts, he always does so with the hope that he will achieve some good.

## Happiness

Happiness is the end which all humans seek. It is composed of many different things according to many different people, including virtue, good friends, good children, money, power, and so on. Happiness can be attributed both to individuals and to collective bodies, like cities.

## Justice

Justice is a virtue that is defined as enjoying one's property as opposed to enjoying the property of others. It is the chief concern of forensic rhetoric.

## Enthymeme

An enthymeme is a form of a logical argument that is particularly suited for rhetorical purposes because it omits the most obvious premises in order to not weigh the audience down with the formality of a syllogism.

## Poetry

Poetry is a form of writing that is particularly characterized by the use of meter. Aristotle advises rhetoricians against making their speeches overly poetic, because the rhythm tends to distract the listener from the message.

## Prose

Prose is the form of writing that rhetoricians use. Aristotle advises using a prose that is limited by a weak rhythm.

## Metaphor

A metaphor is a figurative likening of two objects. It is especially useful in rhetoric for communicating new or surprising thoughts to the audience.

## Simile

A simile is a kind of metaphor. It is distinguished by the use of a word or phrase like "like" or "as" and they are often longer and more complex than simple metaphors.

# Themes

## The Goal of Rhetoric is Persuasion Not Truth

In the first chapter of the first book, Aristotle distinguishes dialectic from rhetoric. In order to understand the significance of this distinction, it is obviously necessary to understand what dialectic is. Dialectic might be reasonably considered equivalent with what is commonly called "logic" in the modern world. It is all of the principles of reasoning, primarily deduction (where a conclusion is derived from two premises) and induction (where a conclusion is derived from a number of empirical examples). The principal goal of dialectic is sound reasoning and, ultimately, the truth. This explains why Aristotle says sophists—false, dishonest pseudo-philosophers—are not dialectics. Rhetoric, on the other hand, is concerned not with the truth, but primarily with being persuasive. Thus, a dishonest sophist is still called a sophist, for he may still be persuasive. The reader will note that the definition of rhetoric—"the faculty of observe in any given case the means of persuasion" (24)—nowhere mentions the truth.

If the reader does not understand this, he is liable to think Aristotle approves of dishonest and even fallacious reasoning in argumentation, for he will frequently provide contradictory ways to prove a certain point. For example, in the chapter on law (Book I, Chapter 13) he gives two different ways one can use the distinction between special and general law: One might argue against observing a certain statute because it conflicts with the higher general law. However, if it would suit one's case to reach the opposite conclusion, one could argue that it is not the jury's role to interpret to what extent the special law conforms with the general law. It is important to note that Aristotle is not necessarily suggesting that one should do these things (though, it might be reasonably argued that the fact that he mentions their usefulness is a kind of tacit approval), but rather simply pointing out how to be persuasive without an eye to behaving ethically.

## Rhetoric Should Be Adapted to One's Circumstances

A constant theme throughout the work is that how one speaks and argues should be adapted to one's audience and purpose. In fact, there is some suggestion that, in an ideal world, there would not really be a need for rhetoric at all. For, ideally, everyone would be convinced sufficiently by logical argumentation which is the province of dialectic. However, since the practical reality is that there are many stupid and uneducated people in the world, one must use means of persuasion other than straightforward logical discourse. It follows, though, that the more education one's audience has the less one will worry about how one presents his arguments, for intelligent people will focus only on the substance of the argument. Speeches given to very general crowds, however, such as ceremonial speeches, will need to be very simple and avoid complex reasoning as much as possible, since it will have little effect on most people.

The education of one's audience is only one factor among many. The nationality of one's audience, for example, can be a significant factor; Aristotle mentions that it is easier to persuade an Athenian crowd of the virtue of some Athenian hero than it would be if the crowd were, say, Spartan. One should also be sensitive, as far as is possible, to the emotional character of one's audience. If a crowd is easily roused to anger, that fact can be used to incite their disgust with some particular person by pointing out some injustices that he has done. The three applications of rhetoric—political, legal, and ceremonial—also play a large part in determining the content of one's speech, as the purpose of each of the applications is very different. Political rhetoric is chiefly concerned with usefulness, for example, while legal rhetoric is chiefly concerned with issues of justice. Therefore, these purposes should always be taken into account when drafting a speech.

## The Three Applications of Rhetoric

Aristotle makes an enormous amount of distinctions among the different types of rhetoric, but the most important—as evidenced by the amount of time he spends on it—is the enumeration of rhetoric's three applications. First, there is so-called political rhetoric. Political rhetoric is concerned with convincing a legislature or legislator to adopt some proposed course of action. Since the political process is always primarily concerned with expediency, the political orator needs to be politically savvy. He should know history, for past events are the best indicator of how future events will turn out. He should also be well-acquainted with the different forms of government and how each form of government comes about or falls apart. As one of the primary goals of a political body is the happiness of its citizens, he also needs to be familiar with what happiness is and how to achieve it. Aristotle's depiction of happiness in the "Rhetoric" might seem strange to someone who has read his "Ethics," for it seems to place a strange amount of emphasis on material comforts. However, one should remember that Aristotle is not concerned with truth in the "Rhetoric" but with being persuasive and, as many men do believe that happiness is constituted by having money or being powerful, one should argue on their terms.

Forensic rhetoric is concerned with speeches that take place in the courtroom, particularly those related to criminal trials. The primary concern of the legal system is the administration of justice and, as such, the forensic rhetorician needs to be well acquainted with justice's principles. Justice is defined as causing harm against another person in transgression of the law. Now, the law is not confined only to the specific statutes of the state, but also includes the so-called universal law which applies to all mankind. In the Athenian legal system, the universal law was considered the supreme law of the land and, as such, if a statute was seen to contradict it, the universal law always took precedence. In addition to justice, the forensic rhetorician is concerned with deducing facts about the past. As a prosecutor, the rhetorician must prove that the defendant actually committed the acts of which he is accused; as a defense attorney, he must prove the opposite. There are many ways to prove this, but his chief tool will be the enthymeme, a specific form of logical argumentation which is suited for rhetorical purposes.

The third and final application of rhetoric is so-called epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric. Epideictic rhetoric is concerned with convincing an audience to either like or dislike a specific person. Since the epideictic rhetorician is chiefly concerned with the emotions of his audience, he needs to be acquainted with what emotions there are in general, how to produce them, and what effect they have on those experiencing them. The epideictic rhetorician is the rhetorician most likely to address the public in general, and as most people are unintelligent and uneducated, his speech will need to be particularly unsophisticated and make use of a lot of emotional appeals and imagery.

# Style

## Perspective

Aristotle was a renowned Greek philosopher even at the time of the book's writing. His frequent mention of his previous works (the "Topics," the "Analytics," the "Ethics," and the "Poetics" among others) shows that at the time the "Rhetoric" was written he was already an established authority in Athens. Aristotle's approach to rhetoric, like his approach to any subject, is intensely methodical and systematic. He always begins with a classification of the subject matter and, in this case, he concludes that rhetoric is not an art. He then proceeds to define the subject matter, which definition he provides at the beginning of the second chapter of the first book. The work from there on is to analyze the various parts and applications of the subject matter in such a way as to cover every conceivable question in the greatest amount of detail.

It is important to realize that the concept of goal or "end" is crucial to Aristotle's account of any subject. Thus, for example, his discussion of morality in the "Nicomachean Ethics" begins with an analysis of the end all men strive for, namely, happiness. In the case of rhetoric, the goal is persuasion. It is important to keep this in mind while reading the book, as it may at times seem like Aristotle is suggesting dishonest rhetorical tactics. In fact, it would be incorrect to impute any kind of approval to Aristotle, for he is merely showing the reader how to be effective in argument, not how to be dishonest; honesty is a topic that would more appropriately be discussed in a work on truth, like the "Analytics." or ethics, like the "Nicomachean Ethics."

## Tone

Aristotle's tone is mainly scientific, but at times he is almost conversational. He often addresses the reader in the second-person perspective and therefore gives the text the quality of a discussion or classroom lecture. Aristotle does seem to present himself as an unquestioned authority on the matter, as he rarely, if ever, qualifies the certainty of any of his statements. However, this may not be indicative of anything more than the accepted style of writing in ancient Greece; if one is writing a treatise, one was expected to write authoritatively on the subject and leave no room for doubt in the reader's mind. Indeed, Aristotle would be violating his own rhetorical principles if he did so, since he says it is important for the audience to believe that the speaker is a credible authority on the topic of the speech.

While the topic of rhetoric is not an incredibly contentious one—compared to, say, metaphysics or ethics—Aristotle does occasionally mention other works on the subject and, specifically, their flaws. He specifically mentions their incompleteness, a defect which he likely attributes to their unsystematic approach to the subject. Aristotle's approach, on the other hand, is almost fiendishly scientific as he methodically dissects each possible aspect of rhetoric.

## Structure

The book is divided into three books and each book is then subdivided into several chapters. The division of the text was not present in the original text but was an editorial decision made not long after the works were completed, probably by one of Aristotle's immediate predecessors. Despite this fact, the divisions are quite useful as they outline the major subjects of the book. The first book is dedicated to laying down the principles of rhetoric. The first two chapters classify and define rhetoric. In the remaining thirteen chapters of the first book, Aristotle distinguishes the various parts and applications of rhetoric. The most important of these distinctions is the division of rhetoric into political rhetoric, legal rhetoric, and ceremonial rhetoric.

The second book is concerned with what the rhetorician ought to say. This book makes reference at several points to proper argumentation, but such an approach is only one of the three modes of rhetorical appeal; one can also appeal to one's own authority and to the emotions of the audience. For sake of completeness, Aristotle, therefore, discusses all three of these modes of appeal, perhaps with an emphasis on the emotional appeal since, as he mentions, it is a particularly powerful appeal, especially on the minds of uneducated men.

The third book is concerned with style and structure. As he mentions in the first chapter, it is not sufficient to know what to say; one must also say it well. One's rhetorical style ought to be tailored to one's particular circumstances. If one is speaking to an educated judge, one should avoid using emotional appeals and instead focus on presenting a sound, logical argument. Conversely, if one is talking to a large crowd, it is likely that most of the people are uneducated. As a complex syllogism would be lost on such people, one should instead appeal to their emotions. Structurally, a speech is comprised of two major parts: a statement of the argument and its demonstration. In certain cases, it is fine to add two other elements to this structure, namely, an introduction and epilogue.

# Quotes

"Rhetoric is useful because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites, so that if the decisions of judges are not what they ought to be, the defeat must be due to the speakers themselves, and they must be blamed accordingly." (22)

"Moreover, before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction. For argument based on knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. Here, then, we must use, as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody, as we observed in the "Topics" when dealing with the way to handle a popular audience." (22)

"It may be said that every individual man and all men in common aim at a certain end which determines what they choose and what they avoid. This end, to sum it up briefly, is happiness and its constituents." (37)

"Revenge, too, is pleasant; it is pleasant to get anything that it is painful to fail to get, and angry people suffer extreme pain when they fail to get their revenge; but they enjoy the prospect of getting it." (70)

"The worse of two acts of wrong done to others is that which is prompted by the worse disposition." (81)

"Anger may be defined as an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends." (92)

"We may describe friendly feeling towards any one as wishing for him what you believe to be good things, not for your own sake but for his, and being inclined, so far as you can, to bring these things about." (100)

"The type of character produced by Wealth lies on the surface for all to see. Wealthy men are insolent and arrogant; their possession of wealth affects their understanding; they feel as if they had every good thing that exists; wealth becomes a sort of standard of value for everything else, and therefore they imagine there is nothing it cannot buy." (127)

"Another line is the use of indignant language whether to support your own case or to overthrow your opponent's. We do this when we paint a highly-coloured picture of the situation without having proved the facts of it: if the defendant does so, he produces an impression of his innocence; and if the prosecutor goes into a passion, he produces an impression of the defendant's guilt. Here there is no genuine enthymeme: the hearer infers guilt or innocence, but no proof is given, and the inference is fallacious accordingly." (157)

"Style to be good must be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do." (167)

"Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh." (186)

"You may use any means you choose to make your hearer receptive; among others, giving him a good impression of your character, which always helps to secure his attention. He will be ready to attend to anything that touches himself, and to anything that is important, surprising, or agreeable; and you should accordingly convey to him the impression that what you have to say is of this nature." (203)

# Topics for Discussion

Why does Aristotle not consider rhetoric an art?

What is the difference between dialectic and rhetoric?

What is the relationship between a demonstration and an enthymeme?

At several points in the work, Aristotle seems to recommend dishonest ways of persuading an audience of one's argument. Does Aristotle approve of these dishonest means?

In the chapter on happiness (Book I, Chapter 5) Aristotle gives several definitions of happiness. Are all of these definitions consistent with one another? If not, why does Aristotle not try to determine which is correct?

What is the difference between happiness and goodness?

Do the three applications of rhetoric—political, forensic, and epideictic—exhaust all of the possible uses? Are there others?

To what extent do Aristotle's rules of rhetoric apply in the modern world? Which rules seem to apply specifically to ancient Greece?