



The Elements of Eloquence: Secrets of the Perfect Turn of Phrase

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From classic poetry to pop lyrics, from Charles Dickens to Dolly Parton, even from Jesus to James Bond, Mark Forsyth explains the secrets that make a phrase—such as “O Captain! My Captain!” or “To be or not to be”—memorable.

In his inimitably entertaining and wonderfully witty style, he takes apart famous phrases and shows how you too can write like Shakespeare or quip like Oscar Wilde. Whether you’re aiming to achieve literary immortality or just hoping to deliver the perfect one-liner, *The Elements of Eloquence* proves that you don’t need to have anything important to say—you simply need to say it well.

In an age unhealthily obsessed with the power of substance, this is a book that highlights the importance of style.

The Elements of Eloquence: Secrets of the Perfect Turn of Phrase Details

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From Reader Review The Elements of Eloquence: Secrets of the Perfect Turn of Phrase for online ebook

Amy Neftzger says

As a writer, I'm interested in the technical information in the book - how some of the best authors in history utilized these building blocks called the figures of rhetoric in their craft. He doesn't explain every figure in existence — just some of the ones more commonly used. What's great about this book is how the author provides specific examples from classic literature.

Aside from the fascinating content, what makes this book unique is the engaging manner in which it's written. Forsyth makes learning about the figures of speech fun and entertaining. He cracks jokes and doesn't take himself or the language too seriously.

If you're a word nerd, purveyor of prose, or literature lover, such as myself, then you should check out this book. Note: I just used several of the elements of rhetoric in that last sentence, but I won't tell you which ones or how many. You'll have to read the book for yourself to figure it out!

Note: More complete review [heret](#)

Lucinda says

"Who needs sense when you have alliteration?"

"So Shakespeare stole; but he did wonderful things with his plunder. He's like somebody who nicks your old socks and then darns them."

'there's absolutely no point in historians getting indignant about language. It's never going to stop changing – they're trying to hold back the tide...'

The sheer witticism and timeless truism within Mark Forsyth's writing, fashions a unique reading experience for a diverse readership. His edgy, original style cleverly draws upon both classic literature and contemporary culture. Incorporating song lyrics, prose and poetry with a sprinkling of notable nostalgia Forsythe ingeniously takes a singular slant, without smothering the core essence of rhetorical usage in writing. His scrupulous analysis of proverbs and unfading sayings, accentuates an alternate angle of perception.

"Speak only if it improves upon the silence"

A must-read for any writer!

Shira Glassman says

I am so in love with *Elements of Eloquence* by Mark Forsyth that only a few chapters in, I added it to my paperback wishlist. You have to understand--me owning treeware means I know that I'll want to read and reread it several times. Otherwise, I check it out from the library so it doesn't take up space in my house and other people can enjoy it (or occasionally buy eBooks.)

I had no idea there were *this many* rhetorical tricks, just waiting to be appreciated in other people's writing, or waiting to be used in mine! Discovering them all was a delight and a joy, and Forsyth makes it easy to understand with the clever trick of using the technique under discussion in the opening bars of each section (although sometimes he's so damn smug about it that I rolled my eyes. But! Adorable.)

A sampling of his treats:

Clouds are not lonely. Especially in the Lake District where Wordsworth wrote that line. In the Lake District clouds are remarkably sociable creatures that bring their friends and relatives and stay for weeks.

I mean, I am now picturing my own Aviva with emoji-heart-eyes. Master-freaking-ful (which reminds me -- he left out expletive infixation! :P)

*Litotes isn't the best figure to use when you're trying to be grand. **Litotes does not stir the soul; it's more suited to stirring tea.***

and

Over the centuries and over the classes, consonants tend to stay roughly the same, while vowels slip around like eels.

I'm wriggling like an eel myself, with delight!

I remember there being moments of "eh" here and there (I actually can't remember what they were **ETA:** I found a note I'd written to myself that there is fatphobia in the "hyperbole" chapter), so if you run into a faily or oppressive isolated line, I'm sorry. But overwhelmingly I found it to be a super awesome resource that turned what could have been dry facts into little treats of mini-chapters full of wit and very clear examples.

Of course I'm not going to remember what all of the techniques were, but I plan on trying them out as an exercise to practice, once I have my own copy of the book.

Caroline says

This is one of those highly lauded books (with an average GR rating of 4.32 stars no less), which lay in my lap like a flabby hippo.

It was not my thing.

I read non-fiction. I like to LEARN. But this collection of rhetorical terms swept over me like high tide in the Bay of Fundy. Nothing stayed put, or nothing that I did not already know. Merism, polyptoton, aposiopesis, diacope, hendiadys, epizeuxis? My brain registered their meanings for the minute or so that I read the relevant pages - and then whoosh - all sense rushed out as the tide retreated - and that happened pretty quickly.

I've learnt one important thing though. It doesn't matter if a book is thoroughly researched and well written, if my little brain can't learn from it, or remember its essentials, it might as well be written in Chinese.

Please don't let my whinging deter you though. As mentioned before, many people loved this book, and certainly the author does a great analysis of what rhetorical devices are, and how they work. It's just as far as I was concerned nothing would stick. And I like things that stick. (That is an epistrophe - sentences or phrases ending in the same word - and no, I didn't remember that, I just looked it up.)

Its one useful role in my life would be as a reference book, a companion to something like Fowler's Modern English Usage, but I don't have shelf space for something I regard - rightly or wrongly - as quite a fusty topic.

Catriona (LittleBookOwl) says

THE SHORT

The Elements of Eloquence is a cleverly crafted book about the English language, that both amuses and enlightens. Forsyth's writing is witty and humorous, and I loved that he often implemented the language techniques he was describing and discussing. In addition to these aspects, creating such fluidity between the chapters makes this a really interesting read that many readers and writers could appreciate and learn from.

THE LONG

Video Review: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jfBF...>

Paul says

Have you always wanted to write like Shakespeare? Or is reaching literary immortality your thing? If you have nothing of any note to say, but still want to have maximum effect in your prose then you need to learn the finer arts of rhetoric. In this expose of the one liner, Mark Forsythe details the way to write that will give you much more style than you thought possible. Its origins are Greek, who formulated the concepts; these were built on by the Romans, before the baton was handed to the English when they finally got around to their Renaissance. Beginning with the always alluring alliteration, he moves through merism, hyperbaton and diacope before asking some rhetorical questions and considers periodic sentences. It would not be complete without the fourteenth rule, nor elements of paradox or hyperbole...

I have read and loved the The Etymologicon and The Horologicon before so was really looking forward to this, and mostly it didn't disappoint. I liked the way he expanded the 39 elements of rhetoric, moving neatly onto the next from the previous chapter. And it is very readable too, he has a knack of explaining things with the barest hint of wit and using examples that bring a smile to your face. Well worth reading, even if you

haven't got a degree in English!

Brent says

An excellent reference on the elegant turn of a phrase.

Many of the tricks used by great writers and orators were first discovered and documented by ancient Greek rhetoricians. The author goes through a generous collection of them by name, giving examples and theories as to why they work.

Plus its funny.

Tiffany Reisz says

An enchanting elegant book! I gotta try some of this shit out!

James Hartley says

This a pithy, witty little book which benefits and suffers from its constricting format. While it sets itself up as a guidebook to "how to turn the perfect English phrase" it's really an explanation of the different classical terms used in rhetoric. Some names, like hyperbole, are familiar, while most are not.

Forsythe's strength is his sense of clarity in explaining and demonstrating use of the terms and also his sense of humour, which is lively and genuinely funny. The book suffers, though, from its tiresome structure - short, punchy chapters linked by a similiar teaser at the end of each - which quickly becomes tiresome.

It makes a short book seem long and turns what might have flowed like a great river into a series of jerky rapids.

Emma Sea says

4.5, rounded up for the binding.

Informative and hilarious. Laughed out loud in public through many pages. Got asked by a creepy stranger what book was I reading, and got to say, "A primer on the classical forms of rhetoric." Stranger did not bother me again. Booyah!

K.J. Charles says

Very informative and extremely funny at points. It's basically an explanation of various rhetorical devices we all use in some ways, which used to be formalised and taught but no longer. Picked up a lot of interesting

nuggets, and it's a very good way to make you consciously aware of what you're doing in writing and how effects are achieved.

Lubinka Dimitrova says

When you giggle uncontrollably while reading an introduction to the classical forms of rhetoric, generously sprinkled with the best quotes from Shakespeare, Churchill, Wilde and many other more or less known heroes of the good turn of phrase, then you know you've got the right book for you. Besides his witty and hilarious way of presenting his material, the author manages to illuminate why we are often deeply affected rather by the phrasing of an idea, than by its essence (Churchill's We Shall Fight on the Beaches speech, where he actually hinted that military disaster was around the corner, is remembered in history as one of the most upheaving speeches ever delivered thanks to the perfect use of anaphora). My personal favorite? Litotes, not the worst figure for the kind-hearted reviewer of books. I've never been called a woman of few words, and now I know why.

Olga Godim says

Marvelous! For a writer like me, without a formal writing education and largely self-taught, this book is a must. It talks about the rules of rhetoric – the rules for creating a memorable phrase. A writer must follow those rules, those rigid formulas, if she wants her writing to sound good, to invoke emotions, to inspire convictions. Those rules are called figures of rhetoric.

Forsyth explains the rules in simple words, not once resorting to the incomprehensible linguistic vernacular. Well, except for their Greek or Latin names, but they surely don't count.

He offers tons of examples, many of them from Shakespeare and other classics. He examines the history of those rules and their usage over the centuries, from ancient Greeks and the Bible to now. He shows that those rules can be learned. It doesn't take a genius. It takes determination and practice. I can learn those rules. So can you, and the knowledge makes them less scary. In a way, this book is a DIY of beautiful writing.

Once upon a time, rhetoric was a part of classic education. Every gentleman had to learn it, together with Latin and Greek. Alas, no more. Most schoolchildren nowadays don't even know the meaning of the word 'rhetoric', much less its rules. Most young writers don't know them either, and the result is a flood of badly written books we all waddle through to get to the rare gems.

Forsyth's book is written in a language so exquisite, so delicious, it made me weep with joy. The author knows his English. Oh, yes, he does! I wish most fiction writers were as good with their English as he is with his. I wish I was.

His erudition is overwhelming, his research deep and persuasive, and his irreverent repartees and mocking little asides extremely amusing. I laughed aloud, I chuckled, I giggled. I enjoyed myself tremendously while reading this book.

I even used some of the rules of rhetoric in this review.

The book is immensely quotable, but I can't retype here all his text – that would be plagiarism – so I will give you only a small selection, a whiff of the author's wit, to whet your appetite. (*Alliteration* is one of the rules of rhetoric. Hooray!)

About the rule of *Blazon*:

When healthy people fall in love, they buy a bunch of flowers or an engagement ring and go and Do Something About It. When poets fall in love, they make a list of their loved

one's body parts and attach similes to them. Your lips are like cherries, your hair is like gold, and your eyes are like traffic lights that make my heart stop and go. These lists are almost universally awkward.

About the rule of *Tricolon* [a list of three]:

Tricolons sound great if the third thing is longer. The American way is (as outlined in their mutinous Declaration of Independence) made up of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The pursuit of happiness is, if you think about it, the least of the promises here. You can pursue happiness as much as you like, and most of us do anyway. It rarely ends in capture. Life and liberty were the more important guarantees. But it sounds so good when you go on a bit at the end.

Recommended to anyone who likes English.

Roy Lotz says

[The only part that annoyed me was when Fors

Trevor says

Witty, clever, fascinating, compulsive, delightful. That first sentence is an example of Scesis Onomaton and merely five of the words I use to describe myself – well, and this book too, obviously. To be honest, I'm not going to remember the names of all of the rules that are discussed here.

You could, if the mood took you, do exactly that and learn all of the Greek names for the rhetorical tricks discussed here, but I don't think that is completely necessary. What this very short book does beautifully is to give you a series of examples of what works in forming a lovely, memorable sentence and, more importantly, why it works. It also shows you, if not used properly, why these tricks also might not work.

And this guy is funny – often making me stop and chuckle to myself in a way that made me glad I wasn't reading this book on a train. Now, that isn't necessarily what I had expected to happen while reading a book on rhetoric. I've read Aristotle's rhetoric too, years ago, and can't remember a single smile, never mind a chortle.

One of the things that I found particularly interesting in this was how often symmetry played a part in making sentences beautiful and memorable. Or how frequently adding colours to sentences set them off. So, jealousy doesn't just look deep into your soul, but it is the green-eyed monster, jealousy that does. Beautiful sentences are often formed by the unexpected, however, the problem is that after it has struck us as beautiful, it too often becomes overused and conventional and so, the surprise factor diminishes with time and so too does the beauty. We are constantly open to new surprises and constantly in the process of becoming bored with things that surprised us yesterday, but no longer do today. I think this is why humour ages so badly.

This book shows us that there are structural rules about how to go about making these surprises.

You will probably know about lots and lots of what is discussed in this book and it is just possible that you will learn nothing from it at all – although, I have to say that I learnt a lot and I have been pretty interested in this stuff for quite some time – all the same, even if you know this stuff like the back of your hand, buy this book anyway. The book is so well put together that, well, it just gives you a good feeling reading it: it is delightful, it is charming. I just love watching people smarter than me doing endlessly clever things. This guy explaining why some of the most memorable sentences in our language are, in fact, memorable, is a joy to watch. I particularly loved it when he made simple changes to our most memorable sentences to show how they needed to be just as they are. Or, even better, when he showed how we ‘misremember’ sentences from books or plays, but actually, our misremembering ‘improves’ the sentences according to one of the rules discussed here.

This needs to go onto your shopping list, this needs to scurry its way up your to-read list – as close to the top as you can make it. Get this book, read this book, enjoy this book. I need say no more...
