

Antanaclasis



DEFINITION

What is antanaclasis? Here's a quick and simple definition:

Antanaclasis is a [figure of speech](#) in which a word or phrase is repeated within a sentence, but the word or phrase means something different each time it appears. A famous example of antanaclasis is Benjamin Franklin's statement that: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." In this example, the first time "hang" appears it means "stay" or "stand," while the second time it refers to being "hanged."

Some additional key details about antanaclasis:

- Antanaclasis derives from the Greek word, "antanáklasis," which literally translates to "reflection."
- Antanaclasis, with its focus on multiple meanings of the same word or phrase, is a form of [pun](#).
- Advertisers frequently use antanaclasis to write catchy and persuasive slogans.

Antanaclasis Pronunciation

Here's how to pronounce antanaclasis: ant-an-uh-**class**-iss

Antanaclasis and Pun

Antanaclasis is a special form of pun. Puns are a broader category into which antanaclasis fits, for two reasons:

- **Structure:** Antanaclasis *has* to occur within a single sentence and involve the repetition of a word or phrase. Puns don't require either. For instance, take the joke "Why don't you ever get hungry at the beach? Because of the sand which is there." There's no repetition in this pun on the words "sand which is," and it's set up across multiple sentences.
- **Type of pun:** Puns can play with the meaning of words in *multiple* ways. For instance, a pun can be *homophonic*, meaning they play with the meanings of two words that sound alike (like "sand which is" and "sandwiches" in the example just above). Puns can also be *homographic*, meaning they play with the different meanings of words that are spelled the same way. Antanaclasis cannot be homophonic; it is *always* homographic, as with the different meanings of the word "hang" in Benjamin Franklin's comment.

All this adds up to a simple fact: all examples of antanaclasis are puns, but not all puns are antanaclasis.



EXAMPLES

Antanaclasis can be found in everything from classical literature to contemporary pop culture, from Shakespearean plays to popular song lyrics to advertisements.

Examples of Antanaclasis in Shakespeare

Shakespeare was a great practitioner of antanaclasis. The device appears in a number of his plays, in moments both comic and tragic.

Antanaclasis in *Henry V*

In [Henry V](#), after England has invaded and defeated France in battle and the play is nearing its end, the comic and rather unscrupulous character of Pistol declares:

To England will I **steal**, and there I'll **steal**.

Here Pistol uses two meanings of the word "steal." In the first appearance, he uses the meaning "to sneak away." In the second, he uses the more common meaning of the act of theft.

Antanaclasis in *Twelfth Night*

In [Twelfth Night](#), the character of Feste pulls a prank on another character named Malvolio. Feste's prank involves getting dressed up in the robes of a priest to trick Malvolio. As he goes off to do his mischief, Feste says:

Well, I'll put it on, and I will **dissemble** myself in 't, and I would I were the first that ever **dissembled** in such a gown.

The first "dissemble" here means to "disguise," while the second means to "lie" or to "act hypocritically." Note how, when the word is repeated, it has a slightly altered form (it's in the past tense rather than the present). That's okay; it still counts as antanaclasis.

Antanaclasis in *Othello*

Near the end of [Othello](#), a candle burns in Desdemona's bedroom as Othello enters with the intent to kill her because he has been convinced that she has been unfaithful to him. He says:

Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the **light**, and then put out the **light**.

In this example of antanaclasis, the first "light" refers to the candle, while the second refers to Desdemona's life. It's worth noting that this example of antanaclasis is a slightly less straightforward than most others. That's because in this example Othello uses a literal meaning for "light" in its first appearance, but he uses "light" [figuratively](#) in its

second appearance. If you look up "light" in the dictionary, you won't find any definition according to which it means "life." Rather, Othello's use of "light" to mean "life" is [metaphorical](#).

Examples of Antanaclasis in Song Lyrics

The witty repetition that takes place in antanaclasis can give power to a memorable chorus or refrain. Here are a couple of examples of antanaclasis in popular music.

Antanaclasis in "Where the Green Grass Grows" by Tim McGraw

In this song, Tim McGraw includes a lyric that uses "bars" to refer to a place where you buy a drink, and to protective rails that block access:

And there's **bars** on the corners and **bars** on my heart

Antanaclasis in "Sir Duke" by Stevie Wonder

In this song, Stevie Wonder makes it clear that while anyone can make a record, not just anyone can make a *good* record:

Just because a record has a **groove**
Don't make it in the **groove**

The first "groove" refers to the grooves etched into records that the needles of records run through in order to then create sound. The second "groove" refers to making people want to dance.

Examples of Antanaclasis in Advertising

The pun in antanaclasis can produce pithy, witty statements that stick in the mind. It's no wonder, then, that brands often use antanaclasis for taglines. Here are some examples:

- "Cats **like Felix like Felix**" — Felix Cat Food, whose mascot is a cat named Felix
 - Translation: Cats that are similar to Felix like this brand of cat food.
- "The **long** cigarette that's **long** on flavor" — Pall Mall Cigarettes
 - Translation: This cigarette is longer than others and has a lot of flavor.
- "People on the **go . . . go** for Coke" — Coca Cola
 - Translation: Busy people buy Coke.
- "If you don't **get it**, you don't **get it**" — The Washington Post
 - Translation: If you don't buy this newspaper, you won't know what's going on.

- "When you **run out, run out** to White Hen" — White Hen Pantry
 - Translation: If you run out of something you need, come to our convenience store.



WHY WRITERS USE IT

Writers use antanaclasis for a variety of reasons:

- To spark an ironic play on words or make a joke.
- To make a slogan, catchphrase, or line more memorable.
- To create a rhythm through repetition that sticks in the listener's head, much like in a song's chorus.
- To use the pithiness and wit of antanaclasis to convince others of an argument, especially as a concluding line (as in Ben Franklin's "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately).
- To contrast and emphasize the two different meanings of the repeated word in a way that can emphasize either comedy or tragedy.



OTHER RESOURCES

- [The Wikipedia Page on Antanaclasis](#): An introduction to antanaclasis with relevant examples from literature, advertising, and several witticisms.
- [The Dictionary Definition of Antanaclasis](#): An overview of the etymology, synonyms and antonyms for antanaclasis.
- [Felix cat food ad](#): A video of antanaclasis in advertising.

HOW TO CITE

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