

Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*



Mary Elizabeth Halper
Humanities at Hertog

Mondays & Thursdays | Jul. 10, 14, 17, 21, 24, & 28
Syllabus

HERTOG SUMMER 2025 HUMANITIES SEMINAR

ARISTOTLE'S *ART OF RHETORIC*

Mary Elizabeth Halper, Dean of Humanities

Speech thoroughly mediates our common life. We use it to educate, to share experiences, to spread information, to communicate opinions, and to persuade. The first and the last of these are the most complex and difficult, for they demand interaction and reception. There is no education if no one learns what the educator offers, and there is no persuasion if no one adopts what the rhetorician proposes. Little wonder, then, that rhetoric is a member of the seven classical liberal arts.

This seminar, offered exclusively to educators, provides an opportunity to read closely Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*. While Aristotle's *Rhetoric* contains a multitude of insights with direct, practical utility for persuasion, its principal task is to comprehend the art, not the execution, of rhetoric. His robust account treats the kinds of rhetoric, the modes of persuasion, and the elements and instruments of persuasive speech. More than that, Aristotle's work on rhetoric discloses a rich picture of human nature in which our capacity for speech and our concern for the true, the good, and the beautiful are central and intimately connected.

This seminar will meet online weekly on **Mondays and Thursdays** from **8 to 10 PM ET**.

Course Materials:

- Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Robert Bartlett.

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1- 2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. **Papers are due by midnight the day before your assigned session.** Please provide page numbers for textual citations. They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Thursday, July 10, 2025

8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET

Session I: Rhetoric & Its Neighbors | Species of Rhetoric: Deliberative

Readings:

- *Rhetoric* I.1-8

Topics:

- Reputation of rhetoric
- Definition of rhetoric
- Distinction of rhetoric, dialectic, politics
- Deliberative rhetoric

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is our commonplace sense of rhetoric? Do we have a sense of different kinds of rhetoric? What is the appropriate place of rhetoric?
- 2) What is persuasion? How does persuasion differ from other uses of speech?
- 3) What makes rhetoric especially appropriate to politics?
- 4) What role does knowledge play in deliberative rhetoric?

Monday, July 14, 2025

8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET

Session II: Species of Rhetoric: Epideictic & Judicial

Readings:

- *Rhetoric* I.9-15

Topics:

- Epideictic rhetoric
- Judicial rhetoric

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What role does the noble (or the beautiful) and the base (or the ugly) play in rhetoric aiming at praise or blame?
- 2) What is the purpose of epideictic rhetoric? Under what circumstances is it best employed?
- 3) What are the causes of, and what are the motives for, injustice? Why might this distinction matter for judicial rhetoric?
- 4) What mitigating factors may be considered in judicial rhetoric? Are there different kinds?

Thursday, July 17, 2025

8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET

Session III: Modes of Persuasion: *Pathos* & *Ethos*

Readings:

- *Rhetoric* II.1-17

Topics:

- Emotions & Dispositions
- Elements of character
- Circumstances of character

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Are all emotions dyadic (that is, do they come in pairs)? What does that structure suggest about their use in rhetoric?
- 2) When, if ever, is it useful to explicitly appeal to emotion? Absent explicit appeal, how does an understanding of emotions conduce to effect persuasion?
- 3) Why is age a primary category in treating character? What other circumstances cut across this primary category?
- 4) Given that character seems to be predetermined, how can it be incorporated into particular occasions for persuasion?

Monday, July 21, 2025

8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET

Session IV: Modes of Persuasion: *Logos* / Vehicle for Persuasion: The Enthymeme

Readings:

- *Rhetoric* II.18-26

Topics:

- Scope of argument
- Triad of rhetorical modes
- Structure of the enthymeme
- Deployment of the enthymeme

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the realm of judgment? Are the boundaries of the realm of judgment porous?
- 2) Do the three modes of persuasion make a whole? How do they integrate?
- 3) What power does example have in rhetoric? How does it differ from an enthymeme?
- 4) How does an enthymeme differ from a syllogism? How does this difference account for its proper place in rhetoric?
- 5) How comprehensive is Aristotle's list of topics? Are they general examples? Or does his list follow an enthymematic structure?

Thursday, July 24, 2025

8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET

Session V: Clarity, Accuracy, and Charisma: Style

Readings:

- *Rhetoric* III.1-12

Topics:

- Diction v. Cliché
- Devices of language
- Genius of style

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why is clarity in diction important? Is being clear different from being explicit?
- 2) Why are clichés, cant, canards, and the like deadly to effective speech?
- 3) Why are metaphors and similes such effective devices?
- 4) How can one develop a sense of style in speech?

Monday, July 28, 2025

8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET

Session VI: Organization I Rhetoric & Education

Readings:

- *Rhetoric* III.13-19
- Shared samples of rhetoric

Topics:

- Parts of a speech
- Effective organization
- Synoptic view of rhetoric

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of a preface? Why is one needed?
- 2) What factors contribute to negotiating the development of narrative and the deployment of persuasive devices?
- 3) What is at stake if a speech has poor organization? (Consider the root of the word organization: *organon*, from which we get the word organ.)
- 4) What role could rhetoric play in a classroom? How do the different species of rhetoric show up? The different modes of persuasion? The necessity of style?