Rhetorical Modes
Penamed by Tom Toles

Writers and speakers either by design or intuitively organize their ideas by rhetorical modes. For one writer comparison and contrast of characters, choices or conditions is the best approach. Another writer will find that presenting the process or steps to an end product works best for accomplishing her purpose. Also called modes of discourse, more than one rhetorical mode (for example, description and illustration) may be used by a speaker in a section or whole work, but one will be the dominant organizing strategy.

There are nine main rhetorical modes (some literature and composition textbooks group selections by these): argumentation (opinion), cause and effect, classification, comparison and contrast, definition, description, examples (illustration), narrative, and process (how-to).

Tom Toles, The Washington Post’s long-time Pulitzer-Prize winning editorial cartoonist, is known for his use of word play; symbolism and iconic images; allusions to literature, fairy tales, historic events and people as well as references to current events. As Toles has announced his retirement, we are taking another look at his visual commentary to find out how he was also using rhetorical modes. It can be argued that all his cartoons are descriptions or illustrations of his point of view, but let’s see how he was deftly using his wit, intellect and pen to structure his visual commentary.
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**Analogy**

Controlling structure is a comparison between two dissimilar items (objects, works of literature, ideas, crowds) based on a similarity of an aspect of both — making a point about this comparison.

**Classification**

The controlling organization is to classify or categorize the ideas (social, cultural and political issues, types of people, kinds of sports) to better understand qualities and make comparisons and contrasts.

October 20, 2020  *My Crowds Are Getting Even Bigger*

October 23, 2020  *Answer to Your Burning Question About 2021*
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**Definition**
State the meaning of a concept or idea, what something means to a particular group to clarify the organization's distinction from others. Sometimes includes the denotation and connotation of the idea, item or group that is defined. May be used to give a foundation to an argument.

**Example/Illustration**
The example is very clear to relate the main idea or essence of an item, group, author, activity or idea. Helps to make abstract concepts more understandable or to show what outcomes might result from decisions and actions.

October 20, 2020  *The LGBTQ of the Right*

February 2018  *Unit: Heat, Packing*
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Explanation
Actions of leaders, natural phenomenon, relationships may require the backstory, the background to which the action or words responded. The exposition may be in the form of a news article, letter, monologue, dialogue or interview.

Problem/Solution
When issues face a family, community, organization or country, the writer or speaker first clarifies what the problem is for all involved. This may follow a broad to more specific identification of what needs attention (categorizing, defining, explaining). Then suggests or tries to persuade the way to end the problem that may require sensitivity, logic and careful argumentation and analysis of benefits.

September 2018  Elf Sessions

October 2, 2020  How DO You Make Trump Shut Up?
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Cause and Effect
The initiating event or action may be based on logic, science, psychology, humans or accidental discoveries. Stating, demonstrating or proving the result of that “cause” may require using other rhetorical modes (examples, definition, description, explanation).

October 12, 2020  We May Also Be in for a Big Political Climate Change

Process
This is often used for how-to or self-help essays or articles that intend to give steps to complete a project or get a proposal done. The text may be in prose or actually numbered with steps to follow.

October 13, 2020  A Diagram of How Trump Swamped the Drain
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Narration
Relate the ideas and information through a story to make a point. It may be an older story (fairy tale, novel scene, historic event) put into a modern context or to demonstrate parallels. It may be a contemporary tale to reveal interrelationships or sequence of events.

October 12, 2020  Has the Witchhunt Cast a Spell on Republicans?
October 13, 2020  GOP Version of a Recount
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Final TOLES Cartoon

As Tom Toles tells us today, he has decided to retire. After a half-century of brilliant cartooning, including 18 years at The Post, he is entitled, but we will miss him greatly, as we know will many of you. While we search for a replacement, we will offer a cartoon every day chosen from a roster of the best cartoonists in the country. You also may continue to enjoy the work of our other staff cartoonist, Ann Telnaes.

— Fred Hiatt, editorial page editor

October 30, 2020
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