

# Five Canons of Rhetoric

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# Inventio

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Part of a series of articles on <b>Rhetoric</b>
The five canons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inventio</li><li>• Dispositio</li><li>• Elocutio</li><li>• Memoria</li><li>• Pronuntiatio</li></ul>

**Inventio** is the system or method used for the *discovery of arguments* in Western rhetoric and comes from the Latin word, meaning "invention" or "discovery". *Inventio* is the central, indispensable canon of rhetoric, and traditionally means a systematic search for arguments (Glenn and Goldthwaite 151).

*Inventio* comes from the Latin *invenire*, meaning "to find" or "to come upon". The same Latin root later gave us the English word inventor. *Invenire* is derived from the Greek *heuriskein*, also meaning "to find out" or "discover" (cf. *eureka*, "I have found it", see heuristic).

## Purpose

Invention is the division of rhetoric that investigates the possible means by which proofs can be discovered; supplies speaker and writers with sets of instructions that help them to find and compose arguments that are appropriate for a given rhetorical situation (Crowley and Hawhee 20).

For personal and lyric essays, narratives, and descriptive writing, invention techniques help writers draw from their memory and observation for the kinds of details that will add depth to their essays (Glenn and Goldthwaite 151).

The first direction of invention aims toward deriving heuristic procedures or systematic strategies that will aid students in discovering and generating ideas about which they might write; the second direction of invention is characterized by how writers establish "voice" in writing and realize individual selves in discourse (Glenn and Goldthwaite 153).

It is the first of five canons of classical rhetoric (the others being dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronuntiatio) that concern the crafting and delivery of speeches and writing.

One of the oldest criticisms of rhetoric is that as an art it has no proper subject matter. In other words, an orator might speak on any topic, with his success being measured purely on the brilliance of his rhetorical skills. This aspect of rhetoric is one reason why Plato attacked what he saw as empty rhetoric on the part of sophist philosophers, such as Gorgias.

Aristotle, in his works on rhetoric, answered Plato's charges by arguing that reason and rhetoric are intertwined ("Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic" is the first sentence of his *Rhetoric*). In Aristotle's view, dialectic reasoning is the mechanism for discovering universal truths; rhetoric is the method for clarifying and communicating these principles to others. And in order to communicate effectively, an orator must be able to assemble proper arguments that support his thesis.

*Inventio*, therefore, is the systematic discovery of rhetorical practices. In the Greek and Roman traditions, rhetorical practices are often but not always arguments. Aristotle, as well as later writers on rhetoric, such as Cicero and Quintilian, devoted considerable attention to developing and formalizing the discipline of rhetorical invention. Two important concepts within invention were *topoi* and *stasis*. Other rhetorical cultures seem to have additional means of locating "available means." Historian of Celtic poetics Robert Graves credited *analepsis* as a method of inventing his

historical arguments in *The White Goddess*, and Mazatec medicine woman Maria Sabina credited the hallucinogenic psilocybe mushroom with the flow of her discourse. Philosopher Jacques Derrida described inventio as the "invention of the other."

## *Topoi*

In classical rhetoric, arguments are obtained from various sources of information, or *topoi* (Greek 'places'; i.e. "places to find something"), also called by the Latin name *loci* (cf. Literary topoi). *Topoi* are categories that help delineate the relationships among ideas; Aristotle divided these into "common" and "special" groups.

In the common group could be found such categories as laws, witnesses, contracts, oaths, comparisons of similarity, difference, or degree, definitions of things, division of things (whole/parts, for instance), cause and effect, and other items that could be analyzed, researched or documented.

Modern writers and students use these topics, as well, when discovering arguments, although today more emphasis is placed on such things as scientific facts, statistics, and other "hard" evidence. Classical rhetoricians saw many areas of inquiry that today's writer might view as being purely in the province of "logic" — developing syllogisms, finding contradictions, and so on — as being of equal or greater importance.

Special *topoi* included such concepts as justice or injustice, virtue, good, and worthiness. Again, these are areas of inquiry seen by many today as belonging to other arts, but from Greek times through the Renaissance, these were considered integral to the study and practice of rhetoric.

## *Stasis*

According to Quintilian (*Inst. or.* 3.6.3<sup>[1]</sup>), the notion of *stasis* was said to have been introduced, not by Hermagoras of Temnos, but by an earlier writer on rhetoric, either Naucrates of Erythrae (a student of Isocrates), or Zopyrus of Clazomenae, and it may have been used already in Aeschines' speech *Against Ctesiphon*.

The procedure known as *stasis* was another important part of the invention process. This involved the practice of posing and exploring questions relevant to clarifying the main issues in the debate. There were four types of stasis: definitional, conjectural, translative, and qualitative. For instance, a lawyer defending someone accused of damaging property might pose the following questions:

- Question of fact: did the person damage the item? (conjectural)
- Question of definition: was the damage minor or major? (definitional)
- Question of quality: was he justified in damaging the item? (qualitative)
- Question of jurisdiction: should this be a civil or criminal trial? (translative)

Through the application of this process, as well as using the relevant *topoi*, the orator would be able to construct not just elegant arguments, but ones that were well-reasoned and well-researched. For example, to answer the second question, the attorney would need to ascertain additional things: how should the degree of damage be measured? Does the law specify distinctions between degrees of damage? Was there some remedy to the damage that could easily set things right? And so on.

Janice Lauer proposes the following techniques for invention: 1. applicable to a wide variety of writing situations so that they will transcend a particular topic and can be internalized by the student 2. flexible in their direction allowing a thinker to return to a previous step or skip to an inviting one as the evolving idea suggest 3. highly generative by involving the writer in various operations—such as visualizing, classifying, defining, rearranging, and dividing— that are known to stimulate insights (Glenn and Goldthwaite 155).

One of the most prolific techniques of arrangement is the use of topics. Topics can be used to invent arguments and also to conceptualize and formulate the single-sentence declarative thesis. Edward P.J. Corbett, Robert Connors, Richard P. Hughes, and P. Albert Duhamel define topics as "ways of probing one's subject in order to find the means to develop that subject" (Glenn and Goldthwaite 153). They issued four common topics that are most useful to

students: definition, analogy, consequence, and testimony. Definition involves the creation of a thesis by taking a fact or an idea and explaining it by precisely identifying its nature; it always asks the question "What is/was it?" Analogy is concerned with discovering resemblances or differences between two or more things proceeding from known to unknown; it is a useful tool for investigating comparisons and contrasts because it always asks the question "What is it like or unlike?" Consequence investigates phenomena costs to effect-to-cause pattern, best established through probabilities from patterns that have previously occurred. It always answers the question "What caused/causes/will cause it?" Testimony relies on appeals to an authority, (such as an expert opinion, statistics, or the law), and it always answers the question "What does an authority say about it?" "Ultimately a thesis or an argument must say something about the real world. Teaching the topics requires using examples and good examples are to be had by applying each topic to a definite subject and coming up with several thesis statements" (Glenn and Goldthwaite 156).

*Inventio* also involves the techniques of ethos, pathos, and logos:

Ethos is the appeal to a rhetor's credibility. This "appeal" or "approach" is also known as the ethical appeal. Ethics of course means the considering of a particular person's background and/or character. Therefore when one considers ethos they are taking into consideration the background or character of the debater or person who is presenting them with an argument to be used as persuasion. When a debater relies on ethos, they are using their "trustworthiness or credibility" to persuade their audience into believing their specific argument on a particular topic (Ramage 81). Many times when a debater is relying on ethos to present and make an argument for their particular standpoint, they "often convey (ethos) through tone and style of the message and through the way (they) refer to differing views" of those in opposition with them (Ramage 81). Regardless of the information presented in their argument a debater simply has to convey the message that they can be trusted in their argument when using ethos. As far as ethos is concerned, a debater's argument or ability to persuade his or her audience "can also be affected by the (debater's) reputation as it exists independently from the message—his or her expertise in the field, his or her previous record or integrity, and so forth" (Ramage 81). All these different aspects play a major part on the effectiveness of a debater's argument when the debater relies on the ethical appeal or ethos proof.

Pathos involves much more than simply making the audience laugh, cry, or become enraged. Pathos is a proof that "is an appeal to an audience's sense of identity, their self-interest, their emotions" and because pathos appeals to the deepest parts of the audience's being "many rhetoricians over the centuries have considered pathos the strongest of the appeals" because the pathos proof involves "the power of emotion to sway the mind" (Fahnestock 14). If a debater were to try to use the pathos appeal in order to persuade his or her audience, they would have to know their audience extremely well in order to know exactly how to approach and persuade their audience's emotions. If the pathos proof is not used properly, the debater could easily appeal to the wrong emotions of their audience and their argument could fall on deaf ears. Even more detrimental for the debater, they could involuntarily persuade their audience to side with their opponent on a given matter.

The logical appeal can either consist of "inductive logic by giving your (audience) a bunch of similar examples and then drawing from them a general proposition" or "the deductive enthymeme by giving your (audience) a few general propositions and then drawing from them a specific truth" (Henning 61). Either type of the logos proof, inductive or deductive, make a sound argument for debater to use when persuading an audience. The logical appeal presents the audience with facts that cannot be denied or ignored.

## External links

- PDF edition of Janice Lauer's *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition* <sup>[2]</sup>
- Larson, Richard L. "Discovery Through Questioning: A Plan for Teaching Rhetorical Invention." *College English* (1968) 30.2: 126-134. <sup>[3]</sup>
- Relevant entries at *Silva rhetoricae*: invention <sup>[4]</sup>, topics of invention <sup>[5]</sup>, stasis <sup>[6]</sup>

## References

- [1] [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio\\_Oratoria/3B\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/3B*.html)
- [2] <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/lauer%5Finvention/>
- [3] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/view/374448>
- [4] <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/canons/Invention.htm>
- [5] <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Invention/TOPICS%20OF%20INVENTION/Topics.htm>
- [6] <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/canons/Invention/Stasis.htm>

# Dispositio

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See also: *Disposition (disambiguation)*

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**Dispositio** is the system used for the organization of arguments in Western classical rhetoric. The word is Latin, and can be translated as "organization" or "arrangement."

It is the second of five canons of classical rhetoric (the first being *inventio*, and the remaining being *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*) that concern the crafting and delivery of speeches and writing.

The first part of any rhetorical exercise was to discover the proper arguments to use, which was done under the formalized methods of *inventio*. The next problem facing the orator or writer was to select various arguments and organize them into an effective discourse.

Aristotle defined two essential parts of a discourse: the statement of the case and the proof of the case. For example, in a legal argument, a prosecutor must first declare the charges against the defendant and provide the relevant facts; then he must present the evidence that proves guilt. Aristotle allowed that in practice most discourse also requires an introduction and a conclusion.

Later writers on rhetoric, such as Cicero and Quintilian refined this organizational scheme even further, so that there were eventually six parts:

- the introduction, or *exordium* -- The term *exordium* comes from the Latin term meaning "to urge forward." In the *exordium*, the speaker gives their main argument, and all the relevant information.
  - the statement of the case, or *narratio* -- Quintilian explained that in the *narratio* "We shall for instance represent a person accused of theft as covetous, accused of adultery as lustful, accused of homicide as rash, or attribute the opposite qualities to these persons if we are defending them; further we must do the same with place, time and the like."
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- the outline of the major points in the argument, or *divisio* (sometimes known as *partitio*) -- It has two functions: names the issues in dispute and lists the arguments to be used in the order they will appear.
- the proof of the case, or *confirmatio* -- It confirms or validates the material given in the narratio and partitio.
- the refutation of possible opposing arguments, or *confutatio* -- If the rhetor anticipates that certain people in his audience may disagree with his speech, he must be prepared to refute the argument that could possibly be presented in opposition to his original speech.
- the conclusion, or *peroratio* -- Cicero taught that a rhetor can do three things in this step: sum up his arguments, cast anyone who disagrees with him in a negative light, and arouse sympathy for himself, his clients, or his case.

While this structure might appear to be highly rigid (and certainly some writers on the subject were overly pedantic), it was in practice a flexible model. Cicero and Quintilian, for example, encouraged writers to rearrange the structure when it strengthened their case: for instance, if the opposing arguments were known to be powerful, it might be better to place the refutation before the proof.

Within each major part, there were additional tactics that might be employed. For instance, a prosecutor might sum up his case with forceful repetition of his main points using a technique known as *accumulatio*. The defense attorney in the same case might use a different approach in his summation.

Finally, *dispositio* was also seen as an iterative process, particularly in conjunction with *inventio*. The very process of organizing arguments might lead to the need to discover and research new ones. An orator would refine his arguments and their organization until they were properly arranged. He would then proceed to those areas that we generally associate with rhetoric today — the development of the style and delivery of the arguments.

## References

Crowley, Sharon and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. New York: Pearson Education, 2004.

# Elocutio

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Part of a series of articles on <b>Rhetoric</b>
The five canons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inventio</li> <li>• Dispositio</li> <li>• Elocutio</li> <li>• Memoria</li> <li>• Pronuntiatio</li> </ul>

**Elocutio** is the term for the mastery of stylistic elements in Western classical rhetoric and comes from the Latin *loqui*, "to speak". Although today we associate the word *elocution* more with eloquent speaking, for the classical rhetorician it connoted "style".

It is the third of the five canons of classical rhetoric (the others being *inventio*, *dispositio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*) that concern the crafting and delivery of speeches and writing. Beginning in the Renaissance, writers increasingly emphasized the stylistic aspects of rhetoric over the other divisions of rhetoric.

An orator or writer had a number of things to decide in developing a style for a particular discourse. First, there was the level of style; plain (*attenuata* or *subtile*), middle (*mediocris* or *robusta*), or high (*florida* or *gravis*). Writers were instructed to match the basic style to their subject matter and their audience. For instance, Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* deemed the plain style suitable for instruction, the middle for moving oration, and the high for charming discourse. Today, we associate elocution and rhetoric with the last of these styles, but for rhetoricians, each style was useful in rhetoric.

The ancient authors agreed that the four ingredients necessary in order to achieve good style included correctness, clearness, appropriateness, and ornament.

Sometimes translated as "purity", correctness meant that rhetors should use words that were current and should adhere to the grammatical rules of whatever language they wrote. Correctness rules are standards of grammar and usage drawn from traditional grammar. In regard to clarity, most ancient teachers felt that clarity meant that rhetors should use words in their ordinary or everyday senses. The object of clarity was to allow meaning to "shine through", like light through a window.

Appropriateness probably derives from the Greek rhetorical notion to *prepon*, meaning to say or do whatever is fitting in a given situation. Ancient teachers taught that close attention to *kairos* will help to determine the appropriate style.

The last and most important of the excellences of style is ornament, which is defined as extraordinary or unusual use of language. Ornamentation was divided into three broad categories: figures of speech, figures of thought, and tropes. Figures of speech are any artful patterning or arrangement of language. Figures of thought are artful presentations of ideas, feelings, concepts; figures of thought that depart from the ordinary patterns of argument. Tropes are any artful substitution of one term for another.

A great amount of attention was paid to figures of speech, which were classified into various types and sub-types. One Renaissance writer, Henry Peacham, enumerated 184 different figures of speech, although it could be argued that this was a manifestation of the increasing over-emphasis on style that began in the Renaissance.

Also important to *elocutio* were subjects we would generally regard as grammatical: the proper use of punctuation and conjunctions; the desirable order of words in a sentence (unlike English, many languages are not as dependent on word order to establish relationships between words, and so choices of word order may revolve more around form than function); and the length of sentences.

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# Memoria

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Part of a series of articles on <b>Rhetoric</b>
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**Memoria** was the term for aspects involving memory in Western classical rhetoric. The word is Latin, and can be translated as "memory."

It was one of five canons in classical rhetoric (the others being *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, and *pronuntiatio*) concerned with the crafting and delivery of speeches and prose.

The art of rhetoric grew out of oratory, which was the central medium for intellectual and political life in ancient Greece. Legal proceedings, political debates, philosophical inquiry were all conducted through spoken discourse. Many of the great texts from that age were not written texts penned by the authors we associate them with, but were instead orations written down by followers and students. In Roman times, while there was a much greater body of written work, oration was still the medium for critical debate. Unlike public speakers of today, who use notes or who read their speeches, good orators were expected to deliver their speeches without such aids.

*Memoria* was the discipline of recalling the arguments of a discourse. It generally received less attention from writers than other parts of rhetoric, as there is less to be said about the subject. However, the need to memorize speeches did influence the structure of discourse to some extent. For example, as part of *dispositio*, some attention was paid to creating structures (such as the *divisio*, an outline of the major arguments of a discourse) that would also aid memory. Some writers also discussed the use of various mnemonic devices to assist speakers.

But rhetoricians also viewed *memoria* as requiring more than just rote memorization. Rather, the orator also had to have at his command a wide body of knowledge to permit improvisation, to respond to questions, and to refute opposing arguments. Where today's speech-making tends to be a staged, one-way affair, in former times, much oration occurred as part of debates, dialogues, and other settings, in which orators had to react to others. Moreover, rhetoricians also recognized that the credibility of a speaker depended not just on the strength of his prepared arguments, but on the audience's perceptions of the speaker. In Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance, a speaker's familiarity of many areas of learning was seen as a virtue.

## Memoria in the Renaissance

When the Humanists took up the ideas on memory found the writings of Classical authors, *memoria* played an important role in the pedagogical system. Texts were learned first by rote memorization, then re-read for meaning. Children's ability to memorize was aided by "memory tables", which were first available in manuscript form, and were, from the 1470s onwards, some of the first products of the printing press. (Source: Paul Gehl, *A Moral Art: Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence* (1993))

## Memory and Kairos

Memory, the fourth canon of rhetoric, and invention, the first canon of rhetoric, are connected. The ad Herennium states that memory is the "treasury of things invented." This indirectly refers to the custom of accumulating commonplaces. Hence, for a rhetor, memory is as much related to the need to extemporize as it is to the necessity to memorize an entire discourse for delivery; in this way, memory is linked to kairos and to the ideas of copia and amplification (Burton). Crowley and Hawhee state about memory and kairos, "... kairos and memory were partnered in several ways. First, both require a kind of 'attunement' in that the rhetor who is gathering items for reserve in the memory must be thinking simultaneously about what's available now that might be useful later. Secondly, memory requires an attunement during the moment of speaking or composing, a recognition of the right time for recalling an illustrative example, an argument, and so on" (317).

## Memory Systems

Ancient peoples used elaborate systems, such as the Method of Loci, to store large amounts of information in their memories. Today, we use literate and electronic memory systems. Literate memory systems include books, periodicals, and libraries. Electronic systems include computers, databases, computer software, the World Wide Web, and other artificial memory devices (Crowley and Hawhee 325-28).

## Further reading

- Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Rubin, *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (CUP 2001).
- Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (CUP, 1990).
- Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (CUP, 1998).
- Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students, Third Edition, 316-329* (CUP, 2004).
- Yates, Frances A. (1966). *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN 10226950018 .

## External links

- Burton, Gideon O. "Memory". *The Forest of Rhetoric silva rhetoricae*. Brigham Young University. <sup>[1]</sup>

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[1] <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/canons/Memory.htm>

# Pronuntiatio

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Part of a series of articles on <b>Rhetoric</b>
The five canons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inventio</li><li>• Dispositio</li><li>• Elocutio</li><li>• Memoria</li><li>• Pronuntiatio</li></ul>

**Pronuntiatio** was the discipline of delivering speeches in Western classical rhetoric. It is the one of five canons of classical rhetoric (the others being inventio, dispositio, elocutio, and memoria) that concern the crafting and delivery of speeches. In literature the equivalent of ancient *pronuntiatio* is the recitation of epics (Aris. Po. 26.2.).<sup>[1]</sup>

As with *memoria*, the canon that dealt with the memorization of speeches, *pronuntiatio* was not extensively written about in Classical texts on rhetoric. Its importance declined even more, once the written word became the focus of rhetoric, although after the eighteenth century it again saw more interest in the works of men such as Gilbert Austin. In public speaking today, it may be somewhat over-emphasized, but that is probably more because other parts of rhetoric are downplayed.

Rhetoricians laid down guidelines on the use of the voice and gestures (*actio*) in the delivery of oratory. There were instructions on the proper modulation of the voice (volume and pitch), as well as the phrasing, pace, and emphasis of speech. Also covered were the physical aspects of oration: stance, gestures, posture, and facial expressions. There was also the concept of *exercitatio* (or practice exercises) that enabled speakers to both memorize their speeches and to practice their delivery.

This excerpt from Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* provides an example of the types of advice provided by rhetoricians:

"The head, being the chief member of the body, has a corresponding importance in delivery, serving not merely to produce graceful effect, but to illustrate our meaning as well. To secure grace it is essential that the head should be carried naturally and erect. For a droop suggests humility, while if it be thrown back it seems to express arrogance, if inclined to one side it gives an impression of languor, while if it is held too stiffly and rigidly it appears to indicate a rude and savage temper." (*Institutio oratoria*, XI iii 68-69, translated by H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library, 1922)

While the content, structure, and style of oration were (and continue to be) the most important elements of oratory, there is no doubt that effective delivery enhances its persuasive power, and that poor delivery detracts greatly from its intended effect.

Delivery is based on the technology of the times. During Cicero's time, delivery was predominantly speaking. Written delivery developed because of the written language, and now delivery is both spoken and written. Technology has taken away the distinctions between written and oral delivery.

Written discourse did not become important until reading became more common. Because the ancients did not use punctuation, their writing consisted of one long stream of words called *scriptio continua*. During the editing process, modern rhetors must go through three stages: correctness rule, formatting, and presentation. Writers face more problems than speakers because they must be conscious of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Punctuation is useful in written discourse because it marks the end of a thought and allows the reader to pause and process the information. Visual rhetoric focuses on images and how words function as images. The delivery of ocular demonstration is the use of words to produce mental images in the audience. Textual presentation allows the writer

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to grab the reader's attention before actually reading the text based on the appearance of the text. The invention of word processors has allowed writers to enhance the appearance of their text and use effects to put emphasis on certain words or thoughts. Delivery refers not only to written or spoken language, but also refers to photographs, paintings, or movies. From *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* by Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, 3rd edition, Pearson Longman, 2004.

## References

- [1] Heinrich Lausberg, David E. Orton, R. Dean Anderson, *Handbook of literary rhetoric: a foundation for literary study*, BRILL, 1998, pp. 480

# Article Sources and Contributors

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