

FIGURATIVE DEVICES

English

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:

Although figurative language is most commonly associated with poetry, its use is far more widespread. Figurative language and devices can be found everywhere from poetry to prose to aspects of everyday life like speech and advertising.

Understanding how to identify and use a variety of figurative devices will give you a better grasp of the ways in which language can be used to communicate ideas creatively.



SOUND DEVICES:

Sound devices are figurative devices that play with the way a word, or a group of words, sounds. These are often used to draw attention to whatever they are discussing or to control the tone of the writing.

Alliteration: The repetition of an initial letter or sound in a series of words.

The **b**eautiful **b**utterflies **b**obbed in the **b**reeze.

The **c**urious **c**at **c**rept into the **k**itchen.

Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds in the middle of words.

The **o**lo buffalo **o**amed through the **o**pen land.

Consonance: The repetition of consonant sounds in the middle of words.

There were no **t**rees in sight on the **b**arren **p**rairie.

Anaphora: The repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of several subsequent sentences.

She was overwhelmed by the love she felt in that moment.

The love for her family. **The love** for her friends. **The love** for the life they had created together.

Onomatopoeia: Words that represent a distinct sound.

A **ding** announced the elevator's arrival.

A bee was **buzzing** nearby.

The racing cyclists raced past with a **woosh**.

Caw cried the crow on the wire.

Rhyme: The repetition of identical sounds at the ends of words or phrases. A **rhyme scheme** is the rhyming pattern of a poem's lines. Rhyme schemes are often denoted as follows:

See the people passing **by** **A**

Shoulders hunched against the **wind**, **B**

Oblivious to the crystal **sky** **A**

Stretched above their **heads**. **C**

Meter: The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry. A poem or text’s meter is essentially its rhythm—it is what determines a poem’s flow.

Meter is measured in units called **feet**, which are determined by:

1. The number of syllables in a line
2. The pattern of emphasis on the line’s syllables

Common Types of Feet:

Trochee: Two syllables with the stress on the first syllable. *DUH-duh* as in “a-pple”.

Iamb: Two syllables with the stress on the second syllable. *duh-DUH* as in “de-light”.

Spondee: Two syllables with equal stress on each syllable. *DUH-DUH* as in “book-mark”

Dactyl: Three syllables with the stress on the first syllable. *DUH-duh-duh* as is “po-e-try”

Anapest: Three syllables with the stress on the last syllable. *duh-duh-DUH* as in “un-der-stand”

Note: Feet can be divided over multiple words.

Common Types of Meter:

Monometer: One unit—or foot—per line

Dimeter: Two feet per line

Trimeter: Three feet per line

Tetrameter: Four feet per line

Pentameter: Five feet per line

Hexameter: Six feet per line

Heptameter: Seven feet per line

Octameter: Eight feet per line

To describe a text’s meter, identify both its feet and its type of meter as such:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? (from Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”)

iambs + pentameter = *iambic pentameter* (Shakespeare’s most commonly used meter)

STRUCTURAL DEVICES:

These devices are examples of the ways that both the physical structure and the grammatical structure of a sentence can be unconventionally altered for figurative effect.

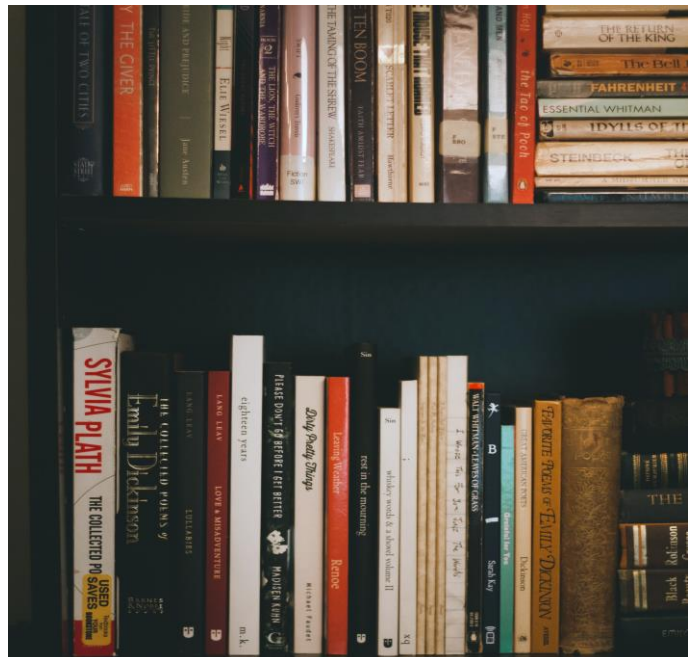
Enjambment: When one sentence, idea, or thought flows over two or more lines of poetry. Note that the first letter of each new line of poetry is typically capitalized even if it is part of the same “sentence” as the previous line.

The leaves dropped swiftly
From the outstretched branches
In the pale-yellow light
Of the crisp autumn morning.

Hypallage: The transposition of a quality to an element that does not have a logical relationship with that particular quality.

She fumbled in the dark, searching for her flashlight with **blind hands**.

Here, the quality of being blind, which should logically be attributed to the subject’s eyes, is instead attributed to her hands.



Anastrophe: An unconventional rearrangement of word order that differs from what logically makes sense.

An artist, he was not; but his sketches were helpful, nevertheless.

The logical order would be: *he was not an artist*. The anastrophe emphasizes his lack of artistic ability by disrupting the natural word flow.

Litotes: The use of a negative expression to convey an affirmative idea.

Saying *he's not ugly* means that he is actually handsome.

Saying *it wasn't cheap* means that it was expensive.

Tautology: The repetition of the same idea in different words.

He never grew tired of exploring the *maze of shelves* at the library. It was a *labyrinth of books* that was full of new possibilities.

ANALOGY AND COMPARISON:

These devices use direct or indirect comparison to express abstract ideas or exaggerate an item's qualities.

Metaphor: A direct comparison of two unlike things.

The building was a fortress.

My love is a blossoming garden.

Implied metaphor: A metaphor that is not stated directly

She hissed her reply to the inconsiderate question.

Here, the word *hissed* establishes an implied metaphor between the woman and an angered animal (say, a cat or a snake) without directly referring to her as such.

Symbol: A widely used metaphor that can be generally understood by most people.

The dove is a symbol of peace

Balanced scales are a symbol for justice or law.

Conversely, tipped scales as a symbol of imbalance, injustice, or unlawfulness.

Simile: A comparison between two unlike things that uses the words *like* or *as*

He is as sly as a fox.

The puddle was *like* an ocean to her five-year-old imagination.

Personification: When an inhuman object or animal is attributed human qualities.

The leaves *danced* in the wind that *whispered* through the trees

Here, the leaves have been attributed the human ability to dance while the wind has been given the ability to whisper.

Pun: A play on the meaning of words or the way they sound.

The teddy bear skipped dessert because he was **stuffed**. (Stuffed means both "filled with stuffing" and "too full to eat")

A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is **two-tired**. (Sounds like "too tired")

Allusion: A reference to another text, whether direct (i.e., by name), or indirect.

Walking into the ultramodern laboratory, she felt like she was entering the *Star Wars* universe.

"I just can't make up my mind!" she complained.

"Ah yes, *To be, or not to be...*" he joked in reply.

The phrase "To be, or not to be" is an indirect allusion to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.



Metonymy: The substitution of a concrete concept for a more figurative, but generally accepted and understood term.

Referring to the queen or king as *the Crown*.

Referring to the film industry as *Hollywood*.

Synecdoche: A specific kind of metonymy that substitutes a part of something for the whole (or sometimes a larger whole for a smaller part).

I could really use an extra set of *hands*.

Here, *hands* is a synecdoche for another person (who can help the speaker).

He had *the country's* support.

Here, *the country* is a synecdoche that substitutes that larger whole of an entire physical nation for the more specific part—the citizens of that country (or even more specifically, that country's governing body).

Apostrophe: A rhetorical address to someone or something that is incapable of hearing them or answering.

"You useless piece of junk!" she exclaimed at her malfunctioning printer.

Idiom: A common expression that is specific to a certain region.

It's raining cats and dogs is an idiom that means it's raining very hard.

To *pull someone's leg* is an idiom that means to joke around with someone.

AMPLIFICATION AND DIMINUTION:

These devices can be used to emphasize or de-emphasize something.

Hyperbole: A deliberate exaggeration to create emphasis.

I haven't seen him in **forever**.

The line to the cash register stretched on for **miles**.

Euphemism: A mild rephrasing used to soften an unpleasant or inappropriate concept

To say someone *passed away* is a euphemism for death.

To say that two people had a *difference of opinions* could be a euphemism for a fight or an argument.

Juxtaposition/Counterpoint: The positioning of two unlike things near one another to emphasize their differences.

The imposing skyscraper towered over the vendors' tiny stalls in the street below.

Here, the skyscraper's enormous height emphasizes the tiny stature of the stalls by proximity.

Oxymoron: The side-by-side placement of two seemingly contradictory or incompatible ideas.

Jumbo shrimp

This is an oxymoron since *jumbo* means extra-large, while *shrimp* implies very small size. However, the two words make sense together as they refer to a large variety of shrimp.

He was a very immature old man.

The words *immature* and *old* form an oxymoron since immaturity and old age are seemingly contradictory. However, they function compatibly in the previous sentence since they refer to a man who is physically old (or mature), but emotionally or behaviourally immature.



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