

# 11 Figures of Speech



## WHAT ARE FIGURES OF SPEECH?

A figure of speech is an expression in which the words are not used literally. A figure of speech is a device that is frequently used to convey a message more clearly or creatively. It is essentially a figurative language made up of a single word or phrase. A figure of speech is a deviation from normal word usage in order to heighten the efficacy of the words. Because it has a rhetorical effect, it is also known as a rhetorical figure. These rhetorical constructions are to be taken non-literally.

The use of a figure of speech can readily capture the attention of the reader and highlight the purpose of the use. It is used to build a comparison and add drama to a piece of writing or speech. It is simply a single word or phrase of figurative language. A simile, metaphor, or personification can be used to communicate a meaning other than the literal one.

It adds to the beauty of the writing. It provides more depth to the text and a sense of amazement to the reader. It breathes life into the writer's words. The figure of speech demonstrates not just the writer's intent, but also his purpose for using such language. The most common types of figures of speech are metaphor, simile, idioms, personification, hyperbole, and euphemism.

## TYPES OF FIGURES OF SPEECH

There are many different forms of figures of speech that can be used. The list of figures of speech is extensive, however, examples of some of the most commonly used forms are provided.

### 1. Personification

Personification is the process of ascribing human qualities or characteristics to inanimate or abstract objects. Non-living things, abstract ideas, or attributes are referred to as humans

or living things in personification. As well as making text interesting (by bringing it to life), personification can be an efficient way to describe inanimate things because readers will find it easy to identify with the human trait and its connotations. By choosing the right human trait, a writer can be descriptive and project their feelings about the object being personified.

For example:

- The door complained as it opened.
- The snowflakes danced at night.
- The Earth was thirsty for water.
- The sun glared down at me from the sky.
- At precisely 4:00 am, my alarm clock sprang to life.
- The river swallowed the earth as the tide continued to rise higher and higher.

### 2. Metaphor

Metaphors are figurative expressions that are not literally true. But they're neither lies nor mistakes because metaphors aren't meant to be taken literally. They are a sort of figurative language used to express a meaning other than the literal denotative meaning of the words or phrases used. A metaphor is a comparison of two dissimilar things or ideas. It is when two unlike or different items or thoughts are compared. The terms 'like' and 'as' are avoided in this informal or implied simile. They are illustrations that make a strong point by comparing two things you wouldn't necessarily pair together.

For example:

- You are the apple of my eye.
- His words cut deeper than a knife.
- I'm feeling blue.
- She's going through a rollercoaster of emotions.
- This is the icing on the cake.



### 3. Simile

A simile is a figure of speech that uses the words “like” or “as” to compare two different things in an entertaining way. The goal of a simile is to make an interesting link in the minds of the reader or listener. One of the most popular types of figurative language is the simile. They can help us express ourselves in a more descriptive and pleasant way. They can be funny, serious, mean, or creative.

For example:

- You were as brave as a lion.
- They fought like cats and dogs.
- Last night, I slept like a baby.
- They looked like peas in a pod.
- He eats like a pig.

### 4. Alliteration

A literary device in which a series of words begin with the same consonant sound is known as alliteration. It is used to emphasise an important point that a writer or speaker wants to make. Alliterative words do not have to begin with the same letter; they just have to have the same first sound. Alliteration is a frequently used stylistic device that can help you remember names and phrases by adding emphasis and interest to a sentence. It is the repetition of the same letter or syllable at the beginning of two or more words.

For example:

- **S**he **s**ells **s**eahells.
- **N**ick **n**eeded **n**ew **n**otebooks.
- **S**even **s**isters **s**lept **s**oundly on the **s**and.
- **K**im’s **k**id **k**ept **k**icking like crazy.
- **W**alter **w**ondered **w**here **W**innie **w**as.

### 5. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is a term that refers to a word that sounds like the thing it describes. It is a figure of speech when the term is used to describe a sound. Onomatopoeia is a term for turning sounds into words to describe an action. Onomatopoeia literally means “to make a name (or sound).” That is, apart from the sound it makes, the term has no meaning.

For example:

- The buzzing bee flew over my head.
- She fell into the water with a splash.
- Water plops into the pond.
- The soda fizzed over the top of my glass.
- The steak is sizzling on the barbecue.

### 6. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that uses great exaggeration to emphasise a point. The word hyperbole is derived from a Greek term meaning “excess.” The use of exaggerated terminology to emphasise or heighten the impression of something is known as an exaggeration. Depending on how it’s used, hyperbole in writing and speech can give a message a dramatic or serious tone. It’s a technique for making something appear larger or more important than it really is.

For example:

- She has got a pea-sized brain.
- I have a million things to complete.
- The joke she cracked is so old, the last time I heard it, I was riding a dinosaur.
- I could do this forever.
- That bike went faster than the speed of light.
- I had a ton of homework.
- It has been ages since I have had a day to myself.

### 7. Euphemism

Euphemism is a polite language that replaces words or phrases that would otherwise be harsh or unpleasant. It’s a gentle or oblique term that frequently replaces a harsh, direct, or insulting term. Euphemisms can be used in a variety of situations. They can assist you in maintaining a courteous tone and avoiding being overly blunt. These expressions are commonly used, and there are several examples of euphemisms in ordinary speech.

For example:

- Using **passed away** instead of died
- Using **letting you** go instead of firing
- Using **well-off** instead of rich

- Using **running a little behind** instead of late
- Using **time of the month** instead of menstruating

### 8. Irony

Irony occurs when what actually happens turns out to be completely different from what would be expected. In writing or speaking, irony involves using words so the intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning. When there is a significant difference between what is stated and what is meant, or between appearance and truth, irony develops. These are frequently used in a light-hearted manner. For example:

- A traffic cop gets suspended for not paying his parking tickets.
- “How nice!” she said when I told her I had to work all weekend.
- “That’s just perfect”—when the printer jams yet again.
- “Lovely weather today”—when it’s pouring with rain.
- “Oh, great!”—when there’s a huge line at the coffee shop.

### 9. Anaphora

Anaphora is a rhetorical device that adds rhythm to a paragraph while emphasising meaning. It adds emphasis or emotion by repeating a word or phrase from the beginning of a work in subsequent clauses or phrases. This strategy involves repeating a single word or phrase at the start of each line or paragraph. The recurrence of a word can heighten the piece’s overall meaning. Anaphora is a type of persuasion, a means of reinforcing a specific message, and an artistic aspect used by writers and public speakers. It is a strategy in which the same word or words appear in multiple phrases or verses.

For example:

- “**I** came, **I** saw, **I** conquered.”—Julius Caesar
- “**With** malice toward none; **with** charity for all; **with** firmness in the right.”—Abraham Lincoln

- **We shall** not stop. **We shall** go on and on. **We shall** move forward.
- “**Mad** world! **Mad** kings! **Mad** composition!”  
—King John II, William Shakespeare.

### 10. Oxymoron

A figure of speech containing words that appear to contradict each other is known as an oxymoron. An oxymoron is a phrase that uses two opposing terms together. It is defined as a combination of words or phrases that have opposing meanings. As a result, an oxymoron is frequently referred to as a contradiction in terms. This inconsistency conjures up a contradictory image in the mind of the reader or listener, resulting in a new concept or meaning for the whole. Oxymorons should never be taken literally. Instead, the context in which an oxymoron is employed should be used to determine its meaning.

For example:

- Close distance
- Bitter-sweet
- Love-hate
- Random order
- Pretty ugly
- Small crowd

### 11. Pun

A pun is generally used in plays where one word has two different meanings. It is used to create humour. It is the humorous use of words with various meanings or words with the same sound but different meanings.

For example:

- This vacuum sucks.
- If you stand by the window, I’ll help you out.
- I like archery, but it’s hard to see the point.
- Her cat is near the computer to keep an eye on the mouse.
- Now that I have graph paper, I guess it’s time to plot something.

### 12. Assonance

The recurrence of vowel sounds in nearby words is known as assonance. It is utilised

to emphasise a word's meaning or to create a mood. Assonance is a literary method in which vowel sounds are repeated in close proximity inside phrases or sentences in the text. It can even happen inside a single word. Assonance can be defined as the repeating of vowel sounds that are identical or very similar. Assonance produces an echoing effect. Basically, when we use repetition of vowel sounds, it is known as assonance.

For example:

- "Hear the **m**ellow **w**edding **b**ells"—"The Bells" by Edgar Allen Poe
- "The **r**ain in **S**pain stays **m**ainly on the **p**lain."—My Fair Lady by Alan Jay Lerner
- "When **h**e was **n**early **t**hirteen"—To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

- "**O** Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art **thou** Romeo?"—Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare
- "Strips of **t**infoil **w**inking like people"—The Bee Meeting by Sylvia Plath

### 13. Idiom

An idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words. It is a common phrase with a meaning that has nothing to do with the literal meaning of its words.

For example:

- Bite off more than you can chew
- Raining cats and dogs
- If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours
- Spill the beans
- Back to square one

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

**Identify the subject of the personification and the human characteristic it was assigned.**

1. I could hear Hawaii calling my name.
2. She did not realise that her last chance was walking out the door.
3. Her computer throws a fit every time she tries to use it.
4. The ocean danced in the moonlight.
5. My life came screeching to a halt.
6. This city never sleeps.
7. The party died as soon as Lia left.
8. The sunflowers nodded in the wind.
9. This advertisement speaks to me.
10. This article says that spinach vegetables are good for health.

**Identify the figure of speech in the given sentences.**

11. At last, they agreed to disagree.
12. A lie has no legs.
13. Words are easy like the wind.
14. Netaji Subash Chandra Bose made a fiery speech.

15. Even the sky shed tears when Gandhiji died.
16. The company has decided to let you go.
17. The lake water is lapping with low sounds.
18. Break, break, break big boulder beside the river.
19. She is between jobs.
20. James is trying to be a good samaritan.
21. The rain in Spain stays mainly on the plain.
22. Ram claims that he can devour mountains of food, and drink rivers of whisky.
23. There is kind cruelty in the surgeon's knife.
24. Necessity is the mother of invention.
25. The murmurous haunt of insects on summer eves.
26. Is life worth living? It depends upon the liver.
27. How high his honour holds his haughty head?
28. What a fine mess of things you have made!
29. My cousin passed away last year.
30. Oh, fantastic! Now I cannot attend the wedding I had been waiting for the past month.

## SOLUTIONS

1. Subject of the personification: Hawaii  
Human characteristic: calling
2. Subject of the personification: chance  
Human characteristic: walking
3. Subject of the personification: computer  
Human characteristic: throws a fit
4. Subject of the personification: ocean  
Human characteristic: danced
5. Subject of the personification: life  
Human characteristic: screeching
6. Subject of the personification: city  
Human characteristic: sleeps
7. Subject of the personification: party  
Human characteristic: died
8. Subject of the personification: sunflowers  
Human characteristic: nodded
9. Subject of the personification: advertisement  
Human characteristic: speaks
10. Subject of the personification: article  
Human characteristic: says
11. Oxymoron. In this sentence, both the words agree and disagree are used together. Both of them are opposite words. So, the figure of speech is Oxymoron.
12. Personification. The lie works here in the sentence like a person. It has no legs. It is personified. So, it is Personification.
13. Simile. In this sentence, Words are compared with the wind. And comparison word-like is used here in the sentence. Therefore, the figure of speech is Simile.
14. Metaphor. Here in this sentence, the speech is like fire. It is compared but the words like, so, as, etc are not used. Therefore, it is a Metaphor.
15. Hyperbole. In this sentence, it is an exaggeration to say that the sky weeps at the death of a person. Therefore, the figure of speech is Hyperbole.
16. Euphemism. In this sentence, “let you go” is used as an indirect term that substitutes the word ‘fire’. Hence, it is a euphemism.
17. Onomatopoeia. Lapping shows the sound. So, this is Onomatopoeia.
18. Alliteration. In this sentence, a series of words begin with the same consonant sound. Break, break, break big boulder beside the river.
19. Euphemism. In this sentence, “between jobs” is used as an indirect term that substitutes the word unemployed. Hence, it is a euphemism.
20. Idiom. “A good samaritan” is a person who helps someone in need with no thought of a reward.
21. Assonance. The rain in Spain stays mainly on the plain. In this sentence, there is a repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words. Hence, it is assonance.
22. Hyperbole. This sentence is an exaggeration and hence, the figure of speech is Hyperbole.
23. Oxymoron. In this sentence, both the words kind and cruelty are used together. Both of them are opposite words. So, the figure of speech is Oxymoron.
24. Personification. In the given sentence, the word necessity is given the human characteristic of a mother. It is personified. So, it is Personification.
25. Onomatopoeia. Murmurous shows the sound. So, this is onomatopoeia.
26. Pun. In this sentence, the word ‘liver’ could have various meanings. A pun is the humorous use of words with various meanings. Hence, it is a pun.
27. Alliteration. In this sentence, a series of words begin with the same consonant sound. How high his honour holds his haughty head?



**28.** Irony. Irony is a dryly humorous or light-hearted mode of speech, in which words are used to convey a meaning contrary to their literal sense, as in the given question.

**29.** Euphemism. In this sentence, 'pass away' is used as an indirect term that substitutes the word 'die'. Hence, it is a euphemism.

**30.** Irony. In this sentence, 'Oh, fantastic!' is used to mean the opposite of its literal meaning. Hence, it is ironic.

