

Tautology

Definition of Tautology

Tautology is the repetitive use of phrases or words that have similar meanings. In simple words, it is expressing the same thing, an idea, or saying, two or more times. The word tautology is derived from the Greek word *tauto*, meaning “the same,” and [*logos*](#), meaning “a word or an idea.” A grammatical tautology refers to an idea repeated within a phrase, paragraph, or sentence to give an impression that the writer is providing extra information.

Tautologies are very common in the English language due to the large variety of words it has borrowed from other languages. Given the fact that, during its evolution, the English language has been greatly influenced by several other languages – including Germanic and Latin – it is not uncommon to find several exotic tautologies. This is how tautologies can often be found in English poetry and [prose](#).

Types of Tautology

There are several types of tautology that are commonly used in everyday life, in poetry, in prose, in songs, and in discussions, depending on the requirements of a situation. Some of the common [categories](#) include:

- Repetitive words used due to inadequacies in the language
- Intentional ambiguities
- Derision
- Poetic device
- Psychological significance
- Speech by inept [speaker](#) or narrator

Examples of Tautology in Literature

Tautology is often confused with [repetition](#). Some authorities say repetition uses the same words, while tautology uses words with similar meanings. That tautology is the repetition – not of words, but of ideas. Others say there is no clear distinction between the two, that tautology includes the repetition of words. To understand this better, read the following examples of Tautology.

Example #1:

“Your acting is **completely devoid** of emotion.”

Devoid is defined as “completely empty.” Thus, completely devoid is an example of tautology.

Example #2:

“**Repeat** that **again**,” and “**reiterate again**.”

To repeat or reiterate something is to do or say it again.

Example #3: *Shout It Out Loud!* (By Kiss)

“Shout it, shout it, **shout it out loud!**”

When a person shouts, it is always aloud.

Example #4: (By Yogi Berra)

“This is like **deja vu all over again**” (Yogi Berra)

The term *déjà vu* means to have a feeling of having previously done or experienced something, or to be doing it all over again. “*Déjà vu* all over again” is an example of tautology.

Example #5: *The Wasteland* (By T. S. Eliot)

The emphatic function of tautology reveals itself in the example given below:

“To Carthage then I came
Burning burning burning burning.”

Thomas Stern Eliot shows the emphatic function of tautology, using the word “burning” repeatedly in the same line.

Example #6: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

In some excerpts, tautology is used intentionally that involves derision inherent in it.

Polonius: “What do you read, my lord?”
Hamlet: “**Words, words, words.**”

Here Hamlet has used words in order to show that he is lost in words that Polonius is famous in using.

Example #7: *The Bells* (By Edgar Allen Poe)

“Keeping **time, time, time,**
In a sort of Runic [rhyme](#)...
From the **bells, bells, bells, bells.**”

Example #8: *The Wasteland* (By T. S. Eliot)

“**Twit twit twit/ Jug jug jug jug jug jug**”

Example #9: *The Hollow Men* (By T. S. Eliot)

“This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.”

Here, different types of tautologies have been used in a technical way of repetition, which dominates others, such as figures of speech, imitation, and ornamentation. All of above examples might appear in the daily use of language, and also as poetic devices.

Example #10: *The Holy Bible* (By Various Authors)

Unlike the artistic inspiration built into the preceding types of redundancy, here are a couple of tautology examples with psychological implications. The speakers show the acceptance of their destiny in these types of repetition:

“If I **perish**, I **perish**.”
(*Esther 4:15*)

“If I be **bereaved** (of my children), I am **bereaved**.”
(*Genesis 43:14*)

Function of Tautology

The importance of tautology cannot be denied in modern literary writing. Today, however, writers try to avoid using tautological words and phrases to avoid monotony and repetition. It has almost become a norm to present short and to-the-point language instead of repetitious and redundant phrases.

Despite it being counted as a major [style](#) error, several writers commonly use tautology as a powerful tool to emphasize a particular idea, or to draw their readers' attention to a certain aspect of life. But it is not always taken as a quality of poor grammar; rather it has been taken as a specific rhetorical device.