Cliché

Cliché Definition

Cliché refers to an expression that has been overused to the extent that it loses its original meaning or novelty. A cliché may also refer to actions and events that are predictable because of some previous events.

All examples of cliché are expressions that were once new and fresh. They won popularity in the public and hence have been used so extensively that such expressions now sound boring and at times irritating, due to the fact that they have lost their original color. For instance, the phrase "as red as a rose" must have been a fresh and innovative expression at some point in time, but today it is considered universally as a cliché, and does not make such an impact when used in everyday or formal writing.

Expressions that are not Clichés

It is important to keep in mind that constant reuse of expressions does not necessarily create a cliché. Typical expressions that are used almost at all times in formal ceremonies, festivals, courts, etc. are not considered cliché examples; rather they befit such occasions, and are regarded as more appropriate. Following are a few examples:

> "I second the motion" (Board or council meeting)
> "I now pronounce you man and wife" (Wedding Ceremony)
> "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." (Oath-taking ceremony)
> "Happy Birthday!"

Similarly, certain epithets like "reverend" and "father" are attached to the names of church officials. Besides, people of the royal family are addressed with epithets "Your Grace," "Your Highness," or "Your Royal Highness."

Such expressions are part of proper etiquette, and do not fall under the category of cliché.

Common Cliché Examples

Example #1

In describing time, the following expressions have turned into cliché:

> *in the nick of time* – to happen just in time
> *only time will tell* – to become clear over time
> *a matter of time* – to happen sooner or later
> *at the speed of light* – to do something very quickly
> *lasted an eternity* – to last for a very long time
> *lost track of time* – to stop paying attention to time

Example #2

In describing people, these expressions have turned into cliché:

> *as brave as a lion* – describes a very brave person
> *as clever as a fox* – describes a very clever person
> *as old as the hills* – describes an old person or idea
> *a diamond in the rough* – describes someone with a brilliant future
> *fit as a fiddle* – describes a person in a good shape
> *as meek as a lamb* – describes a person who is too weak and humble

Example #3

In describing various sentiments, a number of expressions have turned into cliché:

> *frightened to death* – to be too frightened
> *scared out of one's wits* – to be too frightened
> *all is fair in love and war* – to go to any extent to [claim](#) somebody's love
> *all is well that ends well* – a happy ending reduces the severity of problems that come in one's way
> *every cloud has a silver lining* – problems also have something good in them

time heals all wounds – pain and miseries get will heal, with the passage of time
haste makes waste – people make mistakes when rushing

Example #4

Below is a list of some more common clichés:

> *They all lived happily ever after*
> *Read between the lines*
> *Fall head over heals*
> *Waking up on the wrong side of the bed*
> *The quiet before the storm*
> *Between the devil and the deep blue sea*

Function of Cliché

Anton C. Zijderveld, a Dutch sociologist, throws light on the function of cliché in the following excerpt, taken from his treatise *On Clichés*:

"A cliché is a traditional form of human expression (in words, thoughts, emotions, gestures, acts) which – due to repetitive use in social life – has lost its original, often ingenious heuristic power. Although it thus fails positively to contribute meaning to social interactions and communication, it does function socially, since it manages to stimulate behavior (cognition, emotion, volition, action), while it avoids reflection on meanings."