

Oxymoron

Definition of Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a [figure of speech](#) in which two opposite ideas are joined to create an effect. The common oxymoron phrase is a combination of an adjective preceded by a noun with contrasting meanings, such as “cruel kindness,” or “living death”.

However, the contrasting words/phrases are not always glued together. The contrasting ideas may be spaced out in a sentence, such as, “In order to lead, you must walk behind.”

Difference Between Oxymoron and Paradox

It is important to understand the difference between an oxymoron and a [paradox](#). A paradox may consist of a sentence, or even a group of sentences. An oxymoron, on the other hand, is a combination of two contradictory or opposite words. A paradox seems contradictory to the general truth, but it does contain an implied truth. An oxymoron, however, may produce a dramatic effect, but does not make literal sense. Examples of oxymoron are found both in casual conversations and in literature.

Common Examples of Oxymoron

Open secret
Tragic [comedy](#)
Seriously funny
Awfully pretty
Foolish wisdom
Original copies
Liquid gas

The above oxymoron examples produce a comical effect. Thus, it is a lot of fun to use them in your everyday speech.

Short Examples of Oxymoron in Speech

There was a **love-hate** relationship between the two neighboring states.

The professor was giving a lecture on **virtual reality**.

Paid volunteers were working for the company.

The channel was repeating the **old news** again and again.

The contractor was asked to give the **exact estimate** of the project.

A lot of soldiers have been killed in **friendly fire**.

The doctor was **absolutely unsure** of the nature of his illness.

All the politicians **agreed to disagree**.

There was an employee in the office who was **regularly irregular**.

The hero of the play was so dejected that he was the perfect embodiment of being **alone in a crowd**.

The heads of state gathered to determine an **approximate solution** to the crisis.

The green pasture surrounded by hills was teeming with a **deafening silence**.

The political scientist was asked to give his **unbiased opinion** on the current issue.

The CEO of a multinational company said, "We have been **awfully lucky** to have survived the disastrous effects of the recent economic recession."

The program was not liked by the people, for a lot of **unpopular celebrities** were invited.

Examples of Oxymoron in Literature

Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

"Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
O anything, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness! Serious vanity!
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
Dost thou not laugh?"

We notice a series of oxymora being employed when Romeo confronts the

highlight his mental [conflict](#) by the use of contradictory pairs of words, such as “hating love,” “heavy lightness,” “bright smoke,” “cold fire,” and “sick health”.

Example #2: *Lancelot and Elaine* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

“the shackles of love straiten’d him
His honour rooted in dishonoured stood
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true”

We clearly notice the use of oxymoron in the phrases “shackles... straiten’d,” “honour... dishonor,” “faith unfaithful,” and “falsely true”.

Example #3: *Petrarch’s 134th sonnet* (By Sir Thomas Wyatt)

“I find no peace, and all my war is done
I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice,
I flee above the wind, yet can I not arise;”

The contradicting ideas of “war ... peace,” “burn ... freeze,” and “flee above ... not rise” produce a dramatic effect in the above-mentioned lines.

Example #4: *Essays of Criticism* (By Alexander Pope)

“The bookful blockhead ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head,
With his own tongue still edifies his ears,
And always list’ning to himself appears.”

The above lines provide fine [evidence](#) of Pope’s witticism. The oxymora “bookful blockhead” and “ignorantly read” describe a person who reads a lot, but does not understand what he reads, and does not employ his reading to improve his [character](#).

Shakespeare makes use of oxymora in his plays to develop a paradox.

“I will bestow him, and will answer well
The death I gave him. So, again, good night.
I must **be cruel**, only **to be kind**:
Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.
One word more, good lady.”

In the above lines taken from “Hamlet,” Shakespeare draws two contradictory ideas: “be cruel ... to be kind”. The contradiction is understood in the [context](#) of the play. Hamlet wants to kill Claudius, the murderer of his father, who has married his mother. Hamlet does not want his mother to be the beloved of his father’s murderer. Therefore, he is of the view that this murder will purge her.

Example #6: *Romeo and Juliet* , Act I, Scene II (By William Shakespeare)

“O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather’d raven! wolvish-ravens lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem’st;
A damned saint, an honourable villain!
O, nature! what hadst thou to do in hell
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend”

This extract makes use of some good oxymora, such as “damned saint,” and “honorable villain,” etc.

Function of Oxymoron

Oxymoron produces a dramatic effect in both [prose](#) and poetry. For instance, when we read or hear the famous oxymoron, “sweet sorrow,” crafted by Shakespeare, it appeals to us instantly. It provokes our thoughts, and makes us ponder the meaning of contradicting ideas. This apparently

confusing phrase expresses the complex nature of love, that can never be expressed through simple words.

In everyday conversation, however, people do not use oxymoron to make deep statements like the one above. Instead, they do it to show wit. The use of oxymoron adds flavor to their speech.

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[Huge List of Oxymorons](#)

[Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow](#)