

Hyperbole

Definition of Hyperbole

Hyperbole, derived from a Greek word meaning “over-casting,” is a [figure of speech](#) that involves an [exaggeration](#) of ideas for the sake of emphasis.

It is a device that we employ in our day-to-day speech. For instance, when you meet a friend after a long time, you say, “It’s been ages since I last saw you.” You may not have met him for three or four hours, or a day, but the use of the word “ages” exaggerates this statement to add emphasis to your wait. Therefore, a hyperbole is an unreal exaggeration to emphasize the real situation. Some other common Hyperbole examples are given below.

Common Examples of Hyperbole

My grandmother is as old as the hills.
Your suitcase weighs a ton!
She is as heavy as an elephant!
I am dying of shame.
I am trying to solve a million issues these days.

It is important not to confuse hyperbole with [simile](#) and [metaphor](#). It does make a [comparison](#), like simile and metaphor. Rather, hyperbole has a humorous effect created by an [overstatement](#). Let us see some examples from Classical English literature in which hyperbole was used successfully.

Short Examples of Hyperbole

A ton of worry was lifted from the beggar’s back when he received the alms.
He saw a man as tall a power poll.
He saw his childhood friend after ages.
The weather was so hot that literally everything was on fire.
The boy was dying to get a new school bag.

The teacher told his students not to repeat that mistake for the umpteenth time, but to no avail.
He was in such a hurry that he drove his car at a bazillion miles per hour.
The minister told the guests that the couple's friendship was deeper than the sea, and sweeter than honey.
The blacksmith's hand was harder than the rock.
Their headmaster was omnipresent, as he seemed to be all around the school all the time.
The businessman was so busy that he was attending to a million calls simultaneously.
The old man was older than the Himalayas.
The mule is able to lift tons of weight uphill.
His classmates laughed at him, saying he had a pea-sized brain.
John was called the elephant of the class for his clumsiness.

Hyperbole Examples in Literature

Example #1: *Babe the Blue Ox* (American Folklore)

In American folk lore, Paul Bunyan's stories are full of hyperboles. In one instance, he exaggerates winter by saying:

“Well now, one winter it was so cold that all the geese flew backward and all the fish moved south and even the snow turned blue. Late at night, it got so frigid that all spoken words froze solid afore they could be heard. People had to wait until sunup to find out what folks were talking about the night before.”

Freezing of the spoken words at night in winter, and then warming them up in the warmth of the sun during the day are examples of hyperbole, which has been effectively used in this short excerpt from an American folktale.

Example #2: *Macbeth* (By William Shakespeare)

From William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene II:

“Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No. This my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.”

Macbeth, the [tragic hero](#), feels the unbearable prick of his conscience after killing the king. He regrets his sin, and believes that even the oceans of the greatest magnitude cannot wash the blood of the king off his hands. We can see the effective use of hyperboles in the given lines.

Example #3: *As I Walked One Evening* (By W. H. Auden)

“I’ll love you, dear, I’ll love you
Till China and Africa meet,
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street,
I’ll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry.”

The use of hyperbole can be seen in the above lines in the meeting of China and Africa, the jumping of the river over the mountain, the singing of salmon in the street, and the ocean being folded and hung up to dry are exaggerations, not possible in real life.

Example #4: *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (By C. Colloid)

“He cried all night, and dawn found him still there, though his tears had dried and only hard, dry sobs shook his wooden frame. But these were so loud that they could be heard by the faraway hills ...”

The crying of Pinocchio all night until his tears became dry is an example of Hyperbole.

Example #5: *The Heart of Darkness* (By Joseph Conrad)

“I had to wait in the station for ten days – an eternity.”

The act of waiting ten days seemed to last forever and never end.

Example #6: *Two Sunflowers Move in the Yellow Room* (By William Blake)

“Ah, William, we’re weary of weather,”
Said the sunflowers, shining with dew.
“Our traveling habits have tired us.
Can you give us a room with a view?”
They arranged themselves at the window
And counted the steps of the sun,
And they both took root in the carpet
Where the topaz tortoises run.

This is a poem by William Blake in which he uses exaggerated [personification](#) of sunflowers, which is akin to hyperbole.

Example #7: *A Red, Red Rose* (By Robert Burns)

“As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till a’ the seas gang dry.
Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun:
O I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o’ life shall run.”

The poet Robert Burns gives many examples of hyperbole in this piece. The poet says that he would love his beloved until the seas are dried up, and the rocks are melted.

Function of Hyperbole

The above arguments make clear the use of hyperbole. In our daily

emphasize our meaning. However, in literature it has very serious implications. By using hyperbole, a writer or a poet makes common human feelings remarkable and intense to such an extent that they do not remain ordinary. In literature, usage of hyperbole develops contrasts. When one thing is described with an over-statement, and the other thing is presented normally, a striking [contrast](#) is developed. This technique is employed to catch the reader's attention.