

FIGURES OF SPEECH

A figure of speech expresses an idea, thought, or image with words that carry meanings beyond their literal ones. Figures of speech give extra dimension to language by stimulating the imagination and evoking visual imagery that awakens the senses. Thus, figures of speech paint mental pictures in words. Some types of figurative language include the following:

Allusion: A reference to some well-known historical or literary event or person that has striking resemblance to the subject under discussion. Allusion is used often in prose.

“He is a Romeo to every girl he meets.”

“That celebrity is being crucified by the media.”

Cliché: Any over-used, trite or banal expression.

“Today’s business world is dog-eat-dog!”

“Rather than complain, you should just grin and bear it and keep a stiff upper lip.”

Hyperbole: The use of exaggeration or overstatement to make a point; used for emphasis, humor or poetic intensity.

“She is the most annoying person in the entire world.”

*“Here once the embattled farmers stood, / And fired the shot heard around the world.”
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

Imagery: The use of vivid, detailed descriptions that evoke sensory images. Imagery is evoked to give the reader the impression that he or she can see, hear, feel, smell or otherwise experience what is being described.

“She turned the moon into salve, the stars into a swaddling cloth and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four.” (Gloria Naylor in Mama Day)

“Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” (Mark Twain)

Irony: An expression in which the author’s meaning is quite different (often opposite) from what is literally said. Irony, as a matter of tone, occurs most frequently in prose as a technique for humor, satire or contrast.

“When I reflect upon the number of disagreeable people who I know have gone to a better world, I am moved to live a different life.” (Mark Twain)

Metaphor: An implied comparison in which one thing is spoken of in terms of something else; the figurative term substitutes for or is identified with the literal term. Metaphors are extremely valuable in making an abstract idea clearer by associating the idea with something concrete that relates to one or more of the senses.

Life is but an empty dream.

It’s raining cats and dogs.

She is a jewel.

“And merry larks are ploughman’s clocks. / Time is a river.” (Shakespeare)

Personification: Another type of comparison that treats objects or things as if they were capable of the actions and feelings of people. As in a metaphor, there is an implied comparison which gives the attributes of a human being to an animal, object or idea.

The sun smiled down on us.

“...Sea that bears her bosom to the moon” (Wordsworth)

“The dirty nurse, Experience.” (Tennyson)

Simile: A direct comparison of two things, usually employing the words *like* or *as*.

Her eyes shine like fresh cut diamonds.

Life is like a box of cherries.

“My heart is like an apple tree whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit.” (Christina Rosseti)
