

# Figures of speech

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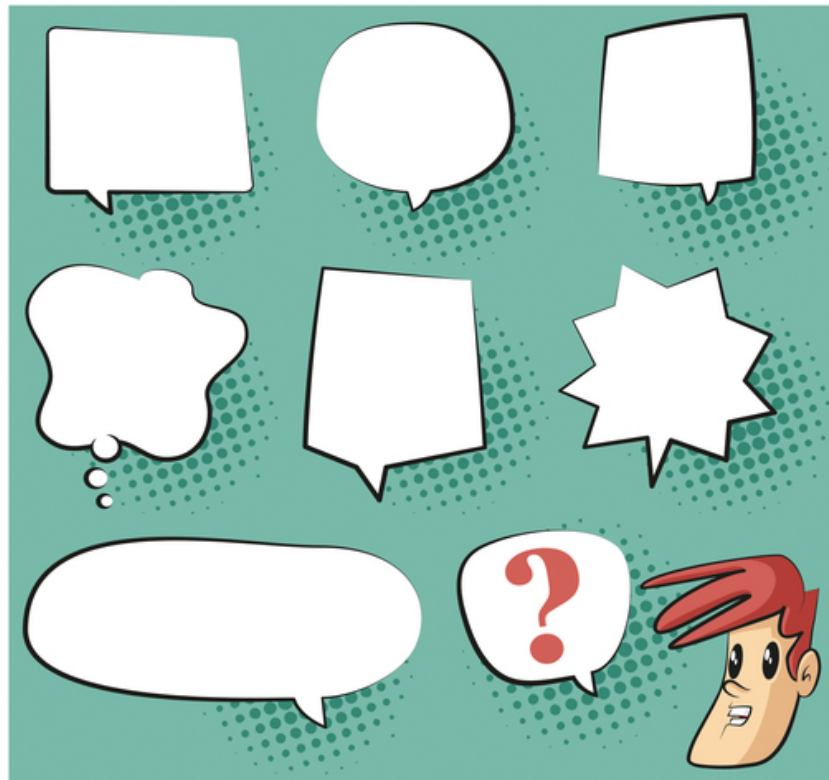


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Figures of speech are used to emphasize, clarify and embellish what is being said. Most figures of speech simply take what is well known and use it to describe what is less familiar so others can understand an idea.

## Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that is used to indicate similarity between two different things. William Shakespeare used metaphor to suggest a meaning beyond the actual words. In the play "As You Like It," he writes: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts." Shakespeare uses a metaphor with the language of the theater to talk about how people behave and change.

Such terms as "the eye of the storm," "the hand of God" and "the mouth of the river" are metaphors that have become common. Sometimes natural events are used in such expressions, such as "a mountain of work" and "the river of time." These might be used to describe something that isn't an actual part of nature, but people understand what that means.

## **Simile**

Another figure of speech is the simile, which is a phrase that states a similarity and uses the word "like" or "as" in showing how one thing is similar to another. A frequently quoted simile from the Scottish poet Robert Burns is: "My love is like a red, red rose." The simile tells readers that his love is beautiful, but it does not mean he is in love with a flower. Some commonly used similes are "as cold as ice," "as wise as an owl" and "as rich as Rockefeller." Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men in the world.

## **Personification**

Other figures of speech are less structured than metaphors and similes. An example is personification, assigning human qualities to something that is not human. "The walls have ears" and "money talks" are instances of personification. One type of personification is anthropomorphism, which means "to have the form of man." This is a common device applied to animals. Famous cartoon animals such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Bugs Bunny are given human qualities, such as talking and wearing clothes.

## **Metonymy And Synecdoche**

Two other kinds of figures of speech are related to each other, metonymy and synecdoche. Metonymy means using the name of one thing for another closely related term. In the question "What would the Pentagon think of the president's new military proposals?" the word "Pentagon" is used instead of "Department of Defense." The Pentagon is the building where the department is housed. Synecdoche means using a part to describe the whole. For example, "There are a lot of hard hats working on this new building," uses the term "hard hats" to refer to a construction crew.

## **Hyperbole And Understatement**

Two other figures of speech are hyperbole, a form of exaggeration, and understatement, making something seem less than it really is. For instance, "I have a mountain of work to do" is an exaggeration, but it expresses that the amount of work is very large. By contrast, "Adolf Hitler was not the most beloved person of the 20th century" is an understatement because of the crimes he committed.

## **Alliteration And Onomatopoeia**

Other devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia deal with sound. They are used in poetry and fiction to create sound effects with words. Alliteration is the use of the same sound at the beginning of neighboring words in a sentence or phrase such as "the dear, dead days beyond recall." Onomatopoeia uses words to imitate sounds to help the reader or listener get the sense or mood in writing. The poet Vachel Lindsay, in his poem "The Congo" used onomatopoeia in combination with rhythm in such lines as:

"Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom  
Hard as they were able, Boom, boom, BOOM,  
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom  
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM."

## **Idiom And Slang**

As languages changed, people created new ways of saying things. Some of these are unique to a particular language, such as idioms and slang. Others, such as sayings and proverbs, come from

people's history.

An idiom is a phrase that has become an accepted part of a language but that makes little sense if taken literally. Most idioms are difficult to translate from one language to another. Common English idioms include "Catch a cold," "Run up a bill" and "Strike a bargain."

Slang consists of words and phrases that came into use in one of the many groups in society. Eventually, slang spreads.

Many groups, from teenagers, jazz musicians and criminals to business workers, have all used slang. The slang these groups create works its way into general use. Slang expressions tend to bewilder outsiders who have never heard them.

Slang expressions arise within groups in many ways. If the correct word is not known, a new one will be created or borrowed. Sometimes, a well-known word will be used in a different way than its usual meaning. The word "rhubarb" was taken over by baseball players to mean a noisy argument. A "one-horse town" refers to a quiet, dull place. Others, such as "off-the-wall," meaning "weird," have no plain meaning. The vocabulary of slang is enormous, and it continues to grow.

## Quiz

1 Read the following statement.

*Some pairs of figures of speech can be opposites of each other.*

Which sentence from the article provides the BEST support for the above statement?

- (A) Two other kinds of figures of speech are related to each other, metonymy and synecdoche.
- (B) Two other figures of speech are hyperbole, a form of exaggeration, and understatement, making something seem less than it really is.
- (C) Other devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia deal with sound.
- (D) Some of these are unique to a particular language, such as idioms and slang.

2 The sentence below from the section "Idiom And Slang" helps prove the claim that some groups make up their own slang to communicate with each other.

*Many groups, from teenagers, jazz musicians and criminals to business workers, have all used slang.*

Which sentence from the section provides further support for the claim?

- (A) As languages changed, people created new ways of saying things.
- (B) If the correct word is not known, a new one will be created or borrowed.
- (C) The word "rhubarb" was taken over by baseball players to mean a noisy argument.
- (D) The vocabulary of slang is enormous, and it continues to grow.

3 Read the introduction of the article [paragraph 1].

How does the introduction introduce the main idea?

- (A) by highlighting how and when figures of speech were first developed
- (B) by defining what a figure of speech is and listing them
- (C) by focusing on when figures of speech are used and who uses them
- (D) by explaining what figures of speech are and what they do

4 What is one reason why the author includes the information about famous cartoon characters?

- (A) to highlight some examples of anthropomorphism
- (B) to highlight some non-examples of personification
- (C) to illustrate some examples of metaphor and simile
- (D) to illustrate some non-examples of figures of speech