

# Figurative Language

**What  
is it?**

**Figurative Language:**  
language that is non-literal  
and requires interpretation

Writing techniques that rely  
on figurative language for  
rhetorical impact are called...

**Figure of Speech:**  
a word or phrase used in a non-  
literal sense to add rhetorical force  
to a written or spoken passage

Here are 12 of the most common figures of speech (with examples):

Figure of Speech	Description	Examples
<b>Allegory</b>	A story or picture that has a deeper meaning, usually a political or moral one	Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" from The Republic
<b>Euphemism</b>	A mild, indirect, or pleasant word or phrase used in place of words that are unpleasant or offensive	"Letting someone go" instead of "firing someone"
<b>Hyperbole</b>	An exaggerated statement or claim not intended to be taken literally	"I told you a million times not to leave your dirty socks on the floor!"
<b>Verbal Irony</b>	The use of words to mean the opposite of their literal meaning	"That cake is as moist as paper!"
<b>Situational Irony</b>	The difference between what is expected to happen and what actually happens	A fire station burns down or a police station gets robbed.
<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	When the reader or audience is more aware of what is happening than a character	In Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," the characters believe the recently bereaved wife is crying tears of sorrow because of the loss of her husband. However, the reader knows that she is crying tears of joy because she is now free from her husband.
<b>Metaphor</b>	A comparison between two things that are unrelated but share common characteristics	"Your voice is music to my ears."
<b>Onomatopoeia</b>	Words that sound like the things they mean	"Bang," "Bark," "Clang," "Click," "Cuckoo," "Meow," "Moo," "Sizzle," "Tweet," "Whiz"
<b>Oxymoron</b>	A phrase in which two words with opposite meanings appear side by side	"Act naturally," "big baby," "deafening silence," "jumbo shrimp," "original copy," "pretty ugly," "random order"
<b>Personification</b>	The attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects	"The daffodils danced and frolicked in the breeze."
<b>Pun</b>	A play on words that exploits the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that it sounds like another word	"A boiled egg every morning is hard to beat." "The clown held open the door for the other passengers. It was a nice jester."
<b>Simile</b>	The comparison of two different things using "like" or "as"	"My love is like a red, red, rose" and "she was busy as a bee"
<b>Symbolism</b>	The use of an object, person, place, or event to represent something other than its literal meaning	A dove is a symbol for peace. A rose is a symbol for love. A torch is a symbol for knowledge. A broken chain is a symbol for freedom from tyranny.
<b>Understatement</b>	A manner of presenting something as being smaller, less serious, or less important than it actually is	A person totals his car in a wreck and tells his friend it was "just a scratch."