

## FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Figurative language is language that is non-literal. By incorporating expressions that mean something other than what they actually say (often referred to as figures of speech), the user adds descriptive details that enhance his audience's understanding of a subject. Figurative language, which is used in both prose and poetry, comes in many forms, some of which are discussed below.

**FIGURES OF COMPARISON:** All figures of comparison are used as devices for clarifying thought; they make imaginative comparisons in different ways.

There are two essential elements in a figure of comparison: tenor and vehicle. The tenor is the discourse or subject under consideration; the vehicle is the image or idea (person, place, thing, quality) whose descriptive details add to the meaning of the tenor. The vehicle carries along details of its own image and adds then to the image of the tenor so that the tenor is better understood.

**Metaphor, simile and analogy** are just a few of the many figures of comparison.

**Metaphor**--A metaphor makes implicit comparisons: two ideas, persons, or objects are understood to be the same.

Examples: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." (Shakespeare)

tenor: Juliet

vehicle: the sun

"The young man was... 'a bull in the swelter of summer come in his great good time to the sultry, biding herds..." (Dylan Thomas)

tenor: young man

vehicle: a bull. . .

**Simile**--A simile makes explicit comparisons: it asserts that one thing is like another. The words "like" or "as" are always used, and the comparison is always between two essentially unlike things having one striking similarity.

Examples: "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer." (Stephen Crane)

"Midnight shakes the memory as a madman shakes a dead geranium." (T.S. Eliot)

**Analogy**--An analogy is an elaborate comparison made up in many cases of both metaphors and similes, and which may note several points of similarity.

Examples: "Dr. Czinner turned to escape the pain in his chest and turned again, but it pursued him; only in the moment of turning did he gain a few strides; when he was still the pain was on him." (Graham Greene)

Expanded analogies are made up of a series of comparisons or analogies centering around a single theme.

**FIGURES OF RELATIONSHIP:** Both metonymy and synecdoche substitute for the exact name of something the name of some other thing closely associated with it.

**Metonymy**--substitutes one common term for another term which is associated with it.

**Three types:**

1. Substitutes the material for the object:

Example: The detective was packing an iron.

2. Substitutes the name of the maker for the object made:

Example: I have a passion for Beethoven.

3. Substitutes any word or phrase closely associated with the term we wish to leave out:

Example: The balcony erupted into wild cheering.

**Synecdoche**—A figure of speech that mentions a part signifying the whole or a whole signifying the part.

**Two kinds:**

1. Uses the name of a part when a whole is meant:

Example: The captain ordered all hands on deck.

2. Uses the whole when a part is meant:

Example: The army is recruiting high school graduates.

**FIGURES OF DEGREE:** The intent is to emphasize and to clarify ideas, not to deceive or to mislead.

**Hyperbole**--overstatement of an idea for the purpose of emphasis, even to the point of exaggeration.

Example: Her purse weighs a ton.

**Litotes**--a form of understatement in which a thing is affirmed by stating the negative of its opposite.

Example: To say that a person is “no amateur” affirms the speaker’s belief that he is a professional.