

The Top 20 Most Common Types of Figurative Language

1. Alliteration

Repetition of an initial consonant sound. ex. "Pompey Pipped at the Post as Pippo Pounces" (sports headline, *Daily Express*, Nov. 28, 2008); "In a somer seson, whan soft was the sonne . ." (William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 14th century)

2. Anaphora

Repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses. Ex. "*I needed* a drink, *I needed* a lot of life insurance, *I needed* a vacation, *I needed* a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun." (Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*)

3. Antithesis

The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced phrases. ex. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way." (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*)

4. Apostrophe

Breaking off discourse to address some absent person or thing, some abstract quality, an inanimate object, or a nonexistent character. ex. "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art" (John Keats); "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." (James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*)

5. Assonance

Identity or similarity in sound between internal vowels in neighbouring words. ex. "I must confess that in my quest I felt depressed and restless." (Thin Lizzy, "With Love")

6. Chiasmus

A verbal pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed. ex. "I flee who chases me, and chase who flees me." (Ovid); "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." (William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* I.i)

7. Euphemism

The substitution of an inoffensive term for one considered offensively explicit. ex. Mr. Prince: We'll see you when you get back from image enhancement camp. Martin Prince: Spare me your euphemisms! It's fat camp, for Daddy's chubby little secret! ("Kamp Krusty," *The Simpsons*, 1992); *Pre-owned* for used or second-hand; *enhanced interrogation* for torture; *wind* for belch or fart; *convenience fee* for surcharge

8. Hyperbole

An extravagant statement; the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect. ex. "Ladies and gentlemen, I've been to Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and I can say without **hyperbole** that this is a million times worse than all of them put together." (Kent Brockman, *The Simpsons*); common in advertisements

9. Irony

The use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. A statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea.

10. Litotes

A figure of speech consisting of an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite. ex. "The grave's a fine a private place, But none, I think, do there embrace." (Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress"); "We are not amused." (attributed to Queen Victoria)

11. Metaphor

An implied comparison between two unlike things that actually have something important in common. ex. "A man may break a word with you, sir, and words are but wind." (Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*)

12. Metonymy

A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated; also, the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it. ex. "The White House asked the television networks for air time on Monday night.;" "The B.L.T. left without paying." (waitress referring to a customer)

13. Onomatopoeia

The formation or use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to. ex. "[Aredelia] found Starling in the warm laundry room, dozing against the slow rump-rump of a washing machine." (Thomas Harris, *Silence of the Lambs*)

14. Oxymoron

A figure of speech in which incongruous or contradictory terms appear side by side. ex. "O miserable abundance, O beggarly riches!" (John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*)

15. Paradox

A statement that appears to contradict itself. ex. "Freedom is slavery." (George Orwell, 1984)

16. Personification

A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstraction is endowed with human qualities or abilities. ex. "Oreo: Milk's favourite cookie." (slogan on a package of Oreo cookies)

17. Pun

A play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words. ex. "Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana." (Groucho Marx); "To pun is to treat homonyms as synonyms." (Walter Redfern, *Puns*, 1974)

18. Simile

A stated comparison (usually formed with "like" or "as") between two fundamentally dissimilar things that have certain qualities in common. ex. "My face looks like a wedding-cake left out in the rain." (W.H. Auden)

19. Synechdoche

A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole, the whole for a part, the specific for the general, the general for the specific, or the material for the thing made from it.
ex. All *hands* on deck; "Take thy *face* hence." (William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*)

20. Understatement

A figure of speech in which a writer or a speaker deliberately makes a situation seem less important or serious than it is. "I have to have this operation. It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumour on the brain." (Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher In The Rye*, by J. D. Salinger)

Studying Literature – “Look-Fors”

1. Read carefully and deliberately. Read the passage/story/section/novel several times to become very familiar with it.
2. Begin any analysis with your initial response to what you have read. Did you like it? Did it affect you in some way? Could you relate to it on any level? Can you understand the author's purpose or his/her main idea?
3. Examine the title. How is it important and/or fitting? Is it mentioned in the work? If so, what is the context?
4. Are characters round or flat? Who is the protagonist? What/Who is the opposing force/antagonist? What role(s) do minor characters play? What conflicts arise as a result of their interactions? Is there character development?
5. Is the setting significant? Is it symbolic? Are there many different settings? Does it have a life of its own?
6. What are the main plot elements (*introduction/exposition; inciting incident; rising action; major crisis; climax; denouement; conclusion*)?
7. Examine the language. How is the story narrated? Is the narrator reliable? What literary devices and/or techniques enhance the story? Are there references that need researching? Are there words that need to be defined? Are the language and the sentence structure simple or complex?
8. What is the writer's view of the world? How do you know? Does it complement or challenge your view of the world?
9. Select significant and/or effective passages that reflect and exemplify the elements you've examined in the past eight areas.