

FIGURES OF SPEECH PART 1

What Is a Figure of Speech?

A figure of speech is an expression used to make a greater effect on your reader or listener. It includes making comparisons, contrasts, associations, exaggerations and constructions. It also gives a much clearer picture of what you are trying to convey.

Let us take a look at how different dictionaries define a figure of speech to have a much better idea of what it is.

Definition of a Figure of Speech

A figure of speech, according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, is defined as “a word or phrase used in a different way from its usual meaning in order to create a particular mental picture or effect.” The Cambridge Dictionary defines a figure of speech as “an expression that uses words to mean something different from their ordinary meaning.” According to the Collins Dictionary, a figure of speech is “an expression or word that is used with a metaphorical rather than a literal meaning.”

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a figure of speech as “a form of expression (such as a simile or metaphor) used to convey meaning or heighten effect often by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning or connotation familiar to the reader or listener.” According to the Macmillan Dictionary, a figure of speech is defined as “an expression in which the words are used figuratively, not in their normal literal meaning.”

Figures of Speech in English Grammar

In English grammar, there are around fifteen to twenty figures of speech. However, there are a few of them which are used more often than the others. Let us look at the most commonly used figures of speech.

- Simile
- Metaphor
- Personification

- Apostrophe
- Alliteration
- Assonance
- Hyperbole
- Euphemism
- Antithesis
- Oxymoron
- Epigram
- Irony
- Pun
- Metonymy
- Synecdoche
- Transferred Epithet

How to Use a Figure of Speech in English? – Points to Remember

You now know that a figure of speech can make your language look and sound a lot more poetical, interesting and flamboyant. However, the challenge is not about learning the different figures of speech but knowing when, where and how to use them. You cannot use it anywhere you like. Only if it is used right and where they are appropriate and necessary, will it make your language better.

Figures of speech are not meant to provide information literally, so it is not suggested that you use figurative language in professional presentations and writings like essays. Since they do not convey literal meanings, it is very important that you learn how each figure of speech can be used. What is more important is knowing what it would mean when used in a particular part of a sentence. So, the most significant point that you have to keep in mind when using figures of speech is to employ them only if they give you the desired effect and meaning.

Classification of Figures of Speech

The figures of speech can be categorized into types based on their functions when used in sentences. Accordingly, the main categories are composed of ones that:

- Show a Relationship or Resemblance or Association

- Show Phonetic Resemblances and Representing Sounds
- Show Emphasis or Unimportance

Showing a Relationship or Resemblance or Association

This category includes figures of speech which are designed to make comparisons to show a relationship or some resemblances. Similes, metaphors, personification, euphemism, metonymy and synecdoche are the figures of speech used for this purpose.

Showing Phonetic Resemblances and Representing Sounds

This category of figures of speech include alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia. The first two figures of speech are used to create an effect by using similar sounding words or words starting with the same consonant and vowel sounds, whereas onomatopoeia includes words that are used to represent sounds.

Showing Emphasis or Unimportance

The figures of speech belonging to this category are used to provide emphasis or show how important or unimportant something is. Hyperbole, antithesis, oxymoron, irony and litotes are figures of speech that can be used for this purpose.

Examples of Figures of Speech

Here are a few examples of the different figures of speech in English grammar.

- Simile – Rachel is as bright as the sun.
- Metaphor – The whole world is a stage.
- Personification – The wind whispered in my ears.
- Apostrophe – O William, you should be living now to see all this.
- Alliteration – Sally sold some seashells.

- Assonance – I seem to like your little green trees.
- Hyperbole – I am so hungry I could eat a horse.
- Oxymoron – Euthanizing their sick pet dog was considered as an act of kind cruelty.
- Epigram – The child is the father of man.
- Irony – A fire station burned down yesterday.
- Pun – Life depends upon the liver.
- Metonymy – The Bench decided that the man is guilty.
- Synecdoche – We need more hands to help us move this cupboard.
- Transferred Epithet – She had a sleepless night.

FIGURES OF SPEECH COVERED IN THE LECTURE-

1] Simile

A simile is a figure of speech that uses comparison. In a simile, we use two specific words “like” and “as” to compare two unlikely things, that actually have nothing in common. This is done to bring out the dramatic nature of the prose and invoke vivid images and comparisons. It is one of the most common forms of a figure of speech and is used in everything from day-to-day talk to poems.

Let us see some examples of simile. “She is as brave as a lion”. Here you will notice a girl and her bravery are being compared to a lion. this is an unusual and illogical comparison, but it brings out the vivid imagery and lyrical quality in the sentence. The literal sentence would have read “She is brave”, but using the simile makes it sound much better. Other such examples can be

- quite like a mouse
- as tall as a mountain
- as strong as an ox
- precious like an angel

2] Metaphor

A metaphor and a simile are quite similar actually. A metaphor also uses compares to things that are in no way similar. It does so to bring out the symbolism. A metaphor is a word or phrase used to show its similarity to another thing. It helps to explain an idea, but if you take a metaphor at its literal meaning it will sound absurd.

An example of a metaphor is “Alex is a chicken”. Literally, this sounds so very absurd. But this is a metaphor which suggests that Alex is a coward, or frightened. It compares or implies that Alex is a chicken to bring out the symbolism. Some other examples are ‘love is a battlefield’, “all the world’s a stage”, “that technology is a dinosaur” etc.

3] Personification

In this, we personify or represent a non-human entity as human. We give an inanimate object or an intangible idea of some human qualities such as emotions, or gestures or even speech. this is done to portray the object as alive and help the listener or reader paint a vivid picture. Again, if we take the words at their literal meaning they will sound absurd.

“The wind howled as the storm grew stronger”. Here we have taken an object, the wind, and personified it as a living thing by claiming it howled. Other such examples could be, “time ran away from him”, “the boat danced in the puddle”, “the car died in the middle of the road” etc.

4] Apostrophe

Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which a speaker directly addresses someone (or something) that is not present or cannot respond in reality. The entity being addressed can be an absent, dead, or imaginary person, but it can also be an inanimate object (like stars or the ocean), an abstract idea (like love or fate), or a being (such as a Muse or god).

Some additional key details about apostrophe:

- Apostrophe, the figure of speech, should not be confused with apostrophe, the punctuation mark.

- The word "apostrophe," which comes from ancient Greek, literally means "turning away," because to perform apostrophe on stage, an actor turns away from the scene to address an absent entity.
- Apostrophe appears most often in poetry and plays, though it can appear in prose literature as well.

‘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.’

Here Stephen simply addresses life as it is, as something to be experienced, and not as something that itself *has* experiences, or feelings, or acts in any other way like a human.