

Figures of Speech

“A figure of speech is a departure from the ordinary form of expression, or the ordinary course of ideas, in order to produce a greater effect.”
(Wren)

In other words, Figures of Speech make the use of words typically suggestive and artistic, and make the style strikingly effective, beautiful and ornamental. The Figures of Speech are an essential part of the poetic style of writing. For poetry they are indispensable. They impart a peculiar brilliance and charm to poetry. The following are the main Figures of Speech used in English.

1. Simile :

“In a Simile a comparison is made between two objects of different kinds which have, however, at least one point in common.”

In this figure two different objects, possessing at least one common point between them, are brought to comparison. Two similar objects are not compared under this Figure.

It should also be remembered that the point of similarity in Simile is expressed by the words **like**, **so**, **as**. For example :

1. She is as lovely as a rose.
2. Rana Pratap was brave like a lion.
3. O my love's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.

(Ben Jonson)

4. Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like
the sea.

(Wordsworth)

2. Metaphor:

“A Metaphor is an implied (or condensed) Simile.”
(Wren)

Or

“A Metaphor is a condensed form of Simile in which comparison between two different objects is shown without the use of such words as **like**, **as** or **so**.”

In other words, **Simile** and **Metaphor** are Figures of the same category. Metaphor is only a condensed form of Simile. Metaphor does not need the use of such comparative words as **like**, **as**, **so**. Therefore, a metaphor can be expanded into a Simile, and a Simile can be condensed into a metaphor. **As—**

1. Camel is the ship of the desert.
2. Gandhiji was the guiding star of the destiny of India.
3. Shivaji was the lion of the Peshwa dynasty.
4. Life is a tale told by an idiot,
Full of sound and fury
(Shakespeare)
5. Her only son is the lamp of her life.

3. Personification :

“In Personification inanimate objects and abstract notions are spoken of as having life and intelligence.”
(Wren)

Under this Figure, inanimate objects are bestowed with human feelings and sensitivities. **As—**

1. There Honour comes a pilgrim grey.
(Gray)
2. Death lays his icy hand on kings.
3. A lie has no legs.
4. Opportunity knocks at the door but once.
5. Nature bemoaned the death of the bride.

4. Hyperbole :

“In Hyperbole a statement is made emphatic by over statement.” (Wren)

Under this Figure a statement is exaggerated or overstated to an incredible degree. This is done for the sake of emphasis. **As—**

1. Rivers of blood flowed on the battlefield.
2. Floods of tears flowed down her cheeks.
3. He can devour mountains of food and drink rivers of whisky.
4. All the perfumes of Arabia cannot sweeten this little hand. (Shakespeare)

5. Onomatopoeia :

“This is the name given to that artifice of language by which the sound of words is made to suggest or echo the sense.” (Nesfield)

Under this Figure, the sound of words is made to suggest the meaning or sense. **As—**

1. The snakes are **hissing** and the bees are **buzzing**.
2. The **murmurous** haunt of **flies on summer eves**. (Keats)
3. The beetle **wheels his droning** flight. (Gray)
4. Cannons to the right of them,
Cannons to the left of them,
Cannons in front of them
Vollied and thundered. (Tennyson)

6. Apostrophe :

“An Apostrophe is a direct address to the dead, to the absent or to a personified object or idea.” (Wren)

Under this Figure a dead or absent person, or an abstract idea is addressed to as if physically present before the speaker. **As—**

1. **O death** ! where is thy sting ?
2. **Milton** ! thou should'st be living at this hour. (Wordsworth)
3. **O solitude** ! where are thy charms ?

7. Oxymoron :

“Oxymoron is a special form of antithesis whereby two contradictory qualities are predicted at once of the same thing.” (Wren)

Under this Figure, two opposite or contradictory qualities of the same thing are stated at the same time. **As—**

1. His **honour** rooted in **dishonour** stood.
2. Thus **idly busy** rolls their world away.
3. **Sweet bitter** tears flowed from her eyes.
4. **Aching joys** and **dizzy raptures** filled my heart.
5. Let us not dread the **kind cruelty** of the surgeon's knife.

8. Alliteration :

“Alliteration consists in the repetition of the same sound or syllable at the beginning of two or more words.” (Nesfield)

This produces a kind of musical effect. **As—**

1. **Ruin** seize thee, **ruthless** king ! (Gray)
2. A **load** of **learning lumbering** in his head. (Pope)
3. A **reeling road**, a **rolling road**, that **rambles round** the shire. (G.K. Chesterton)
4. **How high his Honour holds his haughty head** !
5. The fair breeze **blew**, the white foam **flew**,
The furrow followed **free**. (Coleridge)

9. Irony :

“Irony is a mode of speech in which the real meaning is exactly the opposite of that which is literally conveyed.” (Wren)

Under this Figure, the real meaning or sense of a statement is just the opposite of what is spoken literally in words. **As—**

1. Here under leave of Brutus and the rest
(For **Brutus is an honourable man** :
So are they all, **all honourable men**.)
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
(Shakespeare)
2. Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an **honourable** man.
(Shakespeare)

10. Pun :

“This consists in a play on the various meanings of a word, and is seldom used except as a joke.” (Nesfield)

Under this Figure, humour is sought to be produced by play on different meanings of a word. **As—**

1. Is life worth living ? That depends upon the **liver**.
2. An ambassador is a man who **lies** abroad for the good of his country.

11. Metonymy :

“In Metonymy an object is designated by the name of something which is generally associated with it.” (Wren)

‘Metonymy’ is a Greek word made of two words—**Meta** + **Onoma**. ‘Meta’ means ‘after’, and ‘Onoma’ means ‘name’. Under this Figure, a thing is not called by its own name, but by some quality or attribute associated with it. For instance, ‘**sword**’ may be used for the ‘**soldier**’, or ‘**pen**’ for the ‘**writer**’. As—

1. The **pen** (author) is mightier than the **sword** (the soldier).
2. **Sceptre** and **crown** (*i.e.* kings).
Must tumble down ;
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked **scythe** and **spade**.
(*i.e.* peasants).
3. The **bar** (lawyers) and the **bench** (judges) are complementary to each other.
4. He won the **laurels** (*i.e.* reward).
5. Please address the **chair** (*i.e.* chairman).

12. Synecdoche :

“In Synecdoche a part is used to designate the whole or the whole to designate a part.” (Wren)

In other words, a part is used for the whole, and the whole is used for the part. As—

1. Give us this day our daily **bread** (*i.e.* food).
2. I have many **mouths** (*i.e.* persons) to feed.
3. **England** (*i.e.* the team of England) have won.
4. A fleet of twenty **sails** (*i.e.* ships) passed by our coast.
5. The best **brains** (*i.e.* scholars) have assembled here.

13. Antithesis :

“In Antithesis a striking opposition or contrast of words or sentiments is made in the same sentence. It is employed to secure emphasis.”

(Wren)

Under this Figure, two opposite or contradictory ideas are expressed in the same sentence. This is meant to give emphasis. As—

1. **To err is human, to forgive divine.**
2. **Man proposes, God disposes.**
3. **God made the country, man made the town.**
4. **Many are called, but few are chosen.**

14. Transferred Epithet :

“In this figure an epithet is transferred from its proper word to another that is closely associated with it in the sentence.” (Wren)

Under this Figure, an adjective or an epithet is transferred and applied to an associated object in place of the object proper. As—

1. He passed a **sleepless night**.
2. The ploughman homeward plods his **weary** way.
(Gray)
3. He received a **mortal** wound.
4. I cannot live on **dishonourable** bread.

Exercise

Name the Figures of Speech used in the following sentences :

1. Life is a dream.
2. Revenge is a kind of wild justice.
3. The righteous shall flourish as the palm trees.
4. Ye are the salt of the earth.
5. Suspicions among thoughts are like bats among birds; they fly best by night.
6. O World ! O Life ! O Time ! On whose last steps I climb.
7. O Wind ! If winter comes, can spring be far behind ?
8. The press is the fourth estate.
9. Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.
10. Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale.
11. Why, man, if the river were dry, I am able to fill it with tears.
12. I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up the sum.

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| 13. If speech is silver, silence is gold. | (4) Metaphor; |
| 14. Truth is ever on the scaffold
Wrong is ever on the throne, | (5) Simile; |
| 15. Give every man thy ear,
But few thy tongue. | (6) Apostrophe; |
| 16. O death ! where is thy sting ? | (7) Apostrophe; |
| 17. O judgment ! thou art fled to brutish beasts. | (8) Metonymy; |
| 18. The House is adjourned. | (9) Simile; |
| 19. Youth is full of pleasure,
Age is full of care. | (10) Simile; |
| 20. Sweet art the uses of adversity. | (11) Hyperbole; |
| 21. The cup that cheers but not inebriates. | (12) Hyperbole; |
| 22. He is a cruelly kind guardian. | (13) Antithesis; |
| 23. Our loss is their gain. | (14) Antithesis; |
| 24. He held his haughty head high. | (15) Antithesis (and also Metonymy); |
| 25. With short shrill shrieks the bat flits by. | (16) Apostrophe; |
| 26. We are loyal to the crown. | (17) Apostrophe; |
| 27. Grief sighed and Honour shed tears. | (18) Metonymy; |
| 28. Lady, we are your guests tonight. | (19) Antithesis; |
| 29. Run, run, you are brave indeed. | (20) Oxymoron; |
| 30. Soft, soft, he lies in the church. | (21) Metonymy; |
| | (22) Oxymoron; |
| | (23) Antithesis; |
| | (24) Alliteration; |
| | (25) Alliteration; |
| | (26) Metonymy; |
| | (27) Personification; |
| | (28) Irony; (29) Irony; (30) Pun. |
- Answers**
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|----------------|--|
| (1) Metaphor ; | |
| (2) Metaphor; | |
| (3) Simile; | |