

# EXPLORING THE USE AND TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

This article considered when and how to use figurative language in written and spoken language. The author of the article presented brief information about the six types of figurative language, including simile, metaphor, personification, idiom, symbolism, and hyperbole. Some examples of these types were also analyzed.

**Keywords:** Figurative language, literal language, simile, metaphor, personification, idiom, symbolism, hyperbole.

## Introduction

Figurative language is a type of communication that does not use a word's strict or literal meaning. Language that uses figures of speech is collectively referred to as figurative language. Common in comparisons and exaggerations, figurative language is usually used to add creative elements to written or spoken language or to explain a complicated idea.

Someone said: "I have butterflies in my stomach" when they are nervous. There aren't actually butterflies inside their stomach; they're just using figurative language to describe the uneasy sensation in their body that feels like butterflies moving around inside them.

Figurative language stretches the actual meaning of words for effect, whether to sound artistic, make a joke, or communicate more clearly and engagingly. Using figurative language is common in narrative writing, especially when the author strives to connect emotionally with the reader.

The opposite of figurative language is literal language, or phrasing, that uses the exact meaning of the words without imagination or exaggeration. For example,

## Literal Language

"It was raining a lot, so I rode the bus" is an example of literal language because it explains exactly what happened.

## Figurative Language

"It was raining cats and dogs, so I rode the bus" is an example of figurative language because it uses an idiom to describe heavy rain.

Literal language serves its purpose in specific contexts, such as professional communication, academic papers, or legal documents. Conversely, figurative language can make writing and



speeches more engaging and amusing. The reader or listener has to think about the words more, as if deciphering a riddle, which means they're actively participating.

There are several types of figurative language, but here are six of the most commonly used.

### 1. Simile

Similes are the most straightforward form of figurative language, although some of that simplicity is curiously deceptive. At its most basic level, the simile makes an indirect comparison between two unlike things. Most frequently, this uses the words "like" or "as," but it's a common misconception that these words are always present in similes (Jimmy Kindree. 2019, October 13). For instance, tomatoes dripped like blood from his mouth.

Example "The very mystery of him excited her curiosity like a door that had neither lock nor key". (Margaret Mitchell. 1936.)

### 2. Metaphor

A metaphor describes an object or action in a way that is not literally true but helps explain an idea or make a comparison. The main difference between a simile and a metaphor is that metaphors do not use the words like or as.

Example "All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree". (Albert Einstein. 1950.)

### 3. Personification

Personification means giving human characteristics to nonhuman or abstract things. This can apply to physical attributes ("the eye of the needle"), emotional attributes ("a single lonely shoe"), or human actions ("a leaf dancing in the wind").

Examples:

- The angry wind battered the trees. The wind is given the human characteristic of anger.
- The sun smiled down on us. The sun is given human characteristics.
- The story jumped off the page. The story is given human characteristics.

### 4. Idiom

An idiom is a figurative expression that is used in literature and everyday speech to convey a meaning that differs from the literal meaning of the words used.

Because idiomatic phrases vary greatly by culture and language, they can be difficult to grasp for people who speak a different primary language, as their true meaning isn't the same as what's being expressed.

**Examples:**

- "It's time to spill the beans about your surprise vacation plans!" (Used to refer to revealing a secret, not pouring out a can of beans)
- "It is a piece of cake!" (It is very easy)
- "I am just pulling your leg" (I am only joking)
- "He is under the weather" (He is sick)



## 5. Symbolism

Symbolism in literature is literary device that uses objects, people, situations, or actions to represent something more than their literal meaning. A symbol often carries multiple meanings, depending on the context of the work.

Examples:

- A rose might symbolize love or beauty.
- Red often signifies passion, danger, or love.
- White can represent purity or emptiness.
- A journey can symbolize personal growth or discovery.

## 6. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a great exaggeration, often unrealistic, to add emphasis to a sentiment.

If you're especially busy, you might say, "I have a million things to do." If you're bored, you might say, "I have nothing to do." Neither is actually true, but the phrasing makes the statement more emphatic.

Examples:

- "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?" (Macbeth exaggerates the guilt he feels, imagining that even an ocean could not cleanse him.)  
(William Shakespear. 2008.)
- "He cried all night, and dawn found him still there, though his tears had dried and left him with two big holes in his wooden leg." (Carlo Collodi. 2011.)

Figurative language can improve writing, but only when it's used effectively. If you're using metaphors, hyperbole, or other literary devices in every sentence, you may exhaust your reader. Sometimes, figurative language can simplify a complicated idea, but other times, it can complicate a simple idea. If you want to add figurative language to a sentence, ensure you don't convolute the meaning.

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