

52 Figures of Speech

A one-page revision map, grouped by the job each figure does. Full guide, quizzes and examples at goodlearnerproject.com/figures-of-speech.html

1. Comparison & Likeness

Figures that understand one thing by holding it next to another.

- 1. Simile** — A comparison between two different things using a linking word such as like or as. *e.g. "She was as brave as a lion."*
- 2. Metaphor** — A comparison that states one thing is another, without like or as. *e.g. "Time is a thief."*
- 3. Analogy** — An extended comparison that explains something unfamiliar by lining it up, point by point, with something familiar. *e.g. "A cell is like a factory: the nucleus is the manager, the membrane..."*
- 4. Personification** — Giving human qualities — feelings, actions, or intentions — to something that is not human, such as an object, animal, or idea. *e.g. "The wind whispered through the trees."*
- 5. Anthropomorphism** — Giving a non-human being — an animal, object, or god — a full human character: it speaks, thinks, wears clothes, and behaves like a person all the way through. *e.g. The talking, waistcoat-wearing White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland;...*
- 6. Zoomorphism** — The opposite move to personification: giving animal qualities to a human, a god, or an object. *e.g. "He wolfed down his dinner."*
- 7. Conceit** — An elaborate, surprising metaphor that stretches a comparison between two very unlike things across many lines, asking the reader to follow the clever logic. *e.g. John Donne compares two lovers to the two legs of a drawing compass...*
- 8. Allegory** — A whole story, poem, or image in which characters and events stand for deeper ideas — moral, political, or spiritual — beneath the surface tale. *e.g. Animal Farm is an allegory for the Russian Revolution; the tortoise...*

2. Substitution & Association

Figures that name a thing by something close to it, not by itself.

- 9. Metonymy** — Referring to something by the name of a related thing, not by its own name — the two are closely connected in everyday life. *e.g. "The Crown approved the law" (Crown = the monarchy). "The pen is mig..."*
- 10. Synecdoche** — Using a part of something to mean the whole, or the whole to mean a part. *e.g. "All hands on deck" (hands = sailors). "Nice wheels!" (wheels = the...)*
- 11. Transferred epithet** — An adjective is shifted from the person it really describes to a nearby object. *e.g. "He passed a sleepless night" (the man is sleepless, not the night)...*
- 12. Antonomasia** — Replacing a proper name with a title or descriptive phrase, or using a famous name as a label for a type of person. *e.g. "The Bard" for Shakespeare; calling a wise friend "a real Einstein."*
- 13. Allusion** — A brief, indirect reference to a well-known person, place, event, book, or myth that the reader is expected to recognise. *e.g. "He was a real Romeo with the girls."*
- 14. Symbolism** — Using an object, colour, or image to represent a larger idea or feeling beyond its literal self. *e.g. A dove for peace; a red rose for love; a storm for inner turmoil.*

3. Sound & Music

Figures you hear before you understand them.

- 15. Alliteration** — The repetition of the same consonant sound at the start of words that are close together. *e.g. "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers."*
- 16. Assonance** — The repetition of the same vowel sound in nearby words, whatever letters spell it. *e.g. "The rain in Spain stays mainly on the plain."*
- 17. Consonance** — The repetition of the same consonant sound within or at the end of nearby words (not just the start). *e.g. "The lick, the lick of the licking flame."*
- 18. Sibilance** — A special kind of consonance built on soft hissing sounds — mainly /s/, /sh/, and /z/ — to create a whispering, smooth, or sinister effect. *e.g. "The silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain."*
- 19. Onomatopoeia** — A word that imitates the actual sound it describes. *e.g. "buzz," "hiss," "boom," "splash," "clang," "murmur."*
- 20. Cacophony** — A deliberately harsh, jarring mix of sounds — hard consonants like k, t, g, and b — used to create discomfort, chaos, or noise. *e.g. "The clatter and crack and bang of the breaking crates."*
- 21. Euphony** — A pleasing, smooth, musical arrangement of sounds — soft consonants and long vowels — that is gentle on the ear. *e.g. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" — Keats.*

4. Emphasis by Degree

Figures that turn the volume of a statement up or down on purpose.

- 22. Hyperbole** — Deliberate, obvious exaggeration used for emphasis or effect — not meant to be taken literally. *e.g. "I've told you a million times."*
- 23. Understatement** — Deliberately making something seem less important, serious, or large than it really is, often for irony or modesty. *e.g. Standing in a downpour: "A bit of rain today."*
- 24. Litotes** — A form of understatement that states something positive by denying its opposite — usually with a double negative. *e.g. "She's not bad at maths" (meaning she is very good). "He's not a fool."*
- 25. Meiosis** — Belittling something by describing it with a dismissive or laughably small term, to reduce its importance. *e.g. Calling a serious war "the Troubles"; calling the ocean "the pond."*
- 26. Bathos** — A sudden, often unintentional-seeming drop from something grand or serious to something trivial or silly, usually for comic effect. *e.g. "He lost his family, his fortune, and his favourite pen."*
- 27. Adynaton** — An extreme form of hyperbole that describes something as flatly impossible, to stress that it will never happen. *e.g. "When pigs fly."*

5. Contrast & Contradiction

Figures that put opposites in the same breath.

- 28. Irony** — A gap between what is said or expected and what is really meant or what actually happens. *e.g. A fire station burns down. Saying "Lovely weather!" during a storm.*
- 29. Oxymoron** — Two contradictory words placed side by side to create a striking new meaning. *e.g. "Deafening silence," "bittersweet," "living dead."*
- 30. Paradox** — A statement that seems to contradict itself, yet on reflection reveals a deeper truth. *e.g. "Less is more."*
- 31. Antithesis** — Placing two opposite ideas together in a balanced grammatical structure to sharpen the contrast. *e.g.*

"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

32. Juxtaposition — Placing two contrasting people, things, or ideas close together so their differences stand out. *e.g. A rich mansion described right beside a crumbling slum; a hero and v...*

33. Sarcasm — Saying the opposite of what you mean in a sharp, mocking tone, usually to criticise or make fun of someone. *e.g. Tripping over, then saying: "Well, that was graceful."*

6. Wit & Wordplay

Figures that play games with sound and meaning.

34. Pun — A play on words that exploits two meanings of a word, or two words that sound alike, usually for humour. *e.g. "A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is two-tired."*

35. Malapropism — The mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, with a comic result. *e.g. "He is the very pineapple of politeness" (meaning pinnacle).*

36. Spoonerism — A slip in which the beginning sounds of two words are swapped, often producing something funny. *e.g. "You have hissed all my mystery lectures" (missed ... history).*

37. Portmanteau — A new word made by blending the sounds and meanings of two existing words. *e.g. "brunch" (breakfast + lunch), "smog" (smoke + fog), "motel."*

38. Paraprosdokian — A sentence whose ending is surprising or twists the meaning of the first part, making you re-read it — often for humour. *e.g. "I've had a wonderful evening — but this wasn't it." — Groucho Marx.*

39. Innuendo — A remark that hints at something — often critical, cheeky, or suggestive — without stating it openly, leaving the real meaning to be understood. *e.g. "She finished the whole project on her own, apparently" (hinting at...*

7. Repetition & Structure

Figures that shape a sentence by the pattern of its words.

40. Anaphora — Repeating the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences. *e.g. "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing ground..."*

41. Epistrophe — Repeating the same word or phrase at the end of successive clauses or sentences. *e.g. "...of the people, by the people, for the people" — the repeated endin...*

42. Epizeuxis — Repeating a single word immediately, with no other words in between, for strong emphasis. *e.g. "Never, never, never give up."*

43. Anadiplosis — Repeating the last word of one clause at the start of the next, forming a chain. *e.g. "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."*

44. Chiasmus — Two phrases balanced in reversed grammatical order (an ABBA pattern of structure), without necessarily repeating the exact words. *e.g. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."*

45. Antimetabole — Repeating the same words in reverse order in the second half of a phrase. *e.g. "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for..."*

46. Polysyndeton — Using many conjunctions (and, or, but) in quick succession, often to slow the rhythm or pile things up. *e.g. "We have ships and men and money and stores."*

47. Asyndeton — Deliberately leaving out conjunctions between words or clauses, often to speed up the pace. *e.g. "I came, I saw, I conquered."*

8. Rhetoric & Address

Figures that turn to speak, ask, or soften.

48. Rhetorical question — A question asked for effect, not for an answer — the answer is obvious or beside the point. *e.g. "Is the sky blue?"*

49. Apostrophe — Directly addressing someone absent or dead, or an object or abstract idea as though it could hear and reply. *e.g. "O Death, where is thy sting?"*

50. Hypophora — Raising a question and then immediately answering it yourself. *e.g. "What should we do next? First, we stay calm. Then we make a plan."*

51. Euphemism — A mild, gentle, or indirect word used in place of one that is harsh, blunt, or unpleasant. *e.g. "passed away" for died; "let go" for fired; "between jobs" for unemp...*

52. Circumlocution — Using many more words than needed and talking around a subject instead of naming it directly. *e.g. "The thing you use to open a door that needs the metal object" inste...*