

Figurative Language Reference Guide

Figurative Language Device	Definition	Example and Explanation
Alliteration	The repetition of beginning sounds in two or more neighboring words	<p>“The wind tapped like a tired man” -“The Wind,” Emily Dickinson</p> <p>The repetition of the “t” in tapped and tired makes this an example of alliteration.</p>
Allusion	A brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or idea of historical, cultural, literary, or political significance	<p>“Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!” –“The Raven,” Edgar Allan Poe</p> <p>In Greek mythology, the Plutonian shore was on the river Styx, which was believed to transport the dead to the underworld.</p>
Hyperbole	Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally	<p>“Dr. Jekyll, whom he had long so unworthily repaid for a thousand generosityies...” -<i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>, Robert Louis Stevenson</p> <p>It isn’t likely that someone did someone else a thousand favors, so the number is exaggerated for effect. This would be like someone saying, “I told you a thousand times to clean your room!”</p>
Idiom	An expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but must be learned as a whole	<p>“Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.” -<i>A Christmas Carol</i>, Charles Dickens</p> <p>This idiom comes from the early 16th century, when doornails were nailed in to secure a door, they were bent and unable to be used again. Now, we use the idiom to describe someone who is deceased.</p>
Meiosis	A statement that downplays or understates the importance of something (the opposite of hyperbole)	<p>In <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>, Mercutio is stabbed by an enemy’s sword. As he is dying, he calls his injury a “scratch.”</p> <p>He is downplaying, or understating, how badly he is hurt.</p>
Metaphor	A word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar	<p>“The earth is motionless and poised in space ...a great bird resting in its flight between the alleys of the stars.” –“Interim,” Lola Ridge</p> <p>This line of poetry is comparing the earth to a bird resting in flight or seeming to float.</p>
Onomatopoeia	The forming of a word (as “buzz” or “hiss”) in imitation of a natural sound	<p>“With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -Between the light - and me” -“I heard a Fly buzz - when I died,” Emily Dickinson</p> <p>Here, the word “buzz” is used as an onomatopoeia to describe the sound of the fly. It provides the</p>

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		reader imagery, so they feel as if they are sharing the speaker's experiences.
Personification	Representing a thing or idea as a person in art or literature	<p>"Ask of the winds, the sobbing winds that toss the waves on high;" –"Under the Sea," Fannie Isabelle Sherrick</p> <p>Winds can't literally cry or sob, but the effect of personifying the winds emphasizes the mood of the setting.</p>
Simile	A comparison of two unlike things, often introduced by like or as	<p>"What dreams we have and how they fly like rosy clouds across the sky;" –"Dreams," Paul Laurence Dunbar</p> <p>This line compares dreams to rosy clouds that fly across the sky. The use of "like" makes this a simile. This figurative language provides the reader with a visual of a concrete thing (clouds) to describe something abstract (dreams).</p>
Mood	The atmosphere of a piece of writing; the emotions a reader feels through the author's use of diction, figurative language, and other choices	
Tone	The author or speaker's attitude toward a subject , evident through diction or the viewpoint of an author or speaker on a particular subject; can be formal, informal, serious, cheerful, etc.	

Words to Describe Mood					
<i>The text makes me feel _____ because _____.</i>					
Fearful	Angry	Surprised	Sad	Joyful	Love
threatened	frustrated	amazed	embarrassed	trusting	seen
worried	skeptical	inspired	bored	optimistic	connected
insecure	tense	empowered	heartbroken	powerful	treasured
terrified	mad	curious	lonely	brave	valued
anxious	furious	fascinated	numb	thankful	respected
unsafe	irritated	challenged	exhausted	hopeful	appreciated
vulnerable	suspicious	motivated	disappointed	silly	worthwhile
overwhelmed	envious	confused	ashamed	passionate	important
troubled	protective	startled	disapproval	creative	successful
alarmed	hateful	astonished	uncomfortable	thrilled	welcomed
panicked	annoyed	eager	guilty	triumphant	appreciated
restless	criticized	energetic	lost	proud	admired

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Words to Describe Tone				
<i>The text is about _____. The speaker feels _____ about _____.</i>				
Positive	Negative	Humorous	Sad	Neutral
encouraging	angry	teasing	sorrowful	questioning
optimistic	irritated	playful	gloomy	curious
calm	threatening	lighthearted	dark	surprised
loving	vicious	funny	quiet	reflective
caring	rude	amused	restrained	straightforward
friendly	aggressive	mocking	serious	candid
pleasant	cruel	witty	downcast	matter-of-fact
proud	uncaring	clever	pessimistic	judgmental
happy	argumentative	sharp	unhappy	thoughtful
cheerful	cold	silly	discouraged	disconnected
delighted	unfriendly	whimsical	distressed	sincere
grateful	distant	sarcastic	disheartened	persuasive