

Figurative Language Guide

To download this file, click:

“File” → “Download As” → Choose your file format, & SAVE to your English 1 folder that you have created.

View the following examples of **Figurative Language** (or Figures of Speech) below. Here you can see how a writer’s **diction** (word choice) communicates their **tone** and creates a **mood**. Save this for your notes as it will come in handy in your assignments to use as reference.

Alliteration

The repetition of usually initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables

- **Example** from The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson: “... his appearance: something displeasing, something down-right detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere ...”
- **Explanation:** This Gothic novel contains elements of fear and suspense, so it's only fitting that the author uses alliteration with s and d sounds to provide a sense of danger and suspicion.

Allusion

A reference in a literary work to a person, place, or thing in history or another work of literature.

- **Example:** I have experienced lonely times when I wanted to click my ruby slippers and say, "There's no place like home." This is an allusion to Dorothy's famous line in The Wizard of Oz.
- **Tone:** The author's word choice in this example communicates a tone of acceptance.
- **Mood:** The author's word choice in this example communicates a tone of acceptance.

Hyperbole

A figure of speech that uses exaggeration for emphasis.

- **Example:** The mean girl's words felt like a million knives.
- **Tone:** The author's word choice in this example communicates a matter of fact tone.

- **Mood:** The author's diction creates a sympathetic mood.

Idiom

An expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but must be learned as a whole

- **Example** from A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens: There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail.
- **Effect:** Talk about getting a point across. When you think about nails, they are still and cold. This commonly used idiom first originated in a 1362 poem and has been lodged in literature ever since. Its negative connotation reveals much about tone and mood.

Meiosis

The presentation of a thing with underemphasis, especially in order to achieve a greater effect; understatement

- **Example** from “A Descent Into the Maelstrom” by Edgar Allan Poe: The “little cliff,” upon whose edge he had so carelessly thrown himself down to rest that the weightier portion of his body hung over it, while he was only kept from falling by the tenure of his elbow on its extreme and slippery edge—this “little cliff” arose, a sheer unobstructed precipice of black shining rock, some fifteen or sixteen hundred feet from the world of crags beneath us. Nothing would have tempted me to within half a dozen yards of its brink.
- **Effect:** When you think of a “little cliff,” chances are it's not 1,500 feet high. The understatement of the size of the cliff really just emphasizes how opposite of little it is.

Metaphor

A comparison of two unlike things that does not use comparison words. One thing directly represents another.

- **Example:** In some cultures, women are an untouchable plague.
- **Tone:** The author's word choice in this example communicates an observant tone.
- **Mood:** The author's diction creates a shocking mood.

Onomatopoeia

The forming of a word (as “buzz” or “hiss”) in imitation of a natural sound

- **Example** from *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Edgar Allan Poe: I now observed—with what horror it is needless to say—that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel, about a foot in length from horn to horn; the horns upward, and the under edge evidently as keen as that of a razor. Like a razor also, it seemed massy and heavy, tapering from the edge into a solid and broad structure above. It was appended to a weighty rod of brass, and the whole hissed as it swung through the air.
- **Effect:** Think about the connotation of “hissed.” The negative association of the sound combined with the fact that a giant blade is swinging back and forth through the air would heighten suspense and create a mood of distress.

Paradox

A statement that appears to contradict itself but can be true.

- **Example:** The weak will be strong.
- **Tone:** The author's word choice in this example communicates a factual tone.
- **Mood:** The author's diction creates a hopeful mood.

Personification

A type of metaphor in which nonliving or nonhuman things are given human characteristics or abilities.

- **Example:** The family desperately needed to move out of the decaying house that groaned and moaned every time someone entered.
- **Tone:** The author's word choice in this example communicates a desperate tone.
- **Mood:** The author's diction creates a melancholy (sad) mood.

Simile

A comparison of two unlike things that uses “like” or “as.”

- **Example:** The students felt that the scholarship to the new school was like a blank check for a bright future.

- **Tone:** The author's word choice in this example communicates a detached tone.
- **Mood:** The author's diction creates a hopeful mood.