

Figurative Language

- 0:00 **Owl:** Welcome to Figurative Language, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.
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- 0:10 Sometimes authors use language to mean something other than its literal definition.
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- 0:15 This type of language is called figurative language.
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- 0:18 Figurative language is non-literal language that needs to be interpreted in order to understand what the author is trying to say.
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- 0:25 Often, it is used to make comparisons or paint a picture in the reader's mind.
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- 0:31 Figurative language is frequently used in literature.
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- 0:34 For instance, in the classic novel *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville, Melville introduces the infamous Captain Ahab by comparing him to a man who has been burnt at the stake.
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- 0:45 "He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness...."
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- 0:59 Of course, Ahab wasn't literally burnt at the stake!
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- 1:02 The point is that his grim and wasted appearance resembles someone who has.
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- 1:07 Melville is trying to paint a picture of Ahab by making this comparison.
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- 1:11 This technique is called simile.
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- 1:13 A simile is the comparison of two different things using "like" or "as."
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- 1:19 Similes are one example of writing techniques that rely on figurative language for rhetorical impact.
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- 1:25 We call these techniques figures of speech.
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- 1:29 A figure of speech is a word or phrase that has a different meaning from its literal meaning.
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- 1:34 To help you identify and interpret figurative language, we'll go over a dozen of the most common figures of speech in alphabetical order.
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- 1:46 An allegory is a story or picture that has a hidden meaning, usually a political or moral one.
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- 1:53 One example is Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" from *The Republic*.
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- 1:57 In this text, Plato describes the process of becoming educated by comparing it to a situation in which a person escapes from a dark cave, which represents ignorance and illusion, and enters the light of day, which represents truth and reason.
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- 2:13 A euphemism is a mild, indirect, or pleasant word or phrase used in place of words that are unpleasant or offensive.
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- 2:22 An example is "Letting someone go" instead of "firing someone."
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- 2:29 An hyperbole is an exaggerated statement or claim not intended to be taken literally.



- 2:35 An example of hyperbole is the statement, “I told you a million times not to leave your dirty socks on the floor!”
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- 2:42 There are three types of irony.
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- 2:44 One type is verbal irony, which is the use of words to mean the opposite of their literal meaning.
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- 2:50 An example of verbal irony is the sarcastic statement, “That cake is as moist as paper!”
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- 2:56 Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony.
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- 3:00 Another type of irony is situational irony, which refers to the difference between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.
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- 3:09 Situational irony occurs when a fire station burns down or a police station gets robbed.
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- 3:15 Because fire stations are built to prevent fires, and police stations are built to prevent robberies, it’s ironic to see a fire station burn down and a police station get robbed.
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- 3:25 Finally, there is dramatic irony.
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- 3:28 This occurs when the audience is more aware of what is happening than a character.
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- 3:32 For example, in Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour,” the characters believe the recently bereaved wife is crying tears of sorrow because of the loss of her husband.
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- 3:42 However, the audience knows that she is crying tears of joy because she is now free from her husband.
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- 3:49 A metaphor is a comparison between two things that are unrelated but share common characteristics.
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- 3:55 For example, the statement “Your voice is music to my ears” implies that the person’s voice is as pleasant as a song.
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- 4:04 William Shakespeare’s poem “Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day” is an example of an extended metaphor in which the narrator compares his beloved to a summer’s day.
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- 4:14 Onomatopoeia refers to words that sound like the things they mean.
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- 4:18 Examples include: bang, bark, clang, click, cuckoo, meow, moo, sizzle, tweet, and whiz.
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- 4:38 An oxymoron is a phrase in which two words with opposite meanings appear side by side.
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- 4:44 Examples include: act naturally, bib baby, deafening silence, jumbo shrimp, original copy, pretty ugly, and random order.
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- 4:58 Personification is the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects.
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- 5:04 For example, the statement “the daffodils danced and frolicked in the breeze” gives inanimate flowers the human qualities of dancing and frolicking.



- 5:14 A pun is a play on words that exploits the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that it sounds like another word.
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- 5:22 The statement, “A boiled egg every morning is hard to beat,” plays on the two meanings of the phrase “hard to beat.”
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- 5:29 Taken literally, it means that boiled eggs are literally hard to beat with a whisk.
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- 5:34 However, taken figuratively, it means that boiled eggs are a very good breakfast option with few rivals.
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- 5:41 In the second example, the statement, “The clown held open the door for the other passengers. It was a nice jester,” exploits the fact that the word “jester” sounds just like the word “gesture.”
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- 5:53 A simile is like a metaphor, only it uses the words “like” or “as” to make the comparison more direct.
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- 6:01 Examples of simile are: “my love is like a red, red rose” and “she was busy as a bee.”
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- 6:09 Symbolism is the use of an object, person, place, or event to represent something other than its literal meaning.
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- 6:17 Examples include:
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- 6:18 A dove is a symbol for peace.
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- 6:21 A rose is a symbol for love.
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- 6:24 A torch is a symbol for knowledge.
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- 6:27 A broken chain is a symbol for freedom from tyranny.
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- 6:30 An example of symbolism in literature is Shakespeare’s famous monologue in *As You Like It* in which he compares the world to a stage where people are the actors and they play various roles throughout their lives.
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- 6:43 “All the world’s a stage,
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- 6:45 And all the men and women merely players;
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- 6:48 they have their exits and their entrances;
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- 6:50 And one man in his time plays many parts,”
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- 6:54 – William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*
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- 6:57 An understatement is a manner of presenting something as being smaller, less serious, or less important than it actually is.
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- 7:06 For example, a person totals his car in a wreck and tells his friend it was “just a scratch.”
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- 7:13 Interpreting figurative language, such as figures of speech, might seem difficult at first.
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- 7:18 But learning them and even practicing them yourself in conversation and writing will help you improve your reading comprehension by teaching you the difference between literal and figurative language.



- 7:29 To recap, literal language is language that literally means what it says, whereas figurative language, such as figures of speech, is language that is non-literal and needs to be interpreted.
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- 7:41 By keeping this lesson in mind, as the saying goes, you'll be *as wise as an owl!*
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- 7:48 Thanks for listening to this instructional video on Figurative Language!
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- 7:53 Visit the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab for more support with reading and writing skills.

