

# Handy Handouts®

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## Types of Figurative Language

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We use *figurative language* to describe an object, person, or situation by comparing it to or with something else. For example, "She is as pretty as a picture" describes or compares a pretty girl to a beautiful piece of art. Figurative language is simply a way to add color and depth to what is otherwise a bland statement, "She is pretty." Students who have language difficulties may struggle to compare items or situations that have no real connection to each other (e.g., girl/picture). Some of these students may even challenge the statement and argue, "I've seen art that is ugly. She is probably ugly!"



### Figurative Language Definitions and Examples

**Simile** – A simile (*sim-uh-lee*) uses the words "like" or "as" to compare two explicitly unlike things as being similar. The sentence "Mom is as busy as a bee" paints a mental picture of Mom swarming around *like* a bee when she's busy. "Our old cat moves around *like* molasses in wintertime" means that the cat moves around like thick, slow-moving molasses.



**Metaphor** – A metaphor (*met-uh-fawr, -fer*) suggests something or someone actually *becomes* or *is* something else. "Dad *is* a *bear* when he's mad." "The children *were* angry *hornets* before eating lunch." Metaphors use more specific words like *is, are, was, or were* to paint a mental picture of Dad actually being a mad bear, and the hungry children being angry hornets before getting something to eat! There is no "like" or "as" in comparing the two.



**Personification** – Personification (*per-son-uh-fi-kay-shuh-n*) gives animals or inanimate objects human-like characteristics. "The *soft voice of the waterfall serenaded* me to sleep." In this sentence, the waterfall has been given the human characteristic of having a "soft voice" that "serenades" or sings the writer to sleep. "My dog, Bitsy, *counted the minutes* until her next meal." This suggests that Bitsy knows how to count like a human.





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**Onomatopoeia** – Onomatopoeia (on-uh-mat-uh-pee-uh) is a word that describes a *natural sound or the sound made by an object or a certain action*. Dad lit the fuse, and “POW!” the firecracker exploded. A horrible “Crash!” sounded as the vase hit the floor. Remember the “Zoom!” “Zap!” “Pow!” on the old TV shows? These are onomatopoeias.



rolling stone gathers no moss.” “Every cloud has a silver lining.” “Many hands make light work.” Many times you will hear, “Well, you know what they say...” which will usually be followed by a cliché like the ones listed above. Then the person to whom the cliché was directed may follow up with the questions, “Who are *“they”* anyway? What do *they* know?”

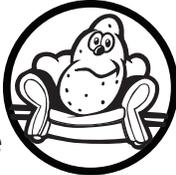


**Hyperbole** – A hyperbole (hy-pur-buh-lee) is a statement so exaggerated that no one believes it to be true. “Dad drank a *million gallons* of water after his run.” We all know that this is not possible. The exaggeration of a million gallons is simply for emphasis to describe the large quantity of water Dad actually drank. “I know I changed the baby’s diaper a *thousand times* today” is another example of a ridiculous exaggeration.



Figurative language is simply a colorful way to express an otherwise boring statement. You can see how very young children, children with special needs or language deficits, or ESL (English as a Second Language) students may have trouble understanding these types of expressions. When your child has trouble understanding *figurative language*, help your child see the comparisons or descriptions of *objects, people, or ideas presented as being like or taking on the characteristics of something that is completely different*.

**Idiom** – An idiom (id-ee-uh-m) is an expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of the words that make it up, as in “*He’s a couch potato*,” or “*Hold your horses*.” Idioms do not present “like” characteristics to other things as in other forms of figurative language. One needs the context of the sentence to help understand the idiom.



**Clichés** – Clichés are statements that have been heard so often that their once colorful play on words has become expected and stale. For example, “Birds of a feather flock together.” “A

Resources:

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Kinsella, Kate; Stump, Colleen Shea; and Feldman, Kevin. Pearson Education. Prentice Hall eTeach. *Strategies for Vocabulary Development*. Retrieved March 2013 from [http://www.phschool.com/eteach/language\\_arts/2002\\_03/essay.html](http://www.phschool.com/eteach/language_arts/2002_03/essay.html)

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