

Common Figurative Terms

Antithesis: opposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction.

*Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.

*Brutus: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.

*The vases of the classical period are but the reflection of classical beauty; the vases of the archaic period are beauty itself."

Archaisms: use of an older or obsolete form.

*Pipit sate upright in her chair.

Euphemism: substitution of an agreeable or at least non-offensive expression for one whose plainer meaning might be harsh or unpleasant.

Hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect.

*My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes and on thine forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest.

Imagery: words that evoke one or more of the five senses.

Irony: expression of something which is contrary to the intended meaning; the words say one thing but mean another.

*Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man

Understatement: for intensification, by denying the contrary of the thing being affirmed.
(Sometimes used synonymously with meiosis.)

*A few unannounced quizzes are not inconceivable.

*War is not healthy for children and other living things.

*One nuclear bomb can ruin your whole day.

Metaphor: implied comparison achieved through a figurative use of words; the word is used not in its literal sense, but in one analogous to it.

*Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage=

Metonymy: substitution of one word for another which it suggests.

*The pen is mightier than the sword.

* Yesterday the White House issued a statement.

Onomatopoeia: use of words to imitate natural sounds; accommodation of sound to sense.

Oxymoron: apparent paradox achieved by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict one another.

*I must be cruel only to be kind. Shakespeare, Hamlet

Paradox: an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it.

*What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young.

Personification: attribution of personality to an impersonal thing.

*England expects every man to do his duty.

Simile: an explicit comparison between two things using 'like' or 'as'.

*Let us go then, you and I,
While the evening is spread out against the sky,
Like a patient etherized upon a table...