

# Top 20 Figures of Speech

By Richard Nordquist, About.com Guide

1. **Alliteration**  
Repetition of an initial consonant sound.
2. **Anaphora**  
Repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses.
3. **Antithesis**  
The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced phrases.
4. **Apostrophe**  
Breaking off discourse to address some absent person or thing, some abstract quality, an inanimate object, or a nonexistent character.
5. **Assonance**  
Identity or similarity in sound between internal vowels in neighboring words.
6. **Chiasmus**  
A verbal pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed.
7. **Euphemism**  
The substitution of an inoffensive term for one considered offensively explicit.
8. **Hyperbole**  
An extravagant statement; the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect.
9. **Irony**  
The use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. A statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea.
10. **Litotes**  
A figure of speech consisting of an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite.

11. **Metaphor**  
An implied comparison between two unlike things that actually have something important in common.
  
12. **Metonymy**  
A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated; also, the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it.
  
13. **Onomatopoeia**  
The use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.
  
14. **Oxymoron**  
A figure of speech in which incongruous or contradictory terms appear side by side.
  
15. **Paradox**  
A statement that appears to contradict itself.
  
16. **Personification**  
A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstraction is endowed with human qualities or abilities.
  
17. **Pun**  
A play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words.
  
18. **Simile**  
A stated comparison (usually formed with "like" or "as") between two fundamentally dissimilar things that have certain qualities in common.
  
19. **Synecdoche**  
A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole (for example, *ABCs* for *alphabet*) or the whole for a part ("*England* won the World Cup in 1966").
  
20. **Understatement**  
A figure of speech in which a writer or a speaker deliberately makes a situation seem less important or serious than it is.