

# FIGURES: EXAMPLES

(Assembled by Jeff Walker; most examples are drawn from Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase.*)

## FIGURES OF WORDS: TROPES & SCHEMES

**1. TROPES** (bending/ “turning” of word-meaning; substitution of “figural” word for “literal” word based on some relation between concepts)

**metaphor** (based on comparison): “He looked into the *ocean* of her eyes.” “The latest scandal is *the elephant in the parlor* no-one wants to talk about.” “No-one at the press briefing mentioned *the elephant in the parlor.*” “These *young lions* of Wall Street are changing the way we do investing.”

**simile** (comparison made explicit with “like”): “Her eyes were *like an ocean.*” “This scandal is *like an elephant in the parlor* that no-one wants to talk about.” “These stockbrokers are *like young lions.*”

**metonymy** (based on associative links, such as cause/effect or container/contained): “The *pen* is mightier than the *sword*”; “Come drink a *cup.*”

**synecdoche** (based on part/whole relations; sometimes considered as a type of metonymy): “*Rome* has spoken”; “A *hungry stomach* has no *ears.*” “The regatta began with *a thousand sails* setting out from the bay.”

**catachresis** (also known as **abusio**: extreme metonymy, involving distortion or violation of normal word-meanings): “I saw the *wealthy gates* of Troy”; “*Blind mouths.*”

**irony** (contrast between what is said & what is meant, between appearance & reality): “Those who passed the test were *treated to the privilege* of experiencing trench warfare, and all its *benefits.*”

**understatement (litotes)**: “The executives at ENRON *made a few mistakes.*”

**overstatement (hyperbole)**: “I must have told you that *a million times.*”

**pun** (plays on similar-sounding words with different meanings, or on different senses of the same word): “If we don’t *hang* together, we’ll *hang* separately”; “The bustle: a *deceitful seatful.*”

**enallage** (effective grammatical “mistake”; substitution of one part of speech or grammatical form for the “proper” one): “he sang *his didn’t*, he danced *his did*”; “The chaste, the unexpressive *she*”; “I *can’t* get no satisfaction.” “*We was* robbed!” “There is no *there* there.”

**periphrasis** (substitution of a “roundabout”/indirect phrase for a single word): “He has *traveled that road from which no-one ever returns*” (= “He died”).

## 2. SCHEMES (arrangement of words, phrases, sentence-structures)

**parallelism** (many many kinds, including:)

**of beginnings** (*anaphora*): “*One look* I but gave which your dear eyes return’d with a look I shall never forget, *one touch* of your hand to mine ...”

**of endings** (*homoioteleuton*): “Then onward I sped in *the battle*, the even-contested *battle ...*”

(also “rhyme” or effects like rhyme: “To tell the knowing what they know seems *right*, but brings no *delight*.”)

**isocolon** (equivalent phrase-shapes): “government *of the people, by the people, for the people* shall not perish from the earth.”

**chiasmus** (“crossover” parallelism): “Ask not what *your country can do for you*, ask what *you can do for your country*.” [This example is also an *antithesis*; see below.]

**anadiplosis** (lit. “doubling up”; repetition of the end at the beginning): “They ask for you: the general who became a *slave*; the *slave* who became a *gladiator*; the *gladiator* who defied an emperor.”

**accumulation** (repetition, restatement, reiteration of an idea in varied ways): “I will not excuse you, you shall not be excused; excuses shall not be admitted.”

(many varieties, including:)

**climax** (a series of items in ascending importance): “It is a sin to bind a Roman citizen, a crime to scourge him, little short of the most unnatural murder to put him to death; what then shall I call this crucifixion?”

[The last item in this series is also an *aporia*; see “figures of thought.”]

**antithesis** (restatement and enhancement by opposites): “Let it not be said that a severe judgment of yours has harmed such a man. Let it be seen instead that your humane decision has brought him relief.”

**analogy** (restatement and enhancement by comparisons): “I was left shocked and speechless by this new information. It was as if an earthquake had suddenly undone the familiar structure of my world, and left my points of reference like so many pieces of broken architecture tumbled on the ground.” (*Illustrations* and *examples* belong to this category, too.)

**correction**: “The hour comes; yea, it has come already.” “We were poor; no, not poor, but penniless.”

**polyptoton** (using varied forms of the same word): “To tell the *knowing* what they *know* seems right, but brings no delight.” (See also “I will not excuse you ...,” above.)

**parataxis** (stringing out ideas in a series of simple clauses; coordinate structures; the “running style”): “He loved his work, *and* gave himself to it fully for many years, *and* was successful; *and then* he suddenly retired.”

**hypotaxis** (“bundling” ideas by embedding clauses within clauses; subordinate structures; the “periodic style”): “Suddenly, *though* he loved the work to which he had given himself so fully and so successfully for many years, he retired.”

**polysyndeton** (insertion of “extra” conjunctions): “The horizon narrowed *and* widened *and* dipped *and* rose”; “When you are old *and* gray *and* full of sleep, *and* nodding by the fire, take down this book.”

**asyndeton** (omission of conjunctions): “You had the motive, the means, the opportunity, to commit this crime”; “The horizon narrowed, widened, dipped, rose”; “When you are old—gray—full of sleep—nodding by the fire—take down this book.”

**ellipsis**: (omission of “understood” elements): “Everybody’s friend is nobody’s.”

**parenthesis**: (“interruption” of a sentence with an inserted remark; see *prolepsis*): “Everyone who cares about this issue — and I believe that includes everyone in this room — should turn out to vote.”

**hyperbaton** (rearrangement of normal word-order; sometimes called “**inversion**”): “About suffering they were never wrong, the old masters.” (Compare: “The old masters were never wrong about suffering.”)

**zeugma** (“yoking together” of phrases with a shared element, sometimes for humorous effect): “She left *in a huff and a hansom cab*.” (Compare: “She got in a hansom cab, and left in a huff.”) “[she might] stain *her honour or her new brocade*.”

## FIGURES OF THOUGHT (“STANCE” FIGURES)\*

**amplification** (also called *auxesis*): see **accumulation** in “schemes” (esp. antithesis, analogy, example, illustration)

**ratiocinatio**: the act of “drawing conclusions,” by syllogism or enthymeme: “if this is so, then ... and hence I say to you ...”

**apostrophe** (lit. “turnaway”; self-interruption; an aside; a declaration or “oath,” with an apparent shift of audience): “O Heavens! Is it possible a young maid’s wits should be as mortal as an old man’s life?”

**aposiopesis** (breaking off, as if unable to continue): “He catches her in his arms. The fire surrounds them while — I cannot go on.”

**aporia** (literally “no way”: talking about being unable to talk about, decide, or do something): “Words cannot describe the beauty of the scene”; “It is impossible to say just what I mean!”; “But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground.”

**“question and answer”** (“dialogue” with oneself, with an imaginary figure, or an opponent’s arguments): “How can I explain my mood? It was certainly a very vile frame of mind which I suffered; but how can I account for it? Who knows his own frailties? We were tickled to laughter by the prank we had played, because no one suspected us ... Why was it, then, that I thought it fun not to have been the only culprit? Perhaps ... because we do not easily laugh when we are alone. True enough: but even when a man is all by himself and quite alone, sometimes he cannot help laughing if he thinks or hears or sees something especially funny. All the same, I am quite sure I would never have done this thing on my own.”

**prosopoeia (personification)**; speaking “in character”: “Suppose this land of ours [Rome] addressed me in some such terms as these: ‘Marcus Tullius, what are you doing? ...’ ”

**erotema (“rhetorical question”)**; stating an assertion as a question whose answer is supposed to be obvious): “Shall we, then, who have been nurtured on everything that is fine, remain unmoved at a poet’s voice?”

**prolepsis** (strategic “digression,” usually to pre-empt a possible objection or counter-argument): “Before I discuss the next point, I must turn aside briefly to the question of ...”; “You will no doubt be asking me, Gratius, why I feel such an affection for this man. The answer is ...” [9-page “digression” on why “this man” (Archias the poet) is admirable].

**praeteritio** (mentioning something by saying that you won’t talk about it):

“To talk about my opponent’s conviction many years ago for tax evasion would be irrelevant and inappropriate, because this election is about issues: so I won’t say anything about it.”

**praecisio** (eloquent silence or extreme brevity; emphasizing something by passing over it in silence): “At this point, gentlemen, I must be allowed to employ the license usual to poets writing about Roman history, and to pass over the disaster which now overtook us. It was so complete that no messenger even came from the battlefield to tell the general what had happened.”

[Another example: The Gettysburg Address is slightly more than 2 minutes long; Lincoln was expected to speak for about 15. The speech itself talks about the inadequacy of words as a memorial to the self-sacrifice of the soldiers who died in the battle — see *aporia*, above — so that the speech in effect ends with about 12 minutes of silence.]

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\* These figures are hard to illustrate, out of context, as they do not depend on a particular linguistic form. They are more like “poses” or “gestures” — hence the name “*stance* figures” — which help to “dramatize” the speaker’s emotion or thought-process.