

SOME COMMON FIGURES OF SPEECH

1. ALLITERATION:

Alliteration is the repetition of an initial consonant sound in successive words, as in "a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers".

Here is an example of alliteration from a poem by Wordsworth:

And sing a solitary song, / That whistles in the wind.

Note: The repetition of similar consonant **sounds** makes the **alliteration**, not merely the letters.

A cute child. (Here, the letter C is repeated, but the sound is different. So, it is not an example of the Alliteration.)

A clever king. (Here, the letters are different, but sounds are same and repeated. So, it is an example of the Alliteration.)

2. ANAPHORA:

The repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses.

("But **one hundred years later**, the Negro still is not free. **One hundred years later**, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. **One hundred years later**, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. **One hundred years later**, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.") –"I Have A Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr.

Strike as I struck the foe!

Strike as I would

Have struck those tyrants!

Strike deep as my curse!

Strike!—and but once!" (Byron, *Marino Faliero*)

3. ANTETHESIS:

Usage of contrasting ideas in the same sentence within a parallel grammatical structure.

To err is human, to forgive divine.

Man proposes, God disposes.

Speech is silver, but silence is gold.

Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.

4. APOSTROPHE:

Addressing directly to a dead or imaginary person or to a personified object or an abstract idea as if having life.

*"O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
That ever lived in the tide of times."* (Shakespeare, Julius Caesar)

*"Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again."* (Paul Simon, The Sounds of Silence)

5. ASSONANCE:

Assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds in neighboring words in a line or verse.

"A host of golden daffodils" (repetition of long O sound) (William Wordsworth, 'Daffodils'.)

"Tyger, Tyger burning bright in the forest of the night" (repetition of 'ai' sound) (William Blake's "Tyger")

6. EPIPHORA:

This literary device is contrasted with ANAPHORA. In Epiphora, a sequence of words or phrases are repeated at the end of neighbouring clauses.

*"There is no Negro **problem**. There is no Southern **problem**. There is no Northern **problem**. There is only an American **problem**".* -Lyndon B. Johnson in We Shall Overcome

*"... this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of **the people**, by **the people**, for **the people**, shall not perish from the earth".* - Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address

7. EUPHEMISM:

Usage of inoffensive or mild words/phrases instead of offensive or harsh and hard words.

*Use of the phrase **passed away** instead of saying **died**.
You are telling me a **fairy tale** = You are telling me a **lie**.*

8. HYPERBOLE:

Usage of exaggerated statements for emphasis or special effect.

*Here is the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
I will swim seven seas to see you, dear!
I am so hungry that I can eat an elephant.*

9. IMAGERY:

Imagery is the use of figurative language to create a visual representation of ideas in our mind. Though it is normally associated with visual images, it is also connected with other physical senses like sense of hearing (auditory), sense of smell (olfactory), sense of touch (tactile), sense of taste (gustatory).

- *It was dark and dim in the forest.*
The words “dark” and “dim” are visual images.
- *The children were screaming and shouting in the fields.*
“Screaming” and “shouting” appeal to our sense of hearing, or auditory sense.
- *He whiffed the aroma of brewed coffee.*
“Whiff” and “aroma” evoke our sense of smell, or olfactory sense.
- *The girl ran her hands on a soft satin fabric.*
The idea of “soft” in this example appeals to our sense of touch, or tactile sense.
- The fresh and juicy orange is very cold and sweet.
“Juicy” and “sweet” – when associated with oranges – have an effect on our sense of taste, or gustatory sense.

10 IRONY:

1-Verbal Irony: The use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning.
2- Situational Irony: A situation that ends up in quite a different way than what is generally expected.
3- Dramatic Irony: This is commonly found in plays, movies and sometimes in poetry. Writers use this device for creating situations in which the audience or reader knows more about the situations and events than

the characters are aware of them. The dramatic irony happens when the character's thoughts and the audience's knowledge become contradictory.

**“Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.”** (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Samuel Coleridge)

10. LITOTES:

Expressing an affirmative idea by negating its opposite.

I am not a fool to believe that. (I am intelligent enough not to believe that)
We are citizens of India, not a mean country. (India is a great country)

11. METAPHOR:

A metaphor is an implied simile in which two unlike things are compared as they are one and the same, without using 'as' or 'like'.

He was a lion in the fight.
All the world is a stage; All the men and women merely players.

12. METONYMY:

In metonymy one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it's closely associated, such as "Crown" for "Royal power", "the Bench" for "the judges".

Pen (writer or written word) **is mightier than sword** (military power).

13. ONOMATOPOEIA:

Onomatopoeia is the use of words (such as *hiss* or *murmur*) that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to. (A word's pronunciation imitates its sound.)

A cuckoo bird.

*When the door of the cage was opened with a **bang**, the tiger jumped out with a **roar**.*

14. OXYMORON:

Use of seemingly contradictory words or expressions to talk about something.

random order, original copy, criminal justice, old news, student teacher, deafening silence, ill health, small crowd, working vacation, clearly misunderstood etc.

*She accepted it as the **kind cruelty** of the surgeon's knife.*

15. PARADOX:

In **paradox** a statement appears to be self-contradictory or silly but may include a latent truth.

*Your enemy's friend is your enemy.
"I must be cruel to be kind." (Shakespeare, Hamlet)
"Child is father of the man" (William Wordsworth)*

16. PERSONIFICATION:

In personification, inanimate objects, ideas or animals are given human qualities and spoken of as living and intelligent persons.

*Death lays **his** icy hand on Kings.*

*"When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze." (William Wordsworth)*

17. PUN:

A pun is a play on words, either on different senses of the same word or on the similar sense or sound of different words.

*Life depends upon the **liver**.
An ambassador is an honest man who **lies** abroad for the good of his country.*

18. REFRAIN:

Refrain is a poetic device that repeats some lines or parts of a poem at regular intervals in different stanzas.

*"The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,
The answer is blowin' in the wind." - (Blowin' in the Wind by Bob Dylan)*

19. RHETORICAL QUESTION:

A **rhetorical question** is asked when the questioner himself already knows the answer or an answer is not actually demanded. Such a question is used to emphasize a point or draw the audience's attention.

*"How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?" - (Blowin' in the Wind by Bob Dylan)*

20. SIMILE:

In a simile two different kinds of objects are compared using **like, as, or so**.
He was like a lion in the fight.

*"I wandered lonely **as a cloud**
That floats on high o'er vales and hills", (William Wordsworth)*

Now let's reread the poems in the X standard textbook and try to identify the poetic devices and style of composing the poets made use of.

1. A Girl's Garden by Robert Frost

This is a **narrative** poem. The poet introduces the protagonist as his neighbor who is now a grown-up woman. He makes her tell the tale of her childhood follies, a child-like thing of making a garden.

Throughout the poem, the reader envisages a life purely in a village atmosphere. For this purpose, the poet uses different **imageries**.

References to 'dung' and 'wheelbarrow' create a **visual image** of farmers' life. 'Not-nice load', referring to dung, points to the not-nice smell of the dung; and thus creates an **olfactory image** (sense of smell). The poet makes the girl 'beg the seeds to grow' and which gives the reader an **auditory image**! And at the same time, begging the seeds can also be seen as an example of the literary device **Apostrophe**.

The usage 'A hill each of potatoes...' is perfectly an example of the **Hyperbole**. This line and the succeeding lines: "A hill each of potatoes, Radishes, lettuce, peas, Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn, And even fruit trees' creates **Assonance** as well (with 'ee' and 'o:'sounds).

2. Mother to Son by Langston Hughes

This poem is a **dramatic monologue**. It is written in the **Free Verse style** which is an open form of poetry. It does not use consistent meter patterns, rhyme, or any other musical pattern. The tone of the poem is didactic, encouraging, and hopeful.

The poet excellently exploits all the possibilities of the **visual imagery** by using words like 'tacks' and 'splinters' to portrait the hardships; "boards torn up,/And places with no carpet on the floor—/Bare" to represent miseries and poverty of the mother. The word 'dark' shows hopeless condition of the mother. The use of the vernacular and dialectic language is adequate enough to draw the picture of an illiterate, poor woman in readers' imagination.

The life is compared to a crystal staircase and maintains it throughout the poem. This is an example extended **metaphor**. Crystal is smooth and glamorous, but fragile and slippery. But the mother's life has never been smooth and luxurious; whereas her struggles and efforts have always been strong, steady and sturdy.

Alliteration is sparingly used in the poem such as the "d" and "s" sounds, as in "Don't you set down on the steps." The poet has used the device of **anaphora** in that "And" is used at the beginning of many of the lines.

3. Blowin' in the Wind by Bob Dylan

In this poem, the poet asks nine questions to which no specific answers are given or expected. All the answers are known to all and blowing in the wind. These questions are the best example of the literary device **Rhetorical question**. The poet talks about the answers which are available or known easily to whoever actually wants them. He keeps on asking questions and talks about answers, without actually answering, through another device namely **Refrain**.

The first question may have a reference to civil right marches that were popular in the 1960's. How many of these walks would it take to win what they naturally have a right to?

The white doves are symbol of peace. How many doves are to be released to the sky in ceremonies commemorating peace and make them sail across seas before the day of peace really achieved?

4. The Ballad of Father Gilligan by W. B. Yeats

This poem is a perfect example of the class of poems or songs called **Ballad**. It is written in multiple stanzas of four lines each, keeping a regular rhyme-

scheme of **ABCB**. It tells a story too, the story of an old priest Father Gilligan. Though not specifically said, the setting of the poem is a country-side dwelled by poor people. The mentioning of the father's riding a horse "**by rocky lane and fen**" and phrases like "**green sod**" show us more of the settings of the poem.

The poem is rich with imageries. **Visual Imagery**: We see the dusk and the dawn with presence of moths, we see the night sky twinkling with millions of stars and we watch the whole world gets covered in darkness. Apart from this, there is also the visual imagery when the priest rides the horse. **Auditory Imagery**: we hear leaves shaking in the wind and sparrows chirping.

The two lines, "**For half his flock were in their beds,/ Or under green sods lay**", denoting that half of the villagers are either in sick-beds or in graves due to some devastating epidemic, are **metaphoric** with sick and death respectively. The lines "**... he turned and died /As merry as a bird**" is an example of the literary device **Simile**. The repetition of the line, "**The old priest, Peter Gilligan**", constitutes for the use of **Refrain** in the poem.

5. Poetry by Pablo Neruda

In the poem 'Poetry' the poet Pablo Neruda talks about poetry that arrived in search of him. He did not know where it came from, or how or when. He did not hear any voices speaking to him. He says he was summoned away by an invisible force, and the poetry touched him.

Something started in his soul, like a fever, and he made his own way, deciphering the "fire." He wrote his first feeble, faint, substance-free line, and suddenly, the heavens opened up and he could see everything from the planets to the shadows, fire, arrows and flowers, making up the universe.

Although he was an infinitesimal being, by the touch of poetry, he was suddenly elevated to a world of ecstasy, felt of himself being pure part of the abyss and was set free to wheel with the stars. He describes the whole experience as his "heart breaking loose on the wind."

Free verse is the style of the poem; passion or ecstasy is the tone. '*The poetry arrived in search of the poet and touched him*'. Assuming poetry as a person, the poetic device **Personification** is very aptly applied here.

'Winter' and 'river' represent 'frozen' but 'flowing' state of contrast. The same way, 'not voices', 'not words', 'not silence', 'pure nonsense', 'pure wisdom' are example of subtle application of the device **Contrast**. The poet has not used the end-rhyme, but instances of **assonance** in the line "**I don't**

know how or when” (internal rhyme) are there to add to the rhythm. *Alliterations* can also be seen in lines, “*and Something Started in my Soul,/ fever or forgotten wings*” and “*planets,/palpitating plantations,*”.

By the touch of the poetry, a world of ecstasy is opened in the mind of poet. Images like flowers, violent fires, the branches of night, the heavens, wings, planets, plantations, part of abyss etc. create a beautiful and a perfect *visual image* of the universe in the imagination of the reader.

6. The School Boy by William Blake.

In this poem, the poet points out the meaninglessness of the modern class-room education system. Through the perspective of a school boy, the poet asks some questions to parents. How can a bird that is born for joy sing songs when it is caged? In the same way, how can a boy who wants to be in company with the songs of the skylark and huntsman in a summer morning, sit in a classroom under the cruel eyes of teachers and forget his youthful spring?

In the poem there are a lot of visual and auditory imageries. The skylark, birds, cruel-eyed teacher, caged bird, nipped buds, stripped plants, blossoms, huntsman’s horn are *visual images*. Birds’ songs, skylark’s singing, huntsman’s blowing horn, and sighs of the school boy are examples of *auditory imageries*.

The poet compares the children to caged birds, asking, "How can the bird that is born for joy / Sit in a cage and sing?" In the next stanza, the children are nipped flower buds, or "tender plants are stripped / Of their joy in the springing day." These comparisons constitute well for the use of the poetic device *metaphor*.

Some Useful Grammatical Expressions

1. As if and As though

As if and **as though** have the same meaning. A past tense verb after **as if** or **as though** can be used with a present tense meaning to show the situation is unreal. If the verb after them is in the present tense, the situation may be real or unreal.

Example:

He behaves **as if** he **was** very rich. = (He is **not** actually rich; but behaves like a rich man)

He talks **as though** he **knows** everything. = (Perhaps he knows or does not)

2. Both...and

We should not use **both...and** before words of different categories. There should be a balancing of words of the same parts of speech when we use **both...and** to connect words or phrases, like:

Both + **adjective** + and + **adjective**: She is *both intelligent and beautiful*.

Both + **noun** + and + **noun**: I gave him *both money and food*.

Both + **verb** + and + **verb**: She *both dances and sings*.

3. Can't help...ing

Can't/cannot help doing something means that **can't stop doing** it.

I can't help screaming when I heard that I got a first rank in the exam. (Though I was careful not to do so, I could not control myself).

Can't help but + bare infinitive (base form verb) is equivalent to **can't help + ...ing** and common in AmE (US English).

I can't help but scream when I heard that I got a first rank in the exam.

4. Either...or

Either...or is used to talk about a choice between two possibilities in the positive sense. Its negative equivalent is **neither... nor**.

You can choose **either** Malayalam **or** Arabic as your second language.

5. Had better

Had better is used to give strong advice. Its meaning is rather like a threat or command than a request. *Had better* does not make a comparison or mean that the action recommended is better than another one. It shows only the urgency of doing something. It is followed by a **bare infinitive** verb.

*You **had better go** and **see** him now, otherwise he will leave.*

6. Hardly...when/before, Scarcely...when/before, No sooner...than.

These expressions are used to say that one thing happened very soon after another.

I had **hardly** entered the room **when** the light went off.
He was **scarcely** inside the room **before** he heard the sound of rats.
I had **no sooner** opened the door **than** a rat ran out.

If the sentences are begun with these expressions, the inverted word order (aux+subj+verb) is used.

Hardly **had I entered** the room when the light went off.
No sooner **had I opened** the door than a rat ran out.

7. Neither...nor

Neither...nor is used to connect two or more negative ideas. When two singular subjects are connected by **neither...nor**, the verb should be singular.

Neither the father **nor** the mother **is** at home.

8. None of

When **none of** is used with plural nouns or pronouns, the verb can be singular in formal style, and plural in informal style.

None of our students **is** failed. (Formal)
None of our students **are** failed. (Informal)

9. One of

One of is followed by a plural noun or pronoun and it takes a **singular** verb.

One of my **books is** missing.

10. Too + adjective/adverb+ to infinitive

The grammatical construction **too + adjective/adverb + to infinitive** has a negative sense. In order to get the negative sense, there should have a contrasting connotation in the total sense denoted by the **adjective/adverb** and the **to-infinitive**.

He is too tired to walk fast. (Being too tired contrasts with walking fast. So, the negative meaning is that **he is so tired that he cannot walk fast.**)

I was too busy to talk to her. (Being busy contrasts with finding time to talk. **I was so busy that I could not talk to her.**)

If the **to-infinitive** has its own subject, **for** is used to introduce it. The water is too hot **for the baby** to drink. ('Baby drinks very hot water' is a contrasting idea. So the negative connotation is clear: **The water is so hot that the baby cannot drink it.**)

11. Would rather

The grammatical expression **would rather** means **would prefer to**. If the subject of the clause/clauses is the same person, a base form (bare infinitive) verb is used after **would rather**.

*I would rather **stay** at home all the day.* (I prefer to stay at home all the day)

If the subjects are different, a simple past verb with present or future meaning is used after **would rather**.

*I would rather **you stayed** at home **now**.* (Simple past verb with present meaning - I prefer you to stay at home **now**)

***He** would rather **I met** him after a week.* (Simple past verb with future meaning - He prefers that I shall meet him after a week.)

To get a past meaning, a perfect **infinitive without to** (would+have+PP) is used after **would rather** with **the same subject**.

I would rather have gone home. (I wish I was at home, but I did not go)

To get a past meaning with different subjects, the past perfect tense verb is used after **would rather**.

*I would rather **you had stayed** at home.* (You did not stayed at home).
