

A Writer's Toolkit

*Difference between
Oxymoron, juxtaposition
and Paradox?*

Words have power

Words are used to condemn a person to death, words are used to award men and women the Nobel Prize, words are used to name people, marry people and bury people, and words are used to express to one other person the deepest thoughts and feelings any human being can experience in this life on Earth.

Words really do have power.

The more you know about the ways you can use words, the more power over language, and life, you possess; the more you know about yourself and other people. In this 'Writer's Toolkit' you will be able to see the ways writers use words, and be able to use them yourself in ways which expand your understanding and strengthen your power over language. Use this 'Writer's Toolkit' often, and be greedy to find out more about the riches our language gives to you.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sounds in words that are close to each other in order to produce a noticeable effect.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free.

from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Allusions

Allusions are references made to another person, event, legend or another work. Biblical allusions are common in literature because the Christian religion has had such a significant impact on the world and Western civilisation.

A Daniel come to judgement!

William Shakespeare,
The Merchant of Venice

Antithesis

With a tone of certainty, antithesis is putting one concise view against another, often by using balanced statements next to each other. The words are placed in contrast to each other, either direct or implied.

Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man;
and writing an exact man.

Francis Bacon

Apostrophe

Apostrophe is when you address a person or a personified idea, often using the exclamation 'O' for a dramatic effect.

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Assonance

This is a device which involves repeating the same vowel sounds with different consonant sounds: seen — deep, time — nine, pot — hod, are in assonance. It often pleases the ear, and so is also very common in slogans and advertising.

A stitch in time saves nine.

Atmosphere

In literature atmosphere means the general mood of a work or performance. It can be used with the idea of setting, when it refers to the mood of the actual place where the action takes place, or the time or season of the work.

Cliché

This is a time-worn phrase used to explain a thought or feeling.

As old as the hills.
Like a bat out of hell.

Colloquial language

Colloquial language is the language belonging to common conversation. Colloquial language includes such common abbreviations as 'don't, won't, exam' or careless language like 'ain't', and slang words like 'cobber', as well as unprintable swear words. Colloquial language includes casual language of the everyday as well as slang, and so is a more general term.

Concrete and abstract words

Concrete words are words from the everyday world of reality, while abstract words are about ideas or feelings not part of objective reality. Here is a passage which moves from the concrete world of the everyday to the abstract world of ideas:

As it is very difficult to gather together the mustard seeds that escape out of a torn package, and are scattered in all directions; so, when the human mind runs in diverse directions and is occupied with many things in the world, it is not a very easy affair to collect and concentrate it.

from *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*

Consonance

This is generally the harmony of sound, or the suiting of sound to sense. In a more technical sense it means using a different vowel sound followed by the same consonants at the end of lines: add — read, him — sham, rat — hit.

Contrast

Contrast between two ideas or a contrast between two words draws your attention to the idea being presented.

He began to hum with a desperate cheerfulness a song of the war years.

from *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene

Denouement in Hamlet

This word is from the French word 'unknotting', often loosely used to describe the ending of a story or play, but properly applied to the preparation for that conclusion. Other names are 'unravelling' and 'falling action'. After working up to a climax the author works at unravelling the threads of the knot and so draws the story to a close. A skilful writer will use other obstacles or other uncertainties to maintain interest after the climax. Shakespeare is an expert, with the climax of his plays often occurring in Act III but the two remaining acts keeping our interest even though they are in denouement.

Ellipsis

This is the omitting of words from a sentence which are necessary for strict grammatical correctness but not for meaning. Such a sentence is said to be elliptical.

Death has done all (that) death can (do).

Euphemism

This is a figure of speech in which a mild or pleasant expression replaces an unpleasant one. A dead person is often said to have 'passed on', which is a euphemistic expression. In America funeral directors are often called 'grief managers', which is another euphemism. As a word or phrase gathers negative associations, a euphemism is often used instead.

Figurative language

This is where we use expressions to add vividness or

clarity to our ideas. We use figurative language all the time in our everyday language. If you say someone 'hit the nail on the head', or 'made a mountain out of a molehill', you are using figurative language. The best writers, and especially poets, will naturally use figures which are less commonplace, to allow us to see things in a new and pleasing way.

The pale silken ribbons of the rain
Knotted, are fluttering down the window pane.

Edith Sitwell,

Whenever a writer calls on our imagination to make comparisons and transfer ideas (as in simile, metaphor, personification) or to realise that he/she is exaggerating (as in hyperbole), or that he/she means the opposite of what is said (as in irony), then the writer is using figurative language.

Formal language

Formal language is correctly formed writing or speech, appropriate to formal occasions. It is the writing and speaking associated with significant public occasions and published writing, considered to be of the highest standard in the community. You could look at some political speeches or public statements to see examples of formal language.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is the use of heightened exaggeration for an effect.

Wild horses wouldn't drag me to that party.
I'd give my right hand to go out with him.
I've told you a million times to clean your room.

Imagery

Imagery, or a mental picture, is often created by presenting an idea or an object in reference to something else, or by using vivid mental images presented to the reader. The poetic mind will see things in new ways, will see new relationships and craft them into new images.

The finest imagery will light up the subject and open new doors of meaning to deep or hidden ideas. It is not merely for decoration, but for illumination. Images can be created by using similes or personification, or by more complex metaphors or symbols.

Inversion - Used by Shakespeare

Inversion is when you change the normal order in the sentence for a particular effect.

Irony

Using irony often means suggesting the opposite of what is actually said in a literal sense. It is the conflict between appearance and reality.

Verbal irony is when a person says one thing but means another. In *Julius Caesar*, Antony is speaking ironically when he says:

I fear I wrong the honourable men
Whose daggers have stabb'd Caesar.

Socratic irony is when you adopt another person's viewpoint in order to ridicule it and/or the person. Debaters and politicians often use it.

Understatement is a form of irony, when you deliberately underplay a situation. For example, to say a family 'has a dollar or two' when they are very wealthy is understatement.

Dramatic or tragic irony is when the significance of what is said or acted on stage is hidden from the characters in the play or film, but is revealed to the audience.

Innuendo is a form of irony when you imply more than you say. Often it is something negative that you are implying. The impact lies in actually not saying what you really feel.

Jargon

This is any speech or writing which uses words which are ugly in sound or difficult to understand. In a narrow sense it is the use of technical terms which are understood only by people in a trade or profession, and not the general reader or listener (such as sporting jargon, or legal jargon).

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is linking two very different ideas together in order to focus our attention and often challenge our stereotyped view of things.

from TRAVELLING

Travelling all day, at evening
the road is hauled away
slowly from the river — that pale, cold tea
we've watched for hours.
It plunges now and
surges over
the long and shuddering
roots of a mountain range.
Cars are coming out, as if a town's near,
their lights opening.

Robert Grey

A road being 'hauled away', and mountains 'shuddering', are unusual ideas; the observations are being juxtaposed with a fresh perspective of a scene the poet has experienced. It is a unique vision of the world he sees.

Metaphor

Metaphors make a direct comparison between two objects or ideas for a specific effect or purpose. One object is directly identified with the other, and is usually a purely imaginative one in respect of one or two qualities. Metaphors used well can add vividness, conciseness or emphasis to ideas and expression.

Everyday speech is full of metaphor, e.g. 'a cutting remark', 'the heart of the matter', 'the skin of your teeth'.

The moon was a ghostly galleon, tossed upon
cloudy seas.

Alfred Noyes

Objective writing

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This is writing in which the writer's personal thoughts and feelings play no part. The writer here is concerned only with describing events or ideas external to the writer's own ideas.

Onomatopoeia

This poetic device is where the sense of the event is suggested by the sound of the words used. Sometimes it occurs in single words like 'groan', 'rattle', 'cheep', and other times in a group of words or a combination of sounds.

The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Lord Alfred Tennyson

Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a term which describes words which appear to be a contradiction, but actually reveal more by being placed together.

I must be cruel only to be kind

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

I never heard

So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Paradox

Paradox is the use of a seemingly contradictory statement that appears absurd, but which really has a thoughtful truth within it. Paradox can create a forceful statement.

The wheel humbles itself to be exalted.

I think that nature often shows her chief strangeness
in her sameness.

G.K. Chesterton

Paraphrase

This is reproducing in other words the full sense of a passage of verse or prose, with no original idea being left out. Its purpose is to convey the meaning in language more familiar to the reader.

Parody

This is the conscious imitation of another literary work, and is done often to satirise or mock. The style, ideas or rhythm of the original work can be parodied for this effect.

Personification

Personification is when objects are given living characteristics to draw attention to their impact upon a person or situation.

Sometimes whoever seek abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind.

John Keats, from 'Ode to Autumn'

Precis

This is a pruned or cut-down statement; a compressed summary of the main points of a statement or a series of pieces of writing. Its length is usually about one-third of the original, and the different points should be arranged in a proper sequence.

Repetition

Repetition can be consciously used by a writer to add force to the language. Repeating words and phrases can drive home or emphasise the thoughts and feelings of the writer or speaker.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea.

from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are questions which are not meant to be answered by the reader, but which the writer answers in the writing. It comes from a technique speakers use to obtain greater effect. It impresses the reader and can grab attention more than a plain statement.

Were there ever such unthinkable deities as parents?
I would give a great deal to know what, in nine cases
out of ten, is the child's unvarnished feeling.

from *The Sporting Spirit* by Aldous Huxley

I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: Was this ambition?

from *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

Rhythm

Rhythm is the musical flow of the language, which is produced by the pauses and stresses as shown through the punctuation, and by the ways sentences are structured and patterned in a piece of writing. There can be a very fluent rhythm in the sentences, echoes of sound and other sound patterns, and figurative language . . . all leading to a very lyrical style.

The moving, flowing, sliding sounds . . .

Sarcasm

Sarcasm uses sharp, direct and intentionally cutting words. The word sarcasm literally means fleshtearing, so it is making a remark that intentionally ridicules, or shows contempt or disapproval. Sometimes the real meaning can be hidden, but it is always personal in its intention (unlike verbal irony, which is general).

He has so many faults and defects it will be hard to
replace him in the job.

Satire

This is where human frailty is mocked in a scornful and amusing way. It often uses irony, innuendo, sarcasm as well as scorn. In most cases it is used to teach by exposing the follies and foolishness of people, but it can also be nothing more than letting go of personal feelings about someone, or something people have done.

Sentence structures

- 1 Balanced sentences are those in which the two halves of the sentence balance each other.

It will be seen that I am describing a clever man; and this is really why Doctor Sloper had become a local celebrity.

from *Washington Square* by Henry James

- 2 Loose sentences are those in which facts tumble on one after the other in a natural conversational flow.

He said he thought he was certain he had seen somebody by the rick and it was Tom Bakewell who was the only man he knew who had a grudge against Farmer Blaize and if the object had been a little bigger he would not mind swearing to Tom and would swear to him for he was dead certain it was Tom only what he saw looked smaller and it was pitch dark at the time.

from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* by George Meredith

- 3 Periodic sentences have punch-line endings, so you have to wait until the last word of the sentence to feel its real impact.

