

# The Most Common Literary Devices Used in Literature

Authors of literary text make use of what are called literary devices, in order to beautify the language of the text and convey meaning at the same time. Some literary devices are exclusive to poetry; others can be used anywhere. Some of the most commonly used literary devices are alliteration, simile, metaphor, imagery, irony, etc.

**Alliteration** is when a multiple words in a row, or close to one another, begin with the same consonant. *For example, **bad babies bother my brother***

**Assonance** repetition of vowel sounds to set the mood or add to the meaning of the word. *For example, ‘From the molten-golden notes’*

**Hyperbole** is an expression which exaggerates an action so much that it cannot possibly be true. It is often used to evoke strong feelings. *For example, the sentence “I have been waiting here forever!” uses a hyperbole.*

**Imagery/Sensory Language** is the usage of words to create a mental image in a person, by **appealing to one of our senses**. Imagery can be auditory or visual. *For example, phrases like ‘clanging bells’ or ‘sweet smelling roses’ immediately evoke images of the objects along with the associated sense once we read about them.*

**Irony** is a contextual device that causes us to have expectations that are different from the actual outcome. There are different types of irony: situational, wherein something other than what we thought would happen happens; dramatic irony, where a character does not know certain information which the audience already knows. There is also verbal irony, in which a character says something but means something else. *For example, if your doctor was smoking while talking to you about cancer, it would be ironic.*

**Onomatopoeia** is a technique of using words that are pronounced and sound just like what they represent. *For example, words such as buzz or hiss when pronounced sound like the very sound they represent.*

**Oxymoron** is a term made of two words that are opposites of each other and therefore imply each other’s opposite. *For example, ‘cruel love’ or ‘terrible beauty’, are oxymoronic terms.*

**Personification** is a technique used to give living, human characteristics to non-living objects. *For example, 'chatter of the brook' implies that a brook can perform a living action such as chattering while it cannot, but conveys the sound.*

**Metaphor** is also a comparison device, but **without words such as like or as**. *For example, 'She is a real pitbull'*

**Simile** is also a comparison device, **using words such as like or as**. *For example, 'Her voice was like a fork against a plate'*

**Rhetorical questions** are questions which are asked but seem to require no answer. They are simply language tools to convey an idea, but not actual questions which require an answer. *For example, 'If practice makes perfect, and no one's perfect, then why practice?'* This is a rhetorical question that is asked simply for its effect. The speaker would not be looking for an answer.

**Repetition** is when an author repeats a word or line multiple times to reinforce its importance to the audience. *For example, 'I do not like green eggs and ham' is repeated in Dr. Seuss' famous book to let the reader know the man is stubborn and set in his ways. It also reinforces the central message when the repetition is broken, 'I do so like green eggs and ham. Thank you, thank you, Sam-I-Am'.* Central message, you should always try something before you say you dislike it.

**Rhyme** is when words end in a similar sound. *For example, mouse and house*

These are some of the most commonly used literary devices to beautify the language used but still convey meaning.

Another purposeful choice that authors make is **varying sentence length**. A longer sentence might be used to highlight how overwhelmed a character feels, where shorter, quick sentences might be used to communicate the urgency of a situation. It's important to realize that **authors craft** their sentences purposefully to communicate more than just what's going on with the characters.