

31 Stylistic Devices for Creative Writers

Without [figurative language](#), writing would be plain and shallow. The more stylistic devices you know, the more unique your writing can be. If writing is your passion, you probably already know a dozen or so stylistic devices, but I'm betting there are a few on this list you've never heard of.

Take a look at this comprehensive list of stylistic devices and see if any might work in your current WIP (work in progress). Of course, you want to be reasonable and not go overboard with forced prose. But I'm sure you can find great places to utilize these wonderful literary techniques.

1. Adnomination

Repetition of words with the same root. The difference lies in one sound or letter. A nice euphony can be achieved by using this poetic device.

Examples: "Nobody loves no one." (Chris Isaak). Someone, somewhere, wants something.

2. Allegory

Representation of ideas through a certain form (character, event, etc.). Allegory can convey hidden meanings through symbolic figures, actions, and imagery.

Example: *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is all about the Russian Revolution. And characters stand for working and upper classes, military forces, and political leaders.

3. Alliteration

The repeated sound of the first consonant in a series of words, or the repetition of the same sounds of the same kind at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables of a phrase.

Examples: A lazy lying lion. Peter picked a peck of pickled peppers. Sally sells seashells by the seashore.

4. Allusion

Reference to a myth, character, literary work, work of art, or an event.

Example: I feel like I'm going down the rabbit hole (an allusion to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll).

5. Anaphora

Word repetition at the beginnings of sentences in order to give emphasis to them.

Example: "Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California." (Martin Luther King)

Opposite: **Epiphora**. Word repetition at the end of sentences.

Example: "And that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." (Abraham Lincoln)

6. Antithesis

Emphasizing contrast between two things or fictional characters.

Example: "Love is an ideal thing, marriage a real thing; a confusion of the real with the ideal never goes unpunished." (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

7. Apostrophe

Directed speech to someone who is not present or to an object.

Example: "Work on, my medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught." (William Shakespeare)

8. Assonance

Repetition of vowels in order to create internal rhyming.

Example: "Hear the mellow wedding bells." (Edgar Allan Poe)

Related: **Consonance**. Repetition of consonants.

9. Cataphora

Mentioning of the person or object further in the discourse.

Examples: I met him yesterday, your boyfriend who was wearing the cool hat. If you want some, here's some cheese. After he had received his orders, the soldier left the barracks.

10. Climax

Arranging text in such a manner that tension gradually ascends.

Example. He was a not bad listener, a good speaker and an amazing performer.

Opposite: **Anticlimax**. Tension descends.

11. **Charactonym** (or Speaking Name)

Giving fictional characters names that describe them.

Example: Scrooge, Snow White.

12. **Ellipsis**

Word or phrase omission.

Example: I speak lots of languages, but you only speak two (languages).

13. **Euphemism**

Replacing offensive or combinations of words with lighter equivalents.

Example: Visually challenged (blind); meet one's maker (die)

Opposite: **Dysphemism**. Replacing a neutral word with a harsher word.

14. **Epigram**

Memorable and brief saying, usually satirical.

Example: "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman." (Virginia Woolf)

15. **Hyperbole**

Exaggeration of the statement.

Example: If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times.

Opposite: **Litotes**. Understatement.

1. **Hypophora**

Asking a question and answering it right away.

Example: Are you going to leave now? I don't think so.

17. **Irony**

There are three types of irony:

- *Verbal* (Antiphrasis) – using words to express something different from their literal meaning for ironic effect ("I'm so excited to burn the midnight oil and write my academic paper all week long").
- *Situational* – result differs from the expectation (Bruce Robertson, a character of *Filth*, is a policeman. Nonetheless, he does drugs, resorts to violence and abuse, and so on).
- *Dramatic* – situation is understandable for the audience but not the fictional character/actor (audience sees that the fictional characters/actors will be killed now, though the characters don't expect it).

17. Merism

Describing people/objects by enumerating their traits.

Example: Lock, stock, and barrel (gun); heart and soul (entirety)

18. Metalepsis

Referencing one thing through the means of another thing, which is related to the first one.

Example: "Stop judging people so strictly—you live in a glass house too." (A hint at the proverb: people who live in glass houses should not throw stones.)

19. Metaphor

Comparing two different things that have some characteristics in common.

Example: "Love is clockworks and cold steel." (U2)

20. Metonymy

Giving a thing another name that is associated with it.

Example: The heir to the crown was Richard. (the crown stands for authority)

21. Onomatopoeia

Imitating sounds in writing.

Example: oink, ticktock, tweet tweet

22. Oxymoron

Combining contradictory traits.

Example: Living dead; terribly good; real magic

23. Parallelism

Arranging a sentence in such a manner that it has parallel structure.

Example: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn." (Benjamin Franklin)

Opposite: **Chiasmus**. An inverted parallelism.

Examples: "To stop, too fearful, and too faint to go." (Oliver Goldsmith); "My job is not to represent Washington to you but to represent you to Washington." (Barack Obama)

24. Parenthesis

Interrupting a sentence by inserting extra information enclosed in brackets, commas, or dashes.

Example: Our family (my mother, sister, and grandfather) had a barbeque this past weekend.

25. Personification

Attributing human characteristics to nonhumans.

Example: Practically all animals in fairy tales act like human beings. They speak and have traits that are typical of people.

26. Pun

A kind of wordplay. Here are a few types of puns:

- *Antanacsis* – repetition of the same word or phrase, but with a different meaning (“Cats like Felix like Felix.”—“Felix” catfood slogan).
- *Malapropism* – usage of the incorrect word instead of the word with a similar sound (“optical delusion” instead of “optical illusion”).
- *Paradox* – self-contradictory fact; however, it can be partially true (“I can resist anything but temptation.”—Oscar Wilde).
- *Paraprosdokian* – arranging a sentence in such a manner so the last part is unexpected (You’re never too old to learn something stupid).
- *Polyptoton* – repetition of the words with the same root (“The things you *own* end up *owning* you.”—Chuck Palahniuk).

27. Rhetorical question

Questioning without expecting the answer.

Example: Why not? Are you kidding me?

28. Simile

Direct comparison.

Example: “Your heart is like an ocean, mysterious and dark.” (Bob Dylan)

29. Synecdoche

Generalization or specification based on a definite part/trait of the object.

Example: He just got new wheels. (car)

30. Tautology

Saying the same thing twice in different ways.

Example: first priority; I personally; repeat again

31. Zeugma (or Syllepsis)

Applying a word to a few other words in the sentence in order to give different meaning.

Example: Give neither counsel nor salt till you are asked for it.