

# Literary Forms

**Literature** is any writing that concerns human existence and/or experience. Literature may be written as poetry or prose.

**Poetry** is writing that attempts to evoke an emotional reaction from the reader. Poetry takes special forms (such as rhyme) and may attempt to address a complex theme in a few words.

**Prose** is fictional or nonfictional writing that is not poetry.

**Fiction** is imaginary writing. Plot, characters, and setting sprout from an author's imagination.

**Nonfiction** is writing about true events, including factual people and places.

**Direct Speech** is an author saying exactly what he or she means in a clearly written form.

**Figures of speech** are words used to enliven writing. They add color and spirit to writing.

**Note:** When an author writes something, he may use figurative language to add flavor to the writing. Figurative language, or figures of speech, makes the writing more interesting and creates a vivid picture in the mind of the reader.

**Direct Speech:** No one has an answer to the world's problems.

**Figure of Speech:** "The answer is blowin' in the wind." – Bob Dylan

## Common Figures of Speech

**Simile** – A writer uses words to compare two things that are not alike by using words such as *like* or *as*.

A ride to North Hutchinson Island is *like a flight to a Caribbean getaway*.  
My computer is *as slow as a snail*.

**Metaphor** – A writer uses words to compare unlike things but treats them as if they are the *same*.

Stalking their prey, the deputies remained hidden, ready to catch speeding motorists.  
We could not leave because it was raining cats and dogs.

**Personification** – A writer gives human characteristics to an object, animal, or thing.

Old Man Winter arrived early this year.  
The old car appeared depressed.

**Overstatement or Hyperbole** – A writer uses exaggeration for emphasis or effect.

I'll die if I don't get accepted into nursing school.  
He has a million excuses for not mowing the yard.

**Understatement** – A writer either says something opposite to what is expected or says something less than expected.

Yes, we had *a little rain*. Many streets were closed due to flooding.

**Sound Words or Onomatopoeia** – A writer uses words to imitate an actual sound associated with the object or action that it refers to.

*buzz crackle fizz gurgle sizzle hiss*

“*Plop, plop, fizz, fizz*, oh what a relief it is.” (slogan of Alka Seltzer)

**Symbol** – A writer uses a person, place, or thing to represent an idea.

A flag is a symbol of a country.

A rose is a symbol of beauty.

A snake is a symbol of evil.

Spring (season) is a symbol of birth, youth.

**Alliteration** – A writer repeats sounds in words to create a rhythm or feeling.

The Fiero was the first to falter, falling from the field of the Daytona race.

The ball bounced briskly before Billy bumped it.

## Practice

(A) In 1994, fragments of a dying comet exploded into the moon like nuclear missiles. (B) The impact of one blast momentarily blinded the world's largest telescope. (C) The event and its aftermath awakened awed astronomers to the possibility of a similar situation shattering the Earth. (D) If such a collision were to happen, the scientists agreed, the bang would level some of the Earth's largest cities, and a resultant cloud of debris would shroud the world in darkness for months. (E) The Man in the Moon, one scientist joked, narrowly escaped a knockout punch. (F) Such a catastrophe, another said, “could certainly ruin someone's day.”

1. Which sentence or sentences contain a simile?
2. Which sentence or sentences contain an example of understatement?
3. Which sentence or sentences contain an example of personification?
4. Which sentence or sentences contain a metaphor?
5. Which sentence or sentences contain an example of alliteration?
6. Which sentence or sentences contain an example of onomatopoeia?

## Answers

1. A      2. F      3. B, D, & E      4. E      5. C      6. D