

# Literary devices

The whole pack, for printing.

sheets.works/english/literary-devices

## Figurative

### Metaphor

A thing is called another thing. No "like". No "as".

Ambition is a horse that jumps too far: [Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself](#). Life is a bad actor, then a short candle: [Out, out, brief candle](#).

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### Simile

A comparison that uses like or as.

Dickens: Scrooge is [Hard and sharp as flint](#). Shakespeare: the crown sits [like a giant's robe Upon a dwarfish thief](#).

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### Personification

A thing does a human verb.

Sleep can be murdered: [Macbeth does murder sleep](#). A day can creep: [Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow Creeps](#). Blood can want more blood: [blood will have blood](#).

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### Hyperbole

Too big on purpose.

The whole sea cannot wash his hands: [Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood](#). No perfume in Arabia can hide hers: [All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand](#).

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## Imagery

A picture you can see, smell, or touch.

She still sees the blood. She still smells it. [Out, damned spot, out, I say!](#)

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## Irony and contrast

### Irony

The result is the opposite of the boast, or the words mean the opposite of the fact.

Ozymandias says [Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!](#) Around the statue there is sand. Lady Macbeth says [A little water clears us of this deed](#) In Act 5 the water does nothing.

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### Dramatic irony

We know. The person on stage does not.

Duncan says you cannot read a face. Then Macbeth walks in. [There's no art  
To find the mind's construction in the face](#) Macbeth feels safe because [none of woman born Shall harm Macbeth](#) Macduff was cut out of his mother.

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### Juxtaposition

Two things put next to each other so we see the gap.

A flower and a snake in one plan: [Look like th' innocent flower, But be the  
serpent under 't](#) A delight that ends in death: [These violent delights have  
violent ends](#)

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## Paradox

A sentence that should not be able to be true, and is.

[Fair is foul, and foul is fair](#) Good is bad. That is the rule of the play.

Macbeth's first words copy it before he has met the witches: [So foul and fair a day I have not seen](#)

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## Sound

### Alliteration

The same first sound, close together.

[Fair is foul, and foul is fair](#) [Double, double toil and trouble](#)

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### Repetition

The same word again, so we cannot miss it.

[Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow Creeps](#) Three tomorrows. None of them mean anything. Blood wants blood: [blood will have blood](#)

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## Story

### Foreshadowing

An early line that tells you what is coming, if you are listening.

The witches' rule is spoken in scene one. Macbeth copies it in his first line.

The floating knife points him to the king's room: [Is this a dagger which I see before me](#) The Friar says the marriage will end badly, then marries them: [These violent delights have violent ends](#)

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# Symbolism

An object that keeps meaning more than itself.

Blood will not wash off. That is guilt, not dirt. [Out, damned spot, out, I say!](#)  
Sleep is peace. Macbeth murders it. [Macbeth does murder sleep](#) Marley's  
chain is every greedy thing he did. He has to wear it. [I wear the chain I  
forged in life](#)

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# Motif

The same image coming back, so the idea gets heavier.

Hands and water, from "a little water" to "out, damned spot". Night asked to  
hide a crime, first by her, then by him.

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