

Metaphor: a figure of speech concisely expressed by comparing two things, saying that one is the other. The English *metaphor* derives from the 16th c. [Old French](#) *métaphore*, from the Latin *metaphora* “carrying over”, Greek (*μεταφορά*) *metaphorá* “transfer”, from (*μεταφέρω*) *metaphero* “to carry over”, “to transfer”^[3] and from (*μετά*) *meta* “between” + (*φέρω*) *phero*, “to bear”, “to carry”. Moreover, metaphor also denotes [rhetorical figures of speech](#) that achieve their effects via association, comparison, and resemblance, e.g. [antithesis](#), [hyperbole](#), [metonymy](#), and [simile](#); all are species of metaphor.

Structure: *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), by [I. A. Richards](#), reports that **metaphor** is in two parts: the **tenor** and the **vehicle**. The tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed. The vehicle is the subject whose attributes are borrowed. Other writers employ the general terms **ground** and **figure** to denote tenor and the vehicle. Consider the [All the world's a stage](#) monologue from [As You Like It](#):

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances; — [William Shakespeare, As You Like It, 2/7](#)*

In this metaphoric example, "the world" is compared to a stage, describing it with the attributes of “the stage”; "the world" is the **tenor**, and "a stage" is the **vehicle**; "men and women" is a secondary tenor, "players" is the secondary vehicle.

In [cognitive linguistics](#), the terms **target** and **source** correspond to the terms **tenor** and **vehicle**. In this nomenclature, metaphors are named with the small-capital typographic convention TARGET IS SOURCE, and all-capitals when small-caps are unavailable; in this notation, the metaphor discussed above would be LIFE IS THEATRE. In a [conceptual metaphor](#) the elements of an extended metaphor constitute the metaphor's mapping — in the Shakespeare quotation above, exits would be mapped to “death” and entrances mapped to “birth”. a metaphor is comparing two unlike things without using like or as.

Types, terms, and categories: A metaphor is more forceful (active) than an [analogy](#), because metaphor asserts two things are the same, whereas analogy acknowledges difference; other [rhetorical](#) comparative figures of speech, such as [metonymy](#), [parable](#), [simile](#), and [synecdoche](#), are species of metaphor distinguished by how the comparison is communicated.^[7] The metaphor category also contains these specialized types:

- [allegory](#): An extended metaphor wherein a story illustrates an important attribute of the subject
- [catachresis](#): A mixed metaphor used by design and accident (a rhetorical fault)
- [parable](#): An extended metaphor narrated as an anecdote illustrating and teaching a moral lesson

Common types: A **dead metaphor** is one in which the sense of the transferred image is absent. Examples: "to grasp a concept" and "to gather what you've understood" use physical action as a metaphor for understanding, most do not visualize the action; dead metaphors normally go unnoticed. Some people distinguish between a "dead metaphor" whose origin most speakers

ignore, e.g. "to break the ice". Others use *dead metaphor* to denote both concepts, and generally use it to describe a metaphoric [cliché](#).

- An **extended metaphor (conceit)**, establishes a principal subject (comparison) and subsidiary subjects (comparisons). The *As You Like It* quotation is a good example, the world is described as a stage, and then men and women are subsidiary subjects further described in the same context.
- A **mixed metaphor** is one that leaps from one identification to a second identification inconsistent with the first. Example: "If we can hit that bullseye then the rest of the dominoes will fall like a house of cards... Checkmate." Quote from Futurama TV show character Zapp Brannigan,
- Per [Hans Blumenberg](#)'s metaphorology, **absolute metaphor** denotes a figure or a concept that cannot be reduced to, or replaced with solely conceptual thought and language. Absolute metaphors, e.g. "light" (for "truth") and "seafaring" (for "human existence") – have distinctive meanings (unlike the literal meanings), and, thereby, function as orientations in the world, and as theoretic questions, such as presenting the world as a whole. Because they exist at the pre-predicative level, express and structure [pragmatic](#) and theoretical views of Man and the World.

Uncommon types: Other types of metaphor have been identified as well, though the nomenclatures are not as universally accepted:

- An **absolute or paralogical metaphor** (sometimes called an anti-metaphor) is one in which there is no discernible point of resemblance between the idea and the image. e.g. "light" as a metaphor for truth or virtue.
- An **active metaphor** is one which by contrast to a dead metaphor, is not part of daily language and is noticeable as a metaphor.
- A **complex metaphor** is one which mounts one identification on another. Example: "That throws some light on the question." Throwing light is a metaphor: there is no actual light, and a question is not the sort of thing that can be lit up.
- A **compound or loose metaphor** is one that catches the mind with several points of similarity. Examples: "He has the wild stag's foot." This phrase suggests grace and speed as well as daring.
- A **dying metaphor** is a derogatory term coined by [George Orwell](#) in his essay [Politics and the English Language](#). Orwell defines a dying metaphor as a metaphor that isn't dead (dead metaphors are different, as they are treated like ordinary words), but has been worn out and is used because it saves people the trouble of inventing an original phrase for themselves. In short, a [cliché](#). Example: [Achilles' heel](#). Orwell suggests that writers scan their work for such dying forms that they have 'seen regularly before in print' and replace them with alternative language patterns.
- An **epic metaphor or Homeric simile** is an extended metaphor containing details about the vehicle that are not, in fact, necessary for the metaphoric purpose. This can be extended to humorous lengths, for instance: "This is a crisis. A large crisis. In fact, if you've got a moment, it's a twelve-story crisis with a magnificent entrance hall, carpeting throughout, 24-hour portorage and an enormous sign on the roof saying 'This Is a Large Crisis.'" ([Blackadder](#))

- An **implicit metaphor** is one in which the tenor is not specified but implied. Example: "Shut your trap!" Here, the mouth of the listener is the unspecified tenor.
- An **implied** or **unstated metaphor** is a metaphor not explicitly stated or obvious that compares two things by using adjectives that commonly describe one thing, but are used to describe another comparing the two.
An example: "Golden baked skin", comparing bakery goods to skin or "green blades of nausea", comparing green grass to the pallor of a nausea-stic person or "leafy golden sunset" comparing the sunset to a tree in the fall.
- A **simple or tight metaphor** is one in which there is but one point of resemblance between the tenor and the vehicle. Example: "Cool it". In this example, the vehicle, "Cool", is a temperature and nothing else, so the tenor, "it", can only be grounded to the vehicle by one attribute.
- A **submerged metaphor** is one in which the vehicle is implied, or indicated by one aspect. Example: "my winged thought". Here, the audience must supply the image of the bird.
- A **synecdochic metaphor** is a trope that is both a metaphor and a synecdoche in which a small part of something is chosen to represent the whole so as to highlight certain elements of the whole.

Use outside of rhetoric: The term metaphor is also used for the following terms that are not a part of rhetoric:

- A **cognitive metaphor** is the association of an object to an experience outside the object's environment.
- A **conceptual metaphor** is an underlying association that is systematic in both language and thought.
- A **root metaphor** is the underlying worldview that shapes an individual's understanding of a situation.
- A **therapeutic metaphor** is an experience that allows one to learn about more than just that experience.
- A visual metaphor provides a frame or window on experience. Metaphors can also be implied and extended throughout pieces of literature.

History in literature and language: Metaphor is present in the oldest written [Sumerian language](#) narrative, the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#):

My friend, the swift mule, fleet wild ass of the mountain, panther of the wilderness, after we joined together and went up into the mountain, fought the Bull of Heaven and killed it, and overwhelmed Humbaba, who lived in the Cedar Forest, now what is this sleep that has seized you? — (Trans. Kovacs, 1989)

In this example, the friend is compared to a [mule](#), a wild donkey, and a [panther](#) to indicate that the speaker sees traits from these animals in his friend (A comparison between two or more unlike objects).

The idea of metaphor can be traced back to [Aristotle](#) who, in his “Poetics” (around 335 BC), defines “metaphor” as follows: “Metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by [analogy](#).”^[8] For the sake of clarity and comprehension it might additionally be useful to quote the following two alternative translations: “Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion.”^[9] Or, as Halliwell puts it in his translation: “Metaphor is the application of a word that belongs to another thing: either from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by analogy.”^[10]

Therefore, the key aspect of a metaphor is a specific transference of a word from one context into another. With regard to the four kinds of metaphors which Aristotle distinguishes against each other the last one (transference by analogy) is the most eminent one so that all important theories on metaphor have a reference to this characterization.

The Greek plays of [Sophocles](#), [Aeschylus](#), and [Euripides](#), among others, were almost invariably allegorical, showing the tragedy of the protagonists, either to caution the audience metaphorically about temptation, or to lambast famous individuals of the day by inferring similarities with the caricatures in the play.

Novelist and essayist [Giannina Braschi](#) states, "Metaphors and Similes are the beginning of the democratic system of envy."

Even when they are not intentional, they can be drawn between most writing or language and other topics. In this way it can be seen that any [theme](#) in literature is a metaphor, using the story to convey information about human perception of the theme in question.

In historical linguistics: In historical [onomasiology](#) or, more generally, in [historical linguistics](#), metaphor is defined as semantic change based on similarity, i.e. a similarity in form or function between the original concept named by a word and the target concept named by this word.^[11]

ex. **mouse:** *small, gray rodent* → *small, gray, mouse-shaped computer device*.

Some recent linguistic theories view language as by its nature all metaphorical; or that language in essence is metaphorical.^[12]

Historical theories of metaphor:

Metaphor as style in speech and writing: Viewed as an aspect of speech and writing, metaphor qualifies as style, in particular, style characterized by a type of analogy. An expression (word, phrase) that by implication suggests the likeness of one entity to another entity gives style to an item of speech or writing, whether the entities consist of objects, events, ideas, activities, attributes, or almost anything expressible in language. For example, in the first sentence of this paragraph, the word ‘viewed’ serves as a metaphor for ‘thought of’, implying analogy of the process of seeing and the thought process. The phrase, "viewed as an aspect of", projects the properties of seeing (vision) something from a particular perspective onto thinking about

something from a particular perspective, that 'something' in this case referring to 'metaphor' and that 'perspective' in this case referring to the characteristics of speech and writing.

As a characteristic of speech and writing, metaphors can serve the poetic imagination, enabling [William Shakespeare](#), in his play "As You Like It", to compare the world to a stage and its human inhabitants players entering and exiting upon that stage; ^[13] enabling [Sylvia Plath](#), in her poem "Cut", to compare the blood issuing from her cut thumb to the running of a million soldiers, "redcoats, every one"; ^[14] and, enabling [Robert Frost](#), in "The Road Not Taken", to compare one's life to a journey. ^[15]

Viewed also as an aspect of speech and writing, metaphor can serve as a device for persuading the listener or reader of the speaker-writer's argument or thesis, the so-called rhetorical metaphor....

Metaphor as foundational to our conceptual system: Cognitive linguists emphasize that metaphors serve to facilitate the understanding of one conceptual domain, typically an abstract one like 'life' or 'theories' or 'ideas', through expressions that relate to another, more familiar conceptual domain, typically a more concrete one like 'journey' or 'buildings' or 'food'. ^{[16][17]}
Food for thought: we devour a book of raw facts, try to digest them, stew over them, let them simmer on the back-burner, regurgitate them in discussions, cook up explanations, hoping they do not seem half-naked nigga. Theories as buildings: we establish a foundation for them, a framework, support them with strong arguments, buttressing them with facts, hoping they will stand. Life as journey: some of us travel hopefully, others seem to have no direction, many lose their way.

A convenient short-hand way of capturing this view of metaphor is the following:
CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (A) IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (B), which is what is called a conceptual metaphor. A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another. A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience. Thus, for example, we have coherently organized knowledge about journeys that we rely on in understanding life. ^[17]

How does this relate to the nature and importance of our conceptual system, and to metaphor as foundational to our conceptual system?

More Than Just a Figure of Speech: Not only are metaphors a figure of speech, in which a term or phrase is applied to something, but it also has another context. Metaphors are pervasive in everyday life. Not just in language, but also in thought and action. A common definition of a metaphor can be described as a comparison that shows how two things that are not alike in most ways, are similar in another important way. In a book titled *Metaphors We Live By*, written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson they describe the essence of a metaphor. They explain how a metaphor is simply understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. To help better describe this the authors came up with the phrase 'conduit metaphor.' With this they meant that a speaker can put ideas or objects into words or containers, and then send them along a channel, or conduit to a listener who take that idea or object out of the container and makes meaning of it. In other words, communication is something that ideas go into. It's separate from

the ideas themselves. In the book the authors have written, they give several examples of daily metaphors in which we use. A couple may be, “argument is war” and “time is money.” One that I have heard many times is “everyday is a holiday.” These metaphors are used in order to help us decipher meanings to certain phrases and words. Often times people understand ideas depending on the context. Metaphors are widely used in context to describe personal meaning. The authors also state how Communication can be viewed as a machine. “Communication is not what one does with the machine, but is the machine itself.” (Johnson, Lakoff, 1980). -Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By* (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), Chapters 1-3. (pp. 3-13).