The Top 25 Figures of Style
also called rhetorical figures

**Alliteration**: The repetition of an initial consonant sound.
*Example*: "My father brought to conversations a cavernous capacity for caring that dismayed strangers." (John Updike, The Centaur, 1962)

**Allusion**: a brief, informally introduced reference to a fairly well-known event, place, text, or person
*Example*: “Don't be a Scrooge! (reference to A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens)”

**Anaphora**: The repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses. (Contrast with epiphora and epistrophe where the same phrase appears at the end of successive clauses.)
*Example*: "It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. It rained all over the place." (Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye, 1951)

**Antithesis**: The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced phrases.
*Example*: "Everybody doesn't like something, but nobody doesn't like Sara Lee." (advertising slogan)

**Apostrophe**: Breaking off discourse to address some absent person or thing, some abstract quality, an inanimate object, or a nonexistent character.
*Example*: "O western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?" (anonymous, 16th c.)

**Assonance**: Identity or similarity in sound between internal vowels in neighboring words.
*Example*: "Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea." (W.B. Yeats, "Byzantium")

**Chiasmus**: A verbal pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed.
*Example*: "You forget what you want to remember, and you remember what you want to forget." (Cormac McCarthy, The Road, 2006)

**Climax**: organizing ideas in writing so that they proceed from the least to the most important.
*Example*: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." -- John 1:1-2 (KJV)
**Euphemism:** The substitution of an inoffensive term for one considered offensively explicit. (Circumlocution)

**Example:** Mr. Prince: We'll see you when you get back from image enhancement camp.

Martin Prince: Spare me your euphemisms! It's fat camp, for Daddy's chubby little secret! ("Kamp Krusty," The Simpsons, 1992)

**Hyperbole:** An extravagant statement; the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect.

**Example:** "I bent over and took hold of the room with both hands and spun it. When I had it nicely spinning I gave it a full swing and hit myself on the back of the head with the floor." (Raymond Chandler, "Pearls Are a Nuisance," 1939)

**Irony:** A statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea. There are three types of irony:

- **Verbal** The use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. **Example:** "Gentlemen, you can't fight in here! This is the War Room." (Peter Sellers as President Merkin Muffley in Dr. Strangelove, 1964)

- **Dramatic** when the audience knows more about the situations, the causes of conflicts and their resolutions before leading characters. **Example:** Oedipus seeks to expose the murderer of King Laius to solve the riddle; the audience knows he himself is murderer. (Sophocles, Oedipus Rex)

- **Situational / Historical** The difference between what is expected to happen and what actually happens. **Example:** Gunpowder was discovered in an attempt to find the elixir of immortality.

**Litotes:** A figure of speech consisting of an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite.

**Example:** "Are you also aware, Mrs. Bueller, that Ferris does not have what we consider to be an exemplary attendance record?" (Jeffrey Jones as Principal Ed Rooney, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, 1986)

**Metaphor:** An implied comparison between two unlike things that actually have something important in common.

**Example:** "The streets were a furnace, the sun an executioner." (Cynthia Ozick, "Rosa")

**Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it's closely associated; also, the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it.

**Example:** "In a corner, a cluster of lab coats made lunch plans." (Karen Green, Bough Down 2013)

**Onomatopoeia:** The use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.

**Example:** "Brrrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiininng! An alarm clock clanged in the dark and silent room." (Richard Wright, Native Son 1940)
**Oxymoron**: A figure of speech in which incongruous or contradictory terms appear side by side.
Example: "How is it possible to have a civil war?" (George Carlin)

**Paradox**: A statement that appears to contradict itself, but which often reveals a greater truth.
Example: "Wise fool"

**Parenthesis**: A form of hyperbaton wherein a word, phrase, or sentence is inserted into a complete sentence as an aside.
Example: "And remember that life's A Great Balancing Act. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed) KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!" (Dr Seuss *Oh, the Places You'll Go*)

**Personification**: A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstraction is endowed with human qualities or abilities.
Example: "Oreo: Milk’s favorite cookie." (slogan on a package of Oreo cookies)

**Polysyndeton**: Use of a conjunction between each clause.
(see also its opposite, asyndeton, which is omission of conjunctions between words, phrases or clauses).
Example: Milton says that Satan, in his course through Chaos, “pursues his way, / And swims or sings, or wades, or creeps, or flies. (Paradise Lost)

**Pun**: A play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words.
Example: Kings worry about a receding heir line.

**Rhetorical Question**: a question in which the answer is implied. The audience gains pleasure from “filling in the blank” mentally.
Example: “How many times do I have to tell you not to yell in the house?”

**Simile**: A stated comparison (usually formed with "like" or "as") between two fundamentally dissimilar things that have certain qualities in common.
Example: “She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat." (James Joyce, "The Boarding House")

**Synecdoche**: A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole (for example, ABCs for alphabet) or the whole for a part ("England won the World Cup in 1966").
Example: "And let us mind, faint heart n’er wan/ A lady fair." (Robert Burns, "To Dr. Blalock")

**Tricolon**: a three unit pattern, e.g. a series of three parallel words, phrases, or clauses. Three-fold patterns are memorable.
Example: “I came, I saw, I conquered” (Julius Caesar)