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Understanding the difference between simile and metaphor is essential for anyone looking to enhance their writing and communication skills. Both are powerful literary devices that use comparison to create vivid imagery, but they do so in distinct ways. This blog explores their definitions, purposes, examples, and types, helping readers grasp when and how to use each effectively to enrich language, add depth to descriptions, and express ideas more creatively. Similes are metaphorical languages that use the terms like or as to compare two objects. They are pronounced SIM-i-lee. An indirect comparison is another name for it. Examples of Simile As brave as a lion (Compares someones courage to that of a lion.) She sings like an angel (Compares her singing voice to the beauty of an angels.) Hes as fast as lightning (Shows he runs extremely fast.) The basic structure of a simile is X is similar to Y. The comparison makes use of a connector such as like or as. I think thats about all. You should be aware, though, that a sentence is not necessarily a simile merely because it contains the words like or as. Similes are utilised in descriptive writing because they are literary devices. For example, She acts just like her father is not a simile if her fathers behaviour is indeed comparable to hers. A simile, however, is when you write, She and her father are like two peas in a pod. They are like two peas in a pod, yet she and her father are not vegetables. Also Read: Simile and Metaphor Worksheet for Classes 4 to 8: Free PDF A metaphor is a figure of speech in which two dissimilar things are directly compared by stating one is the other, without the use of like or as. Its employed to establish vivid imagery and enrich language. Examples of Metaphor Time is a thief. (Time is compared to a thief because it steals moments from our lives.) He has a heart of stone. (This suggests he is very cold or unfeeling.) The world is a stage. (From Shakespeare, meaning life is like a play and we are all actors.) Four components make up a metaphors structure: ComponentMeaningVehicleThe term that expresses the metaphors meaning. The vehicle in the aforementioned example, Your answer is crystal clear, is crystal.TenorThe idea is that the response is simple to understand.GroundThe relationship between the objects under comparison. Transparency and clarity are characteristics shared by the crystal and the response. They are being compared on the basis of this clarity.TensionThe difference between the items is the source of tension. Unless youre at a gem exhibit, where you might be discussing a pun, the answer itself isnt a crystal. When it comes to figurative language, metaphor is a more expansive category than simile. While similes are simple to set up, metaphors can take many different shapes. There are several types of metaphors: standard, implied, sustained, dead, or mixed. TypesMeaningExamplesStandard metaphorA direct comparison between two unrelated things without using like or as.The classroom was a zoo.'(Compares the noisy classroom to a zoo directly.)Implied metaphorThe comparison is suggested but not directly statedone of the things being compared is implied.She barked instructions at the team.'(Implies she is like a dog without saying it outright.)Sustained metaphorA metaphor that is developed over several lines or sentences, sometimes throughout a paragraph or poem.Life is a journey. We start with a map, encounter roadblocks, and navigate detours to reach our destination.'(The metaphor of life as a journey is extended.)Dead metaphorA metaphor that has been used so often that it has lost its original imagery and is now taken literally or goes unnoticed.He caught her attention.'(Originally metaphorical, but now its so common we dont picture someone physically catching attention.)Mixed metaphorA combination of two or more metaphors that dont quite fit together, often creating a confusing or humorous result.Well burn that bridge when we get to it.'(Mixes burning bridges and crossing a bridge when we get to ittwo unrelated metaphors.) Also Read: Definition & 150+ Examples of Similes with Sentences Similes help readers understand by making direct comparisons using like or as. Whereas metaphors help readers feel or reflect by stating something is something else, often with symbolic meaning. To learn more about the difference between simile and metaphor, refer to the following table: AspectSimileMetaphorBasic DefinitionA simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things using words like like or as.A metaphor is a figure of speech where one thing is described as being another, without using like or as.How the Comparison WorksIt shows the similarity between two different things by using connecting words.Example: Her smile is like sunshine.It treats one thing as if it actually were the other, to create a strong or symbolic comparison.Example: Her smile is sunshine.Connecting WordsAlways uses like, as, than, resembles, etc. to show the comparison.No connecting words are used. The comparison is implied or directly stated.Clarity and SimplicityUsually easier to understand as the comparison is clear and straightforward.Often more poetic, symbolic, or abstract, requiring the reader to think or interpret.Usage in WritingCommon in descriptive writing, essays, and everyday speech to make descriptions more vivid and relatable.Frequently used in poetry, literature, and speeches to add depth, emotion, or to symbolize complex ideas.Purpose or EffectTo create a clear picture in the readers mind by comparing something unfamiliar to something familiar.To create a powerful or imaginative image, often suggesting deeper meaning or symbolism.Example in LiteratureHe was as busy as a bee. This gives the image of someone working hard, like a bee does.Time is a thief. Time doesnt literally steal, but this metaphor suggests how time takes away moments from our lives.Tone and StyleOften more casual and explanatory, perfect for narrative or explanatory writing.More intense, artistic, or dramatic, giving the writing a poetic or philosophical tone.Use in Education or SpeechSimiles are often used when teaching or explaining something unfamiliar.Metaphors are used to inspire, persuade, or evoke strong emotion in formal writing and speeches.Example in PoetryMy love is like a red, red rose. Robert Burns (emphasizes beauty and freshness through comparison).All the worlds a stage. William Shakespeare (suggests life is a performance, with each person playing a role). In literature, a simile clarifies meaning by comparing two things using like or as, enhancing imagery and relatability. A metaphor offers deeper symbolism, expressing abstract or emotional ideas by stating one thing is another, enriching the texts meaning. You can explore other difference between simile and metaphor in the following table: AspectSimileMetaphorMain PurposeTo create clear, vivid, and relatable comparisons that help readers visualize or understand an idea.To offer deeper, symbolic, or emotional meaning, often transforming the ordinary into something poetic.Emotional ImpactSimiles lightly enhance emotion or tone by showing a likeness.Metaphors often intensify emotional depth by making a stronger, more imaginative connection.Visual ImageryUsed to paint a picture in the readers mind through comparisons they can easily recognize.Used to evoke layered imagery or abstract ideas through symbolic language.Clarity vs. SuggestionMakes things more explicit and accessibleespecially good for younger readers or casual tone.Often suggestive or layeredleaves room for interpretation and engages the readers imagination.Function in PoetryAdds rhythm, charm, and visual detail without overpowering the meaning.Serves as a central poetic devicesometimes carrying the entire theme or message.Function in ProseHelps in character description, setting, or mood in a straightforward way.Often used to explore themes, abstract ideas, or philosophical concepts.SymbolismUsually literal and surface-levelthe comparison is direct.Often symbolic or philosophical, linking unrelated things in meaningful ways.Reader EngagementMakes the text more relatable and understandable.Makes the reader think more deeply, analyze, or emotionally connect.Example of PurposeThe clouds were like cotton balls. helps visualize the sky.The clouds were ghosts in the sky. gives the scene a haunting, emotional atmosphere. Similes and metaphors both use language to accomplish the same goal: to use comparison to describe. In certain situations, similes and metaphors can even be used interchangeably. Returning to the father-daughter example, you may use the metaphor they are two peas in a pod or the simile they are like two peas in a pod. In both cases, the message is the same. Also Read: Metaphor Definition with Examples: Types and List Q1: What is the difference between a metaphor and a simile? Explain with examples. A simile uses the terms like or as to compare two things. For instance, there seemed to be a million people at the event. A metaphor replaces one thing with another, making the contrast directly. Q2: What is a metaphor and a simile for kids? Metaphors and similes are similar, yet they are only comparisons in different ways. Metaphors dont need like or as, whereas similes need. All they say is what they want to say. I genuinely adore you, to use a metaphor. To hang with you is as simple as pie (simile). Q3: What is a metaphor in poetry? A common creative method is metaphor, which describes an object or the subject of a poem as being the same as another object that is otherwise unrelated. Related Reads We hope this blog on Difference Between Simile and Metaphor helps you improve your English skills. You can also follow the Learn English page of Leverage Edu for more exciting and informative blogs related to English grammar and the English language. Table of contents Have you ever heard someone use the word literally and thought, They cant really mean literally. There were not literally a million people at the concert. That final exam did not literally kill them.What they mean to say is that the concert was so crowded it felt like there were a million people packed together, or that the test was so difficult it drained their mental energy. These are perfect instances to usesimile andmetaphor, figures of speech that compare one thing to another.A simile makes a comparison using the words like or as.Example: The concert was so crowded, it felt like a million people were there.A metaphor makes the comparison directly, substituting one thing for another.Example: That test was a killer.A simile is a type of metaphor, meaning all similes are metaphors, however, not all metaphors are similes. Below well break down the differences between them and explain when to use one or the other. Grammarly helps you communicate confidently What is a simile?A simile (pronounced SIM-i-lee) isfigurative language that compares two things using the words like or as. It is also known as an indirect comparison.As a writer, similes give you the power to create vivid imagery and descriptions for your reader.If you write that someone is . . .as thin as a rail.as American as apple pie.like an open book.Then youre writing in similes. The person youre writing about does not literally have the same width as a rail. The comparison between the character and a rail creates a better image for your reader than saying, Shes skinny.How are similes structured?Similes have a simple structure: X is like Y. The comparison uses like, as, or another connector. And thats pretty much it.However, its important to note that just because a phrase has the word like or as doesnt automatically make it a simile. A simile is aliterary device, which means its used indescriptive writing.For example, if you write, She acts just like her father, thats not a simile if her behavior is actually similar to that of her father. But if you write, She and her father are like two peas in a pod, then youve written a simile. She and her father are not vegetables; they are similar to each other in the way two peas in a pod are similar to each other. Do you see the difference here?When to avoid similesSimiles are a great way to enhance your writings imagery, but use them too often and your reader may become confused or even bored.Imagine reading a passage where three characters are described as brave as a lion, busy as a bee, and cold as ice. All three similes are descriptive on their own, but when packed together, they lose their power. Similes are like accessoriesthey can enhance an outfit, or they can overwhelm it.What is a metaphor?A metaphor is a direct comparison between two things. Metaphors dont suggest one thing is like another; they declare that one thing is another: Love is a battlefield. He is the black sheep of the family. You are my lucky star.Metaphors are abundant in our language, and often you wont even know youre using them.If someone asks, Do I make myself clear?And you answer, Crystal.Youve replied using a metaphor. Their request has the same clarity as a transparent crystal.How are metaphors structured?The structure of a metaphor is based on four elements:Vehicle: The word that conveys the meaning of the metaphor. In the above example, Your answer is crystal clear, the vehicle is crystal.Tenor: What is being conveyedthat the answer is easily understood.Ground: The connection between the things being compared. The answer and the crystal both have the element of transparency and clarity. This clarity is the ground they are being compared on.Tension: The difference between the things. The answer itself is not a crystal, unless youre at a gem showin which case, you might be talking about apun. Types of metaphorsMetaphor is a broader category offigurative language than simile. Unlike similes, with their straightforward setup, metaphors can appear in many forms. A metaphor can be standard, implied, sustained, dead, or mixed.A standard metaphor succinctly states one thing is another.Example: You are my sunshine.An implied metaphor creates an extra level of depth by creating a comparison that relies on prior knowledge.Example: You bring warmth and light into my life.The you in this sentence is being compared to the sun, a source of warmth and light, without it being directly mentioned.A sustained metaphor carries on through multiple sentences, paragraphs, or even an entire work. These are also called extended metaphors.Example: Maya Angelous poem Caged Bird is an extended metaphor. The free bird is a metaphor for a free person; the caged bird is a metaphor for an oppressed person. These metaphors are expanded upon through the entire poem.A dead metaphor is a metaphor that has been used so frequently that it no longer has literary power.Examples: The hands of the clock; the foot of the bed; the last leg of the trip.All these phrases contain metaphorsa clock does not have anatomical hands any more than a bed has an anatomical foot. These are such common phrases, however, that we barely think of them as metaphors.A mixed metaphor occurs when you layer two different metaphors on one another. Usually this happens by accident, especially if youre using dead metaphors.Example: Early bird gathers no moss. Rolling stone catches the worm, right? The Truman ShowThis example is a bit facetious. Its clear the writer purposely mixed those metaphors for comedic effect. But the point made is clear: The phrases early bird catches the worm and a rolling stone gathers no moss make sense on their own, but they create ridiculous, nonsensical statements when combined.What are the similarities between simile and metaphor?Similes and metaphors use language to achieve the same thing: Create a description by using comparison. There are even some instances in which similes and metaphors are interchangeable. To return to the father-daughter example, you could say they are like two peas in a pod (simile) or they are two peas in a pod (metaphor). The message is the same in both instances.What are the differences between simile and metaphor?When you start to create more complex or elongated comparisons, its worth thinking through the differences between simile and metaphor. Two things to consider when deciding which one to use are strength and scale.Strength: Because a metaphor is more direct (one thing is another thing), its a slightly stronger comparison. You should use metaphors to emphasize the comparison between the two things. A simile, on the other hand, is more like a suggestion. It plants the image in the readers head, but then the writing continues. Similes are better for descriptions you dont want a reader to dwell on for too long.Scale: Metaphors and similes also work on different scales. Similes are restricted to the sentence level, whereas metaphors can stretch to include an entire work. For example, there are dozens of theories about what the movie The Matrix is a metaphor for. You arent likely to hear that a complete work is a simile for something else. That would require a lot of likes.Simile vs. metaphor examplesOne of the most famous examples of a simile in pop culture is from the movie Forrest Gump. Forrest, sitting on a park bench and eating a box of chocolates, tells a stranger:My momma always said, Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what youre gonna get.Did you spot the simile? In an earlier scene, Forrests mother tells him:Life is a box of chocolates, Forrest. You never know what youre gonna get.Did you spot the metaphor? The box of chocolates phrase has a simile version and a metaphor version. Funnily enough, neither version is Life is like a box of chocolates, the quote that most people remember from the movie.Below are more examples of similes and metaphors in literature.Examples of simile in literatureThe caf was like a battleship stripped for action.The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway Time has not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away, as if Im nothing more than a woman of sand, left by a careless child too near the water.The Handmaids Tale by Margaret Atwood I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high oer vales and hills.Daffodils by William Wordsworth Examples of metaphor in literatureAll the worlds a stage,And all the men and women merely players.As You Like It by William Shakespeare Well, son, Ill tell you:Life for me aint been no crystal stair.Its had tacks in it,And splinters,And boards torn up,And places with no carpet on the floorBare.Mother to Son by Langston Hughes (The entire poem is a sustained metaphor.) Behind him, sitting on piles of scrap and rubble, was the blue kite. My key to Babas heart.The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini Simile and metaphor FAQsWhat is a simile?A simile is a comparison between two things using the word like or as to connect them. Example: He smothers our enthusiasm like a wet blanket.What is a metaphor?A metaphor is a comparison between two things that declares one thing is another. Example: Hes a wet blanket.What are the key similarities between similes and metaphors?Both similes and metaphors use comparisons between unlike things to create vivid imagery and more complex descriptions for the reader.How do similes and metaphors differ?Similes are indirect comparisons that use the word like or as. Metaphors are direct comparisons that state one thing is another. Metaphor is the broader of the two termsit encompasses a range of comparisons, from sentences to entire works. Similes are limited to sentences. Ask the Editor Question What is the difference between a simile and a metaphor?Steven B., United States Answer Similes and metaphors are both figures of speech that are used to make a comparison between two things that are not alike. The difference is that similes make the comparison by saying that something is like something else but metaphors make the comparison by saying that something is something else.A simile says that one thing "is like" or "is as as" another thing. A metaphor says that one thing "is" another thing. Metaphors do not use the words "like" or "as" in their comparisons.Here are some examples of similes:Life is like a box of chocolates.He was as blind as a bat without his glasses.Her mother was as sharp as a tack. [=her mother was very smart]The kids were fighting like cats and dogs.He swims like a fish. [=he is a good swimmer]Here are some examples of metaphors:The world is your oyster.His computer was a dinosaur. [=his computer was very old]The puppy was the ray of sunshine the family needed.She is a night owl. [=she likes to stay up late at night]But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. (Shakespeare) I hope this helps. You can read more articles in the archive. Understanding the difference between metaphors and similes is crucial for mastering figurative language in both writing and speech. These literary devices use comparisons to create vivid imagery, enhancing communication and engagement across various contexts. One key insight is that effective use of these tools depends on clarity and examples, making it easier to distinguish their roles.This article aims to define metaphors and similes, highlight their differences, and explore their practical applications. From creative storytelling to persuasive communication and beyond, youll learn how to use these devices effectively and avoid common mistakes. Additionally, tips for crafting original comparisons will help you elevate your figurative language skills.The Basics: What Are Metaphors and Similes?Metaphors and similes are foundational tools in figurative language aimed at creating comparisons, but they operate differently. Each has its structure and purpose within communication.What is a Simile?A simile explicitly compares two different things to clarify or emphasize their similarity. Similes are easy to recognize as they typically use like or as as linguistic markers.Similes work by comparing one object, action, or quality to another and highlighting specific traits.The formula for a simile often includes the structure: [Subject] + is like or as [adjective] as + [Object].For example, in the phrase Her smile was as radiant as the sun, the words asas signal the similes presence.What is a Metaphor?Metaphors differ from similes by making direct comparisons without the use of like or as. They assert that one thing is another, creating a more implicit connection.Metaphors drive deeper understanding by blending two ideas directly, enabling vivid mental imagery.For instance, Her smile was the sun, lighting up the room suggests equivalence rather than comparison.Metaphors are commonly used in branding and persuasive writing to evoke emotion and strengthen messaging, such as The world is your oyster.What Is an Analogy, and How Does It Relate?Analogies are broader constructs that incorporate both metaphors and similes. They explain relationships between concepts to make abstract ideas more accessible.Analogies may include both simile-like phrases (The mind is like a muscle) and metaphorical statements (The mind is a powerful engine).They compare processes and relationships rather than individual traits, making them versatile for teaching or problem-solving.For example, Battery life is to smartphones what fuel is to vehicles illustrates how analogies simplify complex comparisons.How to Tell the Difference Between Metaphors and SimilesAlthough metaphors and similes both create comparisons, their differences in structure can help you spot them more easily.How Can You Quickly Identify a Simile or Metaphor?Similes are straightforward to identify due to their reliance on explicit markers like like or as. For instance:Simile: Hes as brave as a lion.Simile: The sound was like a whisper carried by the wind.Conversely, metaphors rely on implicit comparisons and eliminate cues like like or as, as seen in:Metaphor: He was a lion on the battlefield.Metaphor: The sound whispered across the forest.Metaphors demand more interpretation, as they imply equivalence rather than resemblance.Examples of Metaphors vs. Similes Side-by-SideThe following side-by-side examples emphasize the structural and conceptual differences:Similes:Her voice is like velvet.He moved as gracefully as a ballerina.Metaphors:Her voice is velvet, soft, and smooth.He was a ballet in motion, fluid and elegant.Visualizing the Difference with ComparisonsInteractive tools like Canva or infographics can simplify students' or readers' understanding of these distinctions. A T-chart, for example, can compare examples side by side to reinforce claritya method often employed in educational settings.Examples of Similes and Metaphors in UsePractical examples clarify how similes and metaphors enhance communication across both creative and functional contexts.Creative Similes for LanguageSimiles excel at adding flavor and specificity to language, especially in storytelling:In casual scenarios: As confused as a tourist without a map.For dramatic imagery: His voice hit me like waves crashing against a rocky shore.These add color to narratives, making them more engaging and relatable.Popular Metaphor Usage in Speech and WritingMetaphors often evoke strong emotional responses and are widely used in formal communication:Branding metaphors: Phrases like Think outside the box resonate in marketing campaigns.In rhetorical writing, metaphors pair with other devices to emphasize key points: The path to success is paved with failures.Using metaphors effectively requires understanding the emotional undertones they carry.Applications Beyond Everyday UsageSimiles enrich poetic works by creating a rhythmic quality, while metaphors dominate persuasive genres such as political speeches. Both tools serve unique purposes, whether in capturing attention or enhancing narrative depth.Common Mistakes When Using Similes and MetaphorsMisusing figurative language can detract from its intended impact. By understanding common challenges, such as mixing metaphors, you can avoid confusion in communication.What Mistakes Do Writers Make with Figurative Language?One frequent error is blending multiple metaphors within a single comparison, creating incoherence. For example:Incorrect: Climbing the ladder of success is a jungle of obstacles.Instead, simplify to: Climbing the ladder of success is fraught with obstacles.Tone alignment is also essentialfigurative language must match the audience and purpose.Overused or Clich ComparisonsRelying on tired expressions, such as as cold as ice, dilutes creativity. Instead, invent fresh comparisons by focusing on specific imagery, such as as chilling as a December evening.How Educators Can Clarify MisuseTeachers can address these issues using structured activities:Venn diagrams for visual distinctions between similes and metaphors.Exercises where students create both similes and metaphors based on prompts.According to a 2024 educational study from the Language Learning Institute, tools like these significantly enhance student comprehension.Benefits and Tips for Using Figurative Language EffectivelyMastering figurative language enriches communication, making it more dynamic and memorable. The following strategies offer guidance for honing your skills.Tips for Crafting Your SimilesBrainstorming tools like Canva can help spark creativity by visualizing connections between objects. Aim to:Avoid vague ideasfocus on specific, unexpected imagery.Experiment with contrasts for added depth, e.g., bright as neon but as unfeeling as stone.Enhancing Writing with MetaphorsMetaphors are ideal for emotional resonance. Writing aids like Grammarly help identify where metaphors may strengthen text flow or emphasis.Choose metaphors that align with the mood of your writing.Avoid abstract metaphors unless clearly contextualized for your audience.According to a 2023 study by the University of Creative Writing, using well-placed metaphors improves engagement by 27% in narrative writing.Mastering Figurative Language Across ContextsAnalogies combine the best of both worlds, making them powerful for explaining abstract ideas. Whether in teaching, branding, or storytelling, figurative language bridges comprehension gaps effectively.Figurative language is a tool for clarity, creativity, and emotional connection. Similes provide direct comparisons, while metaphors imply deeper relationships. Analogies integrate both into structured explanations, offering a holistic approach. By understanding their individual strengths and practicing creative applications, you can enhance the dynamism and impact of your writing.The terms metaphor and simile are slung around as if they meant exactly the same thing.A simile is a metaphor, but not all metaphors are similes.Metaphor is the broader term. In a literary sense metaphor is a rhetorical device that transfers the sense or aspects of one word to another. For example:The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas. The Highwayman, Alfred NoyesHere the moon is being compared to a sailing ship. The clouds are being compared to ocean waves. This is an apt comparison because sometimes banks of clouds shuttling past the moon cause the moon to appear to be moving and roiling clouds resemble churning water.A simile is a type of metaphor in which the comparison is made with the use of the word like or its equivalent:My love is like a red, red rose. Robert BurnsThis simile conveys some of the attributes of a rose to a woman: ruddy complexion, velvety skin, and fragrant scent.She sat like Patience on a Monument, smiling at Grief. Twelfth Night William ShakespeareHere a woman is being compared to the allegorical statue on a tomb. The comparison evokes unhappiness, immobility, and gracefulness of posture and dress.Some metaphors are apt. Some are not. The conscientious writer strives to come up with fresh metaphors.A common fault of writing is to mix metaphors.Before Uncle Jesse (Dukes of Hazzard) did it, some WWII general is reputed to have mixed the metaphor Dont burn your bridges, meaning Dont alienate people who have been useful to you, with Dont cross that bridge before you come to it, meaning Dont worry about what might happen until it happens to create the mixed metaphor: Dont burn your bridges before you come to them.Many metaphors are used so often that they have become clich. We use them in speech, but the careful writer avoids them: hungry as a horse, as big as a house, hard as nails, as good as gold.Some metaphors have been used so frequently as to lose their metaphorical qualities altogether. These are dead metaphors.In our own time we have seen the word war slip into the state of a dead metaphor: the war on drugs, the war on poverty, the war on AIDS. In these uses the word means little more than efforts to get rid of and not, as the OED has it: Hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state; the employment of armed forces against a foreign power, or against an opposing party in the state.In a sense, all language is metaphor because words are simply labels for things that exist in the world. We call something a table because we have to call it something, but the word is not the thing it names.A simile is only one of dozens of specific types of metaphor. For a long and entertaining list of them, see the Wikipedia article on Figure of Speech.Are All Cliches Metaphors?No. Many metaphors (some of which are similes) have become clichs through overuse think of things like dead as a doornail, blue sky thinking, plenty more fish in the sea, and he has his tail between his legs.So many clichs are metaphors. But there are also some clichd phrases that arent metaphors at all, such as:To be honestLets face itIt goes without sayingBeen there, done that.(For a long list of clichs, many of them metaphors, check out 681 Clichs to Avoid in Your Creative Writing).Should You Use Similes and Metaphors in Your Writing?All types of metaphor, including similes, can be appropriate in writing.Even clichs can be used in some circumstances for instance, you might use them in dialog when writing fiction, either to help give the impression of realistic speech, or to assist in characterisation (perhaps one of your characters has a tendency to speak in clichs).When youre using similes and metaphors, you should:Pay careful attention to any worn or tired phrasings you use. Phrases like fishing for compliments or bubbly personality are metaphors that you might barely notice. Theyre fine if youre chatting to a friend, but not necessarily appropriate in formal writing.Be careful with extended metaphors. While these can be used to great literary effect, they may come across as overdone or forced in modern writing. (An extended metaphor is one that runs with the comparison over several sentences, e.g. Shakespeares All the worlds a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They havetheirexits andtheirentrances, Andone man in his time plays many parts,Hisacts being seven ages. From As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII.Check you havent mixed two different metaphors. Again, this is easy to do with metaphors that have become part of everyday language. However, youll want to avoid writing sentences like We need to think outside the box and sow the seeds to drive us forward or It might feel like were out of the frying pan and into the fire, but once weve crossed the next bridge, well be able to get a birds eye view of the situation.Summing UpMetaphor and simile dont mean quite the same thing. A metaphor is a rhetorical device that transfers the sense or aspects of one word to another. A simile is a type of metaphor that uses like or an equivalent word.You should avoid mixing metaphors (unless youre intentionally striving for a humorous effect).You should also avoid using clichs, except in dialog. In some cases, dead metaphors (such as war on) will be appropriate shorthand particularly in journalism or in informal writing.Each of these sentences contains either a metaphor or a simile (which is a type of metaphor). Select the correct one for each. The simile, the metaphor, and the analogy are some of the most common literary devices, giving writers the tools to compare different ideas, concepts, and experiences. Yet, because these three devices are all comparisons, it can be difficult to keep track of which device means which. What is a simile vs. metaphor vs. analogy?Whether you write poetry, fiction, or nonfiction, your writing will drastically improve with the use of these literary devices. Understanding the conundrum of simile vs. metaphor will sharpen the impact of your words, while developing a proper analogy will help you develop a much stronger argument.This article aims to give you mastery over these essential literary devices, with definitions, examples, and writing exercises for each device. With a deep understanding of simile vs. metaphor vs. analogy, your writing will take on new depth and clarity. Lets dive in! Simile Definition: The Indirect ComparisonThe words simile and similar come from the same root, and thats exactly what a simile is: a comparison of similar things.Specifically, a simile compares two or more items using like, as, or another comparative preposition. Also known as an indirect comparison, the simile allows writers to explore the many facets of complex ideas.A simile compares two or more items using like, as, or another comparative preposition.Take these three simile examples:My cat is as loud as Yankee Stadium.My cat is soft and fluffy, like a teddy bear.My cat destroys furniture the way bulldozers destroy buildings.These similes offer very different descriptions, yet coexist quite peacefully in my catwho is, in fact, loud and soft and destructive.Simile ExamplesHere are some more simile examples, all of which come from published works of literature.In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun The Red Badge of Courage, by Stephen CraneBy portraying the color of the horizon like a rug, this simile makes the sun seem regal and majestic. This is also a great example of show, dont tell writing, because we know the sun is rising without being told its dawn.The world will burst like an intestine in the sun Passengers by Denis JohnsonWhat an uncomfortable image! Would you believe this simile is the first line of a sonnet? Comparing the world to a burst intestine adds a visceral quality to the poem, as it treats the world as a living organism in peril. Additionally, the words burst and intestine have a slimy sound to them, making this simile both disturbing and intriguing.You lived your life like a candle in the wind Candle in the Wind by Elton John (lyrics by Bernie Taupin)This simile is deceptively simple because it paints a complex image. How does a candle react to the wind? Sometimes it flickers, sometimes it stands even taller, and sometimes it wanes to an ember, waiting for the weather to pass.Bernie Taupin, Elton Johns co-songwriter, wrote the lyrics for Candle in the Wind to commemorate the life of Marilyn Monroe, but although the song is specific to one person, the simile could apply to anyone, demonstrating the simple power of this literary device.Simile Writing ExercisesIts your turn to write some similes! A simile should be concise yet expressive, stimulating the readers mind without spoon feeding a certain interpretation. As you work through these exercises, keep your simile examples descriptive, yet open-ended.1. Simile Comparison ListsOn a blank piece of paper, create two lists, with each list containing 6 items.In one list, jot down six different abstract nouns. An abstract noun is something that doesnt have a physical presence: words like love, justice, anger, and envy are all abstract. Words that end in -ism are usually abstract, too, like solipsism, capitalism, and antidisestablishmentarianism.In the other list, jot down six different concrete nouns. These are nouns that you can touch or observeso, even though you cant touch the planet Neptune, its still concrete and observable. Try to use nouns that are in most peoples vocabularies: the reader is much more likely to know what a basketball is than what a chatelaine is.For reference, your list might look like this:Abstract NounConcrete NounLoveBluejayJusticeLeather walletAngerBasketballEnvyPencil sharpenerPeaceBalloonDemocracyThe planet MercuryNow, connect each abstract noun to a random concrete noun. Try not to be too intentional about which nouns you connect: the point is to compare two different items at random.Once youve connected your two lists, its time to write! Youre going to write six similes, one for each pair of nouns. Your similes will use the concrete noun to describe the abstract noun, offering a deeper understanding of that abstract noun.For example, I might connect the words anger and pencil sharpener. The goal is to offer a deeper understanding of anger through visual description, so I might write the following simile:Anger, like a pencil sharpener, made my words precise while grinding me to dust.Write a simile for every noun pair in your list, and see what you come up with! This exercise might spark an idea for a poem, give you a powerful line for a short story, or simply juice your creativity.2. Simile PoetrySomething wonderful about similes is their versatility. The same object can be described through a series of similes, each simile building off of each other to build a full and complex image.Theres even such a thing as simile poetry, which is exactly what it sounds like: a poem consisting of similes. Read the poem Surety by Jane Huffman, which abounds with great simile examples.The goal of this exercise is to write your own simile poem. Well follow a simple four step process to do this.First, select an object or concept that you want to write about. You have free range here: select something as trivial as a spoon, as complicated as time travel, or as abstract as godhood.Second, generate a list of nouns. Set a timer for 2 minutes and write down as many nouns as you can think of. Try to stick to concrete nouns, as abstract nouns will prove harder to write with.Third, write some similes! Compare the topic of your poem to each of the nouns you just listed. You dont have to use every noun, as there might be nouns in your list that have nothing in common with your topic. The goal is to create strong, impactful similes, each of which demonstrate a different facet of the complex idea youre writing about.Fourth, assemble your poem. You can write a poem entirely out of similes the way Jane Huffman did, or you can use these similes strategically, like how Kyle Dargan uses the simile to write his ghazal Points of Contact. The word metaphor comes directly from the Greek word metaphora, a transfer. Thats exactly what metaphors do: they transfer identities, altering the readers understanding of the nature of something.A metaphor is a statement in which two items, often unrelated, are treated as the same thing. Also known as a direct comparison, metaphors can create powerful imagery and description, deepening the meaning of objects and ideas.A metaphor is a statement in which two things, often unrelated, are treated as the same thing.Rather than using like or as like similes do, metaphors are statements of being, often using words like is, are, and became to make a comparison. Metaphors can also make a comparison without using being verbs or other comparison words. Take these three metaphor examples, each of which draw a portrait without using excessive language:The grandfather clock is king of the family room furniture.The grandfather clock became a death knell for her childhood.The grandfather clock had the face of an estranged lover.Lets address what each of these metaphors accomplish. The first metaphor shows us the clocks size and importance; the second metaphor shows us the clocks ominous presence, focusing on its sound; the third metaphor treats the clock as forlorn and solitary.In other words, each of these metaphors express the relevance of the grandfather clock without stating it explicitly. Such is the beauty of metaphors: the ability to tell a story through proximity.Before we offer some more metaphor examples, we need to discuss two important facets of metaphor writing, especially as they relate to simile vs. metaphor.First, metaphors rely on the suspension of disbeliefin other words, the reader knows theyre being lied to, but accepts it anyway. Obviously, a clock cannot be a king, nor can it be a death knell or a lover its a clock, after all. Nonetheless, the reader accepts what is being told to them because they trust that the metaphor, and what it conveys, is relevant to the text. Metaphors can be imaginativemagical, even!but they must be relevant.The metaphor is more complete than the simile.Second, the metaphor is much more complete than the simile. If I was actually writing about a grandfather clock, I would only choose one metaphor and stick with it. Multiple metaphors will contradict each other because theyre creating different statements of being. The reader will inevitably wonder if the clock is actually a king, a death knell, or neither, and this thought process will end up disrupting the readers suspension of disbelief. This type of writing is known as a mixed metaphor.Now, lets see some more metaphor examples! The following metaphor examples all come from published works of literature.Whatever causes night in our souls may leave stars. Ninety-Three by Victor HugoSometimes, the simplest metaphors carry the most complex meanings. The premise of this direct comparison is easy to understand: the things that trouble us now may strengthen us later. At the very least, those stars are twinkles of wisdom that we gain from life experience, illuminating our paths forward, if dimly.Yet, the operative word in this metaphor is may. The things that trouble us might strengthen us, but they might also create an eternal dusk. And, even with starshine, our souls can very much be blanketed by night.What emerges from this metaphor is a bittersweet rumination on life and its many perils. Accruing wisdom is always a choice, but faith in the light is vital for anyone to push forward.But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,Walks oer the dew of yon high eastern hill. Hamlet by William ShakespeareThis metaphor is a form of personification, a literary device in which nonhuman objects are given humanlike qualities. Specifically, Shakespeare is comparing the sunrise to that of a person, dressed in russet red, walking up a hill.Its a simple and beautiful comparison. Instead of saying the sunrise is red, Shakespeare personifies the dawn itself, showing us its russet color, its slow ascent, and the morning dew that flecks each blade of grass.Id like to starta bonfire in my heartbut today theres justa stone; last night,a whirlwind; before,a broken mirror. Hope Poems by Jill RobbinsThe metaphor here accomplishes several things, but first, we should note that there are several different metaphors here. Every metaphor has two components: the subject, and the thing that subject is being compared to. (These are known as the tenor and the vehicle, which well explain in the next section.)So, the subject (tenor) of this metaphor is the speakers heart, and the comparisons (vehicles) are a bonfire, a stone, a whirlwind, and a broken mirror.Each of these objects describe something different about the speakers heart. She would like her heart to be a bonfirea symbol of passion and livelihood. Instead, her heart is a series of objects that cannot catch fire, with each object symbolic of something else. A stone might symbolize heavy and immovable emotions; a whirlwind might represent the speakers capricious feelings; a broken mirror might reflect the speakers fragmented sense of self.But wait! Isnt that a mixed metaphor? Yesbut its a mixed metaphor that works. The series of incongruent symbols gives the reader a window into the speakers heart. By comparing each symbol to the speakers desired bonfire heart, the reader recognizes the many emotions preserved in each image. Aristotle said:The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an eye for resemblance. (De Poetica, 322 B.C.)So how can you be a genius?In a metaphor, one thing is likened to another. Vivid metaphors are considered a mark of good writing. Since a metaphor disregards logican object cannot be something else and be itself at the same timesome consider it superior to the simile (though there are plenty of superior similes out there). Good metaphors can become, if they grow to be well known, clichs. (Clichs are dead metaphors.) Clichs dull your writing. They become almost invisible to the reader. How do you know your metaphor is a clich? Other than being well read, you can acquaint yourself with lists from a number of books or check Web sites like Clich Finder.Another bad metaphor is one that is mixed. In a mixed metaphor, the parts of the comparison dont match. They can be funny, but you dont want them popping up in your serious writing. Examples of mixed metaphors include:Its deja vu all over again.The flood of students flew out the doors.The insult cut her like a knife; it froze her in mid-sentence.Theres also a danger in using metaphor badly and not even realizing we are using metaphors. Jack Lynch, in his Guide to Grammar and Style cites this more or less realistic example of business writing:We were swamped with a shocking barrage of work, and the extra burden had a clear impact on our workflow.Lets count the metaphors, writes Lynch, we have images of a marsh (swamped), electrocution or striking (shocking), a military assault (barrage), weight (burden), translucency (clear), a physical impression (impact), and a river (flow), all in a mere twenty words. If you can summon up a coherent mental image including all these elements, your imaginations far superior to mine.Lynch then gives a real example from The New York Times (11 June 2001):Over all, many experts conclude, advanced climate research in the United States is fragmented among an alphabet soup of agencies, strained by inadequate computing power and starved for the basic measurements of real-world conditions that are needed to improve simulations.Lynch: Lets see: research is fragmented among soup (among?); it is strained (you can strain soup, I suppose, but Im unsure how to strain research); and it is starved not enough soup, I suppose. Or maybe the soup has been strained too thoroughly, leaving people hungry. I dunno.The moral of the story: pay attention to the literal meaning of figures of speech and your writing will come alive.Using metaphors is much more than writing something is something else. Using a sustained metaphor that is neither over-extended nor mixed can be effective:We dived into the debate, sank our serrated teeth into their arguments, tore their ideas into bloody shreds, and then swam away to digest our preyUse metaphors:As verbs: The song ignited his lust but snuffed out her interest.As adjectives and adverbs: Her carnivorous brush ate up the canvas.As prepositional phrases: The old man considered the scene with a blue-white vultures eye.As appositives or modifiers: On the stairs he stood, a gawking scarecrow. What is the difference between a simile and a metaphor? There are a few key traits that separate simile vs. metaphor, and understanding them will help you decide which device to use in your work.