



Simile and the World

Similes With You

(Comparisons)

This lesson will help you write colorful comparisons.

How often do you hear the word “like”? Probably too often. Some people use “like” as another way of saying “uh” or “um.” (“Like, I heard what she said and like, how could she say that, because, like, we were like best friends.”)

If we don’t mistreat it, *like* is a useful and even powerful word.

When you say something is **like** something else, you make a **simile** (SIM-ih-lee). A **simile** says **something is similar to something else**. Even if you didn’t KNOW the word “simile,” you already USE similes all the time. Do these sound familiar?

“Slow down! When you run down those steps, it feels **like an earthquake**.”
“Talking to her is **like talking to a brick wall**.”

A simile does not have to include the word “like,” so long as it has the *idea* of likeness. “You’re **as good as gold**” and “I feel **as big as a house**” are similes.



Any writer can think of a tired-out, overused simile. A thoughtful writer comes up with original similes which surprise us and make us think, “Of course! It really is like that!”

White squirrels live in the town of Olney, Illinois. For a newspaper article about the squirrels, writer Pamela Selbert invented some fresh new similes. She had seen the squirrels only in photographs and wrote that they “*looked to have been carved from ivory or white chocolate*.” When she finally saw one of the squirrels, she described it as “*bright as though lit by some inner source*.” She wrote that its tail was “*swaying like the train on a wedding gown*.”

Ivory . . . white chocolate . . . an inner light . . . a wedding gown . . . to describe *squirrels*? Those are imaginative similes from an imaginative writer!

A second kind of comparison is metaphor. Think of a metaphor as **an equals sign (=)**. You make a metaphor when you say **something is something else**, such as:

“You **are** a breath of fresh air.”
“This job **is** a chain around my neck.”

The Bible is full of similes and metaphors. Here are a few examples:

Simile

“All we **like sheep** have gone astray.”
(Isaiah 53:6, KJV)

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is **like a wise man who built his house on the rock** . . . But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is **like a foolish man who built his house on sand.**” (Matt. 7:24, 26)

Metaphor

“**The Lord is my shepherd.**” (Psalm 23:1)

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly **they are ferocious wolves.**” (Matt. 7:15)

“**I am the vine; you are the branches.**”
(John 15:5)

Simile and metaphor are powerful tools for a writer. In only a few words, they draw an instant picture for the reader. They help you explain difficult ideas because they compare something hard with something simple. Whether you use a simile or a metaphor, **keep it clear**. If you write, “Alfred was like an old sock,” your reader will ask “*How* was Alfred like an old sock?” Explain your comparison, or your meaning will be lost. At the same time, **a little mystery keeps your reader curious**. The parables of Jesus are metaphors and similes, and most of the time Jesus did not explain them in detail, but left his hearers to figure out his meaning.

Start-Up:

Write down some similes and metaphors which you have heard people use.

Look around the place where you are right now. Describe different things, or describe how you feel, using **two similes and two metaphors which you make up yourself**.

Intermediate:

For each of the following overused similes or metaphors, **write a fresh one to replace it**. First identify each statement as a metaphor or a simile. Then think carefully about the meaning of each one. If the original is a simile, write a new simile. If it’s a metaphor, write a new metaphor.

- “The news hit me like a ton of bricks.”
- “My friend is the Rock of Gibraltar.”
- “I feel like a million bucks today.”
- “He went through here like a tornado.”

Think of four other tired, overused similes or metaphors.
Write new ones to express the same ideas.



Advanced:

Read Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. Like most of Jesus’ parables, it’s an **extended metaphor** (a metaphor carried out into a story). **Write your own parable** as an **extended metaphor** which expresses the same truths as the prodigal son parable.