

# Choosing Vivid Words

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how and why to use vivid language in your speech. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Conquer Monotony
2. Writing Descriptively
  - a. Similes and Metaphors
  - b. Process Words

## 1. Conquer Monotony

"The monotonous speaker not only drones along in the same volume and pitch of tone but uses always the same emphasis, the same speed, the same thoughts— or dispenses with thought altogether. Monotony: the cardinal and most common sin of the public speaker. " - J. Berg Esenwein, *The Art of Public Speaking*

The quickest way to lose your audience is to be boring. Avoid the "sin of **monotony**," as Esenwein puts it, by using vivid language and imagery to build interest in your speech.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Monotony**

Tedium as a result of repetition or a lack of variety.

## 2. Writing Descriptively

Think of your favorite food or meal, or perhaps your favorite place to visit. What does it smell like? Look like? Taste like? What sounds are characteristic of your favorite vacation spot?

When you use vivid, descriptive language in your speech, you immerse your audience in a sensory experience that transports them from their seats and into the experience you craft with your words.

Writing descriptively is more than just using "pretty" language to dress up your speech; in fact, you want to be

careful that your speech doesn't come across as poetry. Using descriptive language can actually help get your points across more pointedly to your audience than by simply presenting hard facts and data. Descriptive language engages your audience's imagination, which holds their attention and adds both interest and complexity to your speech.

There are a variety of ways to add descriptive language to your speech, which are described below.

## 2a. Similes and Metaphors

Two of the easiest techniques to add descriptive wording to your speech are simile and metaphor. They essentially achieve the same goal: comparing one thing to another in likeness. In a **simile**, the comparison is made by using the words "like" or "as."

**Metaphors**, on the other hand, usually compare things directly by using the verb "to be." These comparisons help to paint a picture in the minds of your audience. For speechwriters, metaphor and simile are like the brushstrokes of an artist, the notes of a melody, or the choreography of a dance — they demonstrate an artistry with language.

These comparisons may be alike or dissimilar. The use of opposing ideas and imagery can illustrate bolder points while similar comparisons bolster the strength of an idea or image.

### IN CONTEXT

Billy Collins, former U.S. Poet Laureate, is a master of metaphor. Take, for example, his poem "Litany":

You are the bread and the knife,  
the crystal goblet and the wine.  
You are the dew on the morning grass  
and the burning wheel of the sun.  
You are the white apron of the baker,  
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,  
the plums on the counter,  
or the house of cards.  
And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.  
There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,  
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,  
but you are not even close  
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

And a quick look in the mirror will show  
that you are neither the boots in the corner  
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,  
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,  
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,  
the evening paper blowing down an alley  
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees  
and the blind woman's tea cup.  
But don't worry, I'm not the bread and the knife.  
You are still the bread and the knife.  
You will always be the bread and the knife,  
not to mention the crystal goblet and—somehow—the wine.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Metaphor

The use of a word or phrase to refer to something that isn't, invoking a direct similarity between the word or phrase used and the thing described, but without the words like or as, which would imply a simile.

### Simile

A figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, in the case of English generally using like or as.

## 2b. Process Words

Process words tell someone how to process a set of information. In a speech, it's important to vary your vocabulary so that you don't end up repeating yourself.

There are several process words that get at the basic six ways of processing information:

- Comparing
- Criticizing
- Describing
- Discussing
- Evaluating
- Explaining

By using synonyms of these words as you craft your speech, you not only tell your audience how to process the information you're presenting, you also build interest by using a varied vocabulary.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how to **avoid monotony** by adding **descriptive language** to your speech. This will allow you to immerse your audience in a sensory experience. Use **simile and metaphor** as a way to add descriptive language and wording into your speech. Make your points more compelling by

painting pictures with words in the minds of your audience members. Tell your audience exactly how you want them to digest the information in your speech by using a variety of **process words**.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Metaphor**

The use of a word or phrase to refer to something that it isn't, invoking a direct similarity between the word or phrase used and the thing described, but without the words like or as, which would imply a simile.

### **Monotony**

Tedium as a result of repetition or a lack of variety.

### **Simile**

A figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, in the case of English generally using like or as.