ENGLISH, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Hyperbole

Difficulty level: Easy

English, Literacy, and Communication

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Overview of the concept

This is how you spot wild exaggeration in everyday talk and advertising, like saying you are starving when you are just hungry, so you know not to take it literally. Hyperbole is exaggeration on purpose, to make a point or get a laugh, and it is everywhere in ads, songs, and everyday speech. Knowing how to spot it keeps you from believing an ad that promises the best thing ever, and it helps you read stories, poems, and speeches the way the writer meant them.



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Rule

Hyperbole: hyperbole is wild exaggeration on purpose, to make a point or get a laugh, and it is not meant to be taken literally.

Ask: could this really be true, such as 'I have told you a million times'? If the number is an impossible exaggeration for emphasis, it is hyperbole. If it could be literally true, it is not.

Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Is this hyperbole? 'I have told you a million times.'

SOLUTION

Ask: has the speaker really said it a million times? No.

The number is blown up way beyond what could be real, purely for emphasis.

Yes, it is hyperbole.

EXAMPLE 2

Q Is this hyperbole? 'I told you three times.'

SOLUTION

Ask: is three times an impossible exaggeration? No, it could be literally true.

No exaggeration for effect is used.

No, it is not hyperbole.

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Practice questions

1 Is this hyperbole? 'I am so hungry I could eat a horse.'

- A Yes
- B No

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2 Is this hyperbole? 'I ate two sandwiches.'

- A Yes
- B No

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3 Is this hyperbole? 'This bag weighs a ton.'

- A Yes
- B No

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4 Is this hyperbole? 'The bag weighs 5 kilograms.'

A Yes

B No

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5 Is this hyperbole? 'I waited forever.'

A Yes

B No

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6 Is this hyperbole? 'I waited ten minutes.'

A Yes

B No

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7

Is this hyperbole? 'It rained cats and dogs.'

A Yes

B No

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Is this hyperbole? 'It rained lightly.'

A Yes

B No

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9

Is this hyperbole? 'She cried a river of tears.'

A Yes

B No

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10

Is this hyperbole? 'She cried for a minute.'

A Yes

B No

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ANSWER KEY

1. Yes

2. No

3. Yes

4. No

5. Yes

6. No

7. Yes

8. No

9. Yes

10. No

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