

Module 8: Drama – *Romeo and Juliet*

Topic 4 Content: Oxymoron

Introduction

Using Oxymora

Common Examples

Famous Examples

Controlled chaos. Inside out. Small crowd.

Each of these phrases is an example of an oxymoron. You may recall that a paradox is a contradiction that, upon further examination, reveals a possible truth. A paradox tends to be complex and multifaceted. On the other hand, an oxymoron is a more concise version of a paradox.

An **oxymoron** is the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory terms. The plural form of *oxymoron* is *oxymora* or *oxymorons*. Like paradoxes, oxymora appear illogical at first glance, but many of them make sense on a deeper level. In fact, most oxymora are used in everyday language and are easily understood.

Click the tabs above to learn more about oxymora and how they are used.



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Using Oxymora: Dramatic Effect

Dramatic Effect

Writers often use oxymora for dramatic effect. An oxymoron can highlight the absurdity of a situation or express complicated emotions, thus inviting further analysis and reflection. For example, in describing hell in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, John Milton said:

As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
No light, but rather ***darkness visible***
Served only to discover sights of woe

Here, Milton draws attention to the evil atmosphere of hell in which Satan finds himself by referring to evil as "darkness" and juxtaposing it with the contradictory term "visible." The hell of *Paradise Lost* is one so evil that flames burn dark instead of bright.

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Using Oxymora: Humor and Entertainment

Humor and Entertainment

Creating and understanding oxymora can be highly entertaining. Many writers use oxymora to demonstrate wit or provide humor. From time to time, people will disagree as to whether an oxymoron is legitimate, especially when it is based on subjective opinion. For example, some people would say that ***good morning*** is an oxymoron if they do not like to be awake early.

In cases where an oxymoron depends on opinion, there is a fine line between being humorous and being offensive. To demonstrate this, simply say the name of your favorite genre of music. How would you feel if someone were to suggest that ***rock music, rap music, pop music, country music, indie music***, or any other music that you like is not "real" music?

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Using Oxymora: Avoiding False Oxymora

Avoiding False Oxymora

Sometimes people mistakenly identify a phrase as an oxymoron. This is usually due to misunderstanding of vocabulary or assumptions based on connotations. Consider these examples of false oxymora.

Pleasantly Surprised

✘ A surprise refers to something unexpected. Saying that you were pleasantly (or unpleasantly) surprised is not an oxymoron.

Dim Light

✘ Light does not necessarily have to be bright. Saying that a light is dim (or bright) is not an oxymoron.

Amazingly Bad

✘ The word *amazingly* refers to causing astonishment. Saying that something is bad in an astonishing way is not an oxymoron.

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Common Examples: Colloquial Oxymora

Colloquial Oxymora

Many oxymora are used in colloquial language, or informal speech that you use every day. Observe the following examples of casual oxymora that are frequently used without people realizing that they can qualify as oxymora. How do these examples make sense even though they are contradictory?

Have you ever taken a class with a ***student teacher***?

Have you ever said, "Oh that's ***old news!***" to someone?

Have you ever heard someone say, "You're ***clearly confused***"?

Have you ever put something in a ***random order***?

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Common Examples: Single-Word Oxymora

Single-Word Oxymora

An oxymoron does not necessarily have to consist of exactly two words. Take a look at these examples of single-word oxymora.

Ball: something round

Point: has a sharp edge

Ballpoint

a type of pen tip that uses a rotating ball

Piano: from the Italian for
soft/low

Forte: from the Italian for
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Pianoforte

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Common Examples: Puns in Oxymora

Puns in Oxymora

Some oxymora are only apparent when you consider the puns, or double meanings, of certain words. Take a look at these examples of oxymora that are created from puns.

Original Copy

Copy refers to a specimen of something, but it also means *a duplicate*. Thus, to say "original duplicate" is an oxymoron.

Awfully Nice

Awfully refers to inspiring awe, but it also means *extremely unpleasant*. Thus, to say "unpleasantly nice" is an oxymoron.

Civil War

Civil refers to a nation or state, so a civil war involves a single nation. But *civil* also means *polite*, so a "polite war" is an oxymoron.

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Common Examples: Emerging Oxymora

Emerging Oxymora

New oxymora are continually evolving as emerging technologies and inventions require the creation of additional vocabulary. Notice how these examples have accompanied the advent of some inventions.

Green Blackboard

Chalkboards were commonly called blackboards because they were black. Now blackboards sometimes come in the color green.

Steel Wool

Steel is a type of metal, whereas wool is the fur of sheep. Now you can scrub pots with sponges made not of wool but of steel fibers.

Black Light

A light eliminates darkness well, but a black light does not. Black lights emit mostly invisible ultraviolet waves to reveal fluorescence.

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Famous Examples

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<p>"I like a smuggler. He is the only <i>honest thief</i>." — Charles Lamb</p> <p>"And faith unfaithful kept him <i>falsely true</i>." — Alfred Tennyson</p> <p>"A business that makes nothing but money is a <i>poor business</i>." — Henry Ford</p> <p>"I am a <i>deeply superficial</i> person." — Andy Warhol</p> <p>"Good night, good night! parting is such <i>sweet sorrow</i>." — William Shakespeare</p>		

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