

# VERBAL IRONY

**Verbal irony** is a type of figurative language in which the speaker's intended meaning contradicts the literal meaning of the words. Three types of verbal irony are sarcasm, exaggeration, and understatement.

**Sarcasm** occurs when a speaker's intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning of their words. Sarcasm is often used to show displeasure or create humor.

Ruby looked at the calendar and saw that it was her week to scoop the cat's litter box, knowing that Tiger had just switched to a new, very smelly food. "Lucky me," Ruby said.

**Exaggeration** occurs when a speaker significantly overstates a situation to highlight how small or simple a situation is.

"I'm going upstairs to read," Hallie told her brother, Sam. Five minutes later, Hallie returned to grab her sweater. Sam grinned, saying, "Wow, you've been up there for ages!"

**Understatement** occurs when a speaker uses words with a less extreme literal meaning to emphasize the situation's size or importance.

"It's going to be a bit nippy this week," the meteorologist remarked as he presented the forecast for a week of below-freezing temperatures.

Each of the scenarios below includes verbal irony. Identify the ironic part of the scenario, and explain why it's ironic. **Sample answers**

1. Glancing at the appetizers, Henry asked Alice how the vegetarian dumplings were. "They're absolutely terrible," she responded between bites. "I should probably eat them all so you don't have to."

Alice says that the dumplings are terrible, but she keeps eating them and wants to eat more of them, so they must actually taste really good.

2. "Three thousand orders overnight?" Jon remarked as he checked the orders for his homemade macarons. He looked at the stand mixer currently taking up all of the space on his tiny counter and observed, "We might need a bigger kitchen."

Jon says that he might need a bigger kitchen, which is ironic because if one stand mixer is taking up all of the space on his tiny counter, he's definitely going to need a much larger kitchen to complete three thousand orders for macarons.

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Keep going! Identify the ironic part of the scenario, and explain why it's ironic. **Sample answers**

3. "Let me get those groceries for you, Mom!" Dominic volunteered. "That's okay," she replied. "I know this bag weighs a ton, but I think I can handle it," she winked as she carried in the single bag filled with marshmallows and cereal.
- Mom says that the bag of groceries weighs a ton, but it can't physically weigh a ton, and it's probably very lightweight if the bag only has marshmallows and cereal inside.
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4. "Carefully now," Maya whispered as she pulled the delicate soufflé out of the oven. Suddenly, the doorbell rang and her dogs bounded through the kitchen, causing her to drop the soufflé on the ground. "How lovely," Maya sighed.
- Maya says "How lovely," after the soufflé falls, but she was trying to be very careful with the soufflé, so when she dropped it on the ground, the situation was disappointing and not at all lovely.
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5. Alana's eyes grew wide when her cousin showed up to Thanksgiving with a skillet of cornbread. "Thanks, that smells amazing!" she replied as she carried the skillet back to the kitchen. As she wedged the cornbread next to the yeast rolls, biscuits, and croissants, she whispered to her dad, "I don't think we have enough bread."
- Alana says "I don't think we have enough bread," but with four different types of bread in the kitchen, there is likely more than enough bread for the Thanksgiving guests.
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6. "Didn't you say you were making pizza tonight?" Omar asked Damian in between rounds of the new Soul Castle 3 game. Suddenly, the doorbell rang, and when Damian returned, he presented a large pineapple and anchovy pizza. "Of course!" groaned Omar, "Chef Damian's Gourmet Fish-and-Fruit Pie."
- Even though Omar calls the pizza "Chef Damian's Gourmet Fish-and-Fruit Pie," Damian clearly didn't make the pizza and must not be a gourmet chef since the pizza was delivered to the front door.
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7. After the waiter delivered the entrées to their table, Kayden and Ivy stared for a moment at the tiny dollop of risotto on Kayden's plate. "Wow! That's quite a feast you have there," Ivy grinned, "Bon appétit!"
- Even though Ivy is saying that Kayden has "quite a feast" on his plate, he really doesn't have very much food at all if he only has a tiny dollop of risotto.
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