

Zeugma

APSU Writing Center Handout

A zeugma is a figure of speech in which a single word (usually a verb or adjective) governs two or more nouns or phrases, creating a connection between them. It can add emotion, create surprise, or produce a thoughtful or dramatic effect.

Example 1

"You are free to execute your laws, and your citizens, as you see fit." *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

- The word **execute** applies to both laws and citizens.
- **Interpretation:** "You are free to execute your laws and execute your citizens."

Example 2

"Yet time and her aunt moved slowly — and her patience and her ideas were nearly worn out before the tete-a-tete was over." Jane Austen

- **Interpretation:** The governing words **moved slowly** and **were nearly worn out** apply both to time and her aunt (time and the aunt seemed slow) and to her patience and ideas (her patience and ideas were exhausted), showing the dual effect of the situation.

Example 3

"The storm sank my boat and my dreams."

- The zeugma connects literal and figurative meanings: the storm affects both the boat (literal) and the speaker's dreams (figurative).

Spot the Zeugma:

- On our first date, I held my breath and the car door for her.
- All over Ireland, the farmers grew potatoes, barley, and bored.
- She had already exhausted her kids and her patience by the end of the first day of summer vacation.

Types of Zeugmas

Prozeugma

The governing word (yoke) comes at the **beginning** of the sentence.

- **Example:** He took his hat, and his vacation.
- **Example:** While at church Andy played guitar, Aaron piano, and James violin.

Mesozeugma

The governing word comes in the **middle** of the sentence.

- **Example:** He works nights, I days.
- **Example:** First the door locked, and then his jaw.

Hypozeugma

The governing word comes at the **end** of the sentence.

- **Example:** His clothes, his books, and his dignity were lost.
- **Example:** Hours, days, weeks, months, and years seemed to slip away.

Diazeugma

A single subject governs multiple subsequent verbs.

- **Example:** Müller receives the ball, dribbles, dodges the defender, shoots, and scores!
- **Example:** The Romans destroyed Numantia, razed Carthage, obliterated Corinth, overthrew Fregellae. — *Ad Herennium*

References

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