

Oxymoron vs. Paradox & Ambiguity vs. Equivocation

High School English Language Arts Worksheet

Know the Difference

Oxymoron: combines two words or very short phrases that contradict each other.

Examples:

- deafening silence
- organized chaos
- jumbo shrimp
- seriously funny
- bittersweet

Remember: Oxymoron = contradictory words placed together.

Paradox: a statement or idea that appears contradictory but may contain a deeper truth or meaning.

Examples:

- "Less is more."
- "The more you learn, the less you realize you know."
- "Sometimes you have to lose in order to win."

Remember: Paradox = a contradictory idea or statement.

Ambiguity: occurs when a word, phrase, or sentence has more than one possible meaning.

Example:

"I saw the man with the telescope."

Who had the telescope—the speaker or the man?

Remember: Ambiguity = unclear meaning.

Equivocation: occurs when someone deliberately uses a word or phrase in different ways during an argument, often making the argument seem logical when it is not.

Example:

"A feather is light. What is light cannot be dark. Therefore, a feather cannot be dark."

The word light changes meaning from "not heavy" to "not dark."

Remember: Equivocation = shifting the meaning of a word or phrase.

Part I: Oxymoron or Paradox?

Write O for Oxymoron or P for Paradox.

1. _____ "The silence was deafening."
 2. _____ "Less is more."
 3. _____ "The comedian was seriously funny."
 4. _____ "The more we learn, the more we realize how much we don't know."
 5. _____ "It was an open secret."
 6. _____ "Sometimes the best way to move forward is to take a step back."
 7. _____ "The room was filled with organized chaos."
 8. _____ "You have to spend money to make money."
 9. _____ "The beginning of the end had arrived."
 10. _____ "The more choices people have, the harder it can be to choose."
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Part II: Explain the Difference – Fill-in-the-blank

11. What is the main difference between an oxymoron and a paradox?

An _____ places contradictory words or short phrases together, while a _____ is a larger statement or idea that appears contradictory but may contain a deeper truth.

12. Why is "deafening silence" an oxymoron?

"Deafening" means extremely _____, while "silence" means the absence of _____. The contradictory words are placed together.

13. Why is "Less is more" a paradox?

"Less is more" appears contradictory because less and more are _____. However, the statement can express the idea that simplicity can sometimes be more _____ than excess.

14. Which usually contains only a few contradictory words: an oxymoron or a paradox?

15. Which usually expresses a complete idea or statement: an oxymoron or a paradox?

Part III: Ambiguity or Equivocation? - Write **A** for Ambiguity or **E** for Equivocation.

16. _____ "I saw her duck."

17. _____ "Nothing is better than happiness. A sandwich is better than nothing. Therefore, a sandwich is better than happiness."

18. _____ "The teacher told the student that she needed to study."

19. _____ "A feather is light. Light cannot be dark. Therefore, a feather cannot be dark."

20. _____ "The chicken is ready to eat."

21. _____ "A good citizen follows the law. Laws can be unjust. Therefore, a good citizen should sometimes break the law."

22. _____ "I watched the boy with the binoculars."

23. _____ "A mouse is a small animal. Small things are insignificant. Therefore, a mouse is insignificant."

24. _____ "The coach told the player that he would start tomorrow."

25. _____ "A bank is a safe place for money. A river bank is a bank. Therefore, a river bank is a safe place for money."

Part IV: Multiple Choice

26. Which sentence contains an oxymoron?

- A. The test was difficult.
- B. The classroom was empty.
- C. The argument was painfully beautiful.
- D. The students studied quietly.

27. Which sentence contains a paradox?

- A. The hallway was crowded.
- B. "The only constant is change."
- C. The book was interesting.
- D. The teacher collected the papers.

28. Which sentence is ambiguous?

- A. Sarah ate breakfast at 7:00.
- B. The dog chased the ball.
- C. I saw the student with the camera.
- D. The bell rang at noon.

29. Which example demonstrates equivocation?

- A. "The soup was hot."
- B. "I saw the bat near the tree."
- C. "A good diet is healthy. This candy is good. Therefore, this candy is healthy."
- D. "The students finished their homework."

30. Which best describes an oxymoron?
- A. A statement that contains a hidden deeper truth
 - B. Two contradictory words or ideas placed together
 - C. A sentence with an unclear meaning
 - D. A misleading argument based on word choice
31. Which best describes a paradox?
- A. A contradiction that may reveal a deeper truth
 - B. Two opposite words placed side by side
 - C. A word with multiple dictionary definitions
 - D. A deliberately misleading argument
32. Which best describes ambiguity?
- A. Deliberately changing the meaning of a word
 - B. Combining contradictory words
 - C. A lack of clarity because something has multiple possible meanings
 - D. A statement that appears impossible but is true
33. Which best describes equivocation?
- A. Using a familiar expression
 - B. Using contradictory words together
 - C. Deliberately shifting the meaning of a word or phrase
 - D. Creating a statement with multiple interpretations accidentally

Part V: Analyze the Examples

Example A

"The new employee was a small giant in the company."

34. Is this an oxymoron or paradox?

Answer: _____

35. Explain your answer.

"Small giant" combines two _____ ideas. A giant is large, while small means _____ large. The contradiction occurs in a short phrase.

Example B

"Sometimes the fastest way to finish a task is to slow down and do it carefully."

36. Is this an oxymoron or paradox?

Answer: _____

37. Explain your answer.

The statement appears contradictory because "fastest" and "slow down" seem to _____. However, slowing down to work carefully can sometimes help a person finish more efficiently.

Example C

"The student saw the teacher with the book."

38. Is this ambiguity or equivocation?

39. What are two possible meanings of the sentence?

1. The student had the _____ and saw the teacher.
2. The teacher had the book and was seen by the _____.

Example D

"A bat is an animal. A baseball bat is a bat. Therefore, a baseball bat is an animal."

40. Is this ambiguity or equivocation?

Answer: _____

41. Explain how the meaning of the word "bat" changes.

The first use of "bat" refers to the _____. The second use refers to a piece of _____. The argument switches between the two meanings to reach a _____ conclusion.