

Figurative or Literal?

8th Grade

Deciding which meaning a sentence intends, and why it matters.

LITERAL

- Words mean exactly what they say
- "The car broke down on the motorway."
- Can be checked against reality
- Used in reports and instructions
- No interpretation needed

FIGURATIVE

- Words mean something beyond themselves
- "He broke down in tears."
- Cannot be checked literally
- Used in stories, poetry, speech
- Requires the reader to interpret

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Context decides. The same phrase can be literal in one sentence and figurative in the next.

Idioms are the trap for anyone reading in a second language — the literal reading is always available and always wrong.