

## 1 Paradox and Oxymoron

### 1.1 Paradox or Oxymoron?

- A paradox consists of a whole sentence. An oxymoron on the other hand comes with only two words that contradicts itself.
- Unlike a paradox, an oxymoron is a descriptive phrase containing two terms, which seem to be incongruent.
- In simple words, a paradox is considered to be an action that is contradictory and an oxymoron is a description of a phrase, which is contradictory.
- While a paradox can be seen as a phrase like 'freedom is slavery', an oxymoron is only a combination of two contradictory words like 'cold fire'.

Below are some paradoxes and oxymorons. Identify each by writing **paradox** or **oxymoron** in the blank.

- 1 It's a definite maybe that Sarah will come to the party. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 She was busy doing nothing. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Nobody goes to that store because it is too crowded. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 There was a deafening silence in the stadium. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Robin Hood was an honest thief who stole to help the poor. \_\_\_\_\_

### 1.2 How to answer a **paradox** question:

[Point from the passage] **contradicts** [contradictory point from the passage], **because** [state why one would not expect both points to be true at the same time]. **Despite this**, both [1<sup>st</sup> point] and [2<sup>nd</sup> point] are seen to occur. Thus, it is a paradox."

### Example

In one of Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, the protagonist Hamlet says, "I must be cruel to be kind."

- This announcement does not seem to make sense. How can an individual treat others kindly even when he is cruel?
- However, Hamlet is talking about his mother, and how he intends to kill Claudius to avenge his father's death.
- This act of Hamlet will be a **tragedy for his mother** who is married to Claudius.
- Hamlet does not want his mother to be the beloved of his father's murderer any longer, and so he thinks that the murder will be **good for his mother**.

**Question:** Why is the phrase "I must be cruel to be kind" a paradox?

**Answer:** Being cruel **contradicts** the act of being kind **because** an individual cannot treat others kindly when he is cruel. **Despite this**, Hamlet plans to create a tragedy in order to do good for his mother. Thus, it is a paradox.

### 1.3 Unusual and effective questions (Oxymoron)

- Structure of answer: **Unusual** because... **Effective** because...
- Approach the first part of the question (unusual) by asking yourself what is surprising/odd about the usage of the word(s) or phrase.
- For the second part of the answer (effective), think about what is the intended purpose or impression (thoughts and feelings) that the writer wants to leave in you.

#### Example

From the daylight nightmare, I was awakened, as I had been many times before, by my sisters. They came scrambling and calling up the steep rough bank. Like shields between me and the sky, faces with grins and white teeth each to be called up with a loud cry, they brushed off terror with their broad scoldings of affection. They leaned over me – one, two, three – their mouths smeared with redcurrants and their hands dripping with juice.

**Question:** The paragraph begins ‘from this daylight nightmare I was awakened...’ What is unusual and effective about the phrase ‘daylight nightmare’? [2]

**Answer:** **Unusual** because nightmares usually happen at night/in the dark/when asleep.  
**Effective** because it shows how unreal/strange/terrifying the experience can be.

## 2 Irony

- Verbal irony: the use of words to express something that is opposite from its literal meaning of.

➤ **How to answer the question:**

It is expected that [insert expected feeling/meaning] but the author actually means that [insert opposite meaning of what is written in the passage].

- Situational irony: a situation that is odd/ amusing because what actually happens is the opposite of what might be expected to happen.

➤ **How to answer the question:**

It is often expected that [insert paraphrased part of passage that was the general expectation by social conventions or norms]. However, in the passage, [insert what is opposite and contrary to the expectations of the norms as stated before].

- Dramatic irony: Arises whenever the audience knows more than one or more of the characters. Thus, they can foresee the possible consequences of an action, tragic or comic, or errors in the characters' judgments.

➤ **How to answer the question:**

[The character] believes that [insert action or expectation of the character]. However, the reader knows that [the most likely consequence as predicted by the reader].

### 2.1 Practice Questions

Identify the type of irony in each of the passages and provide a brief explanation why it is an irony.

- 1 Bobby began studying for the big math test on the bus ride home. He tried to study while walking home from the bus but recognized this as a bad idea after bumping into a lamppost. When he got home, he didn't watch any TV because he was studying so intensely. He completed the study guide that Mr. Morris gave him and then he completed one that he had made himself. Bobby stayed awake all through the night finding extra problems on the Internet and completing them. By the time the sun rose, Bobby had mastered the content. He felt prepared as he entered the classroom. He sat at his desk, put his head down and fell asleep even before he could try any of the questions.

Type of irony: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 While walking home from work, Lake Park Mall security guard Scott Thornton thought about his day. A shoplifter had outrun him, he had lost the keys to the golf cart, and a group of skateboarders had made fun of his weight. Scott was so deep in thought that he did not even notice that he had stumbled on to a movie set. Lost in thought, he passed by trailers, cameras, and stagehands, yet he was unaware of the scene around him. When he came out of his daze, he looked up and saw a man who was wearing a ski mask waving a knife at an old lady. Scott bolted into action. He was so charged up with adrenaline that he did not even notice the cameraman filming him as he jump kicked the actor wearing the ski mask.

Type of irony: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

- 3 It was the ninth inning and Bryant's team was down by two. There was a man on first and second and Bryant was up to bat. If he could get a good hit, he could tie the game and maybe even win it. He stared the pitcher in the eye with a cold steel gaze as the ball floated from his hand. Everything seemed to move in slow motion as Bryant twirled awkwardly, swinging the bat and somehow missing the ball completely. As the players lined up to exchange handshakes at the end of the game, the pitcher stared coolly at Bryant. They shook hands, and the pitcher said, "Nice hit, Champ. Way to get a hold of it." Bryant had never felt more embarrassed.

Type of irony: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

- 4 The two men crawled across the sun scorched sand. The wind blew the sand grains into their faces at blinding speeds as they reached their way over the sand dune. As they reached the top of the dune, they looked over and saw a glistening pool some thirty yards down the hill. It wasn't a large pool, but it shimmered in the sun and beckoned the dehydrated men, urging them to continue their struggle. Summoning the will to live and using it as strength, the men pushed forward until the tiny pool was in reach. The man in front desperately scooped a handful of the shiny liquid from the precious water source and threw it into his mouth, where upon he began coughing and spitting out the water. The man behind him seemed confused, until the man in front said, "This is salt water..."

Type of irony: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

## ANSWERS

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#### 1.1 Paradox or Oxymoron?

- 1 Oxymoron
- 2 Paradox
- 3 Paradox
- 4 Oxymoron
- 5 Oxymoron

#### 1.3 Unusual but effective

- 1 A scream is a loud sound and to describe it as 'silent' is unusual (1m) and the phrase effectively used to show Salma was so overwhelmed by fear that she could not scream for help although she desperately needed help (1m).
- 2 The phrase is unusual as the word 'choice' indicates more than one option (1m). It is effective as Terry had no other option if he did not want to lose his job (1m).

### 2 Irony

- 1 Situational irony. One might believe that studying intensely would help Bobby prepare for the test, but in reality the intensity of Bobby's preparation resulted in his failure.
- 2 Dramatic irony. Scott believes that the old woman is being robbed, but the opposite is true: she is collaborating with a fellow employee on a movie set. The audience knows what Scott doesn't.
- 3 Verbal irony. The pitcher congratulates Bryant on his hit when in fact Bryant hit the ball rather disgracefully.
- 4 Situational irony. One would expect that the water, which the men struggled so fiercely to acquire, would provide the men with relief, when in fact it causes them more agony