

# Anthropomorphization

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Another great technique to create metaphors is anthropomorphization. Now it's a fairly complicated word to describe actually a fairly simple concept. That's when you take animals or things or ideas and ascribe them with human emotions, feelings, motives, and desires. Now, scientific rigor normally discourages people from taking ideas like electrons and implying motives or wants or desires because, of course, those things aren't actually there. But, it can help you understand the idea because the human brain reasons in terms of relationships, desires, and motivations a lot better than it reasons in terms of completely abstract ideas. We're not computers, we're people that have feelings and emotions and desires and so reasoning in those terms is a way to help describe and understand complicated ideas. As long as you understand the difference, it can help you get great metaphors to understand ideas, create connections, and actually understand the core idea more deeply.

So let's walk through one quick example. Let's say you're trying to understand why Noble Gases don't react with other elements in the periodic table. Now, you can go for a fairly complicated, abstract explanation, which is typical of chemistry classes, or you can use this technique to anthropomorphize a metaphor to help explain the idea more deeply. So for me, my idea is that they don't want to react because they're snooty. And why are they snooty? Well, they're snooty because they have all the valence electrons that they would need, so they're like a rich person who doesn't need to have contact with the commoners.

Now, that's a fairly simplified analogy and, of course, they don't actually behave that way. They're just atoms, they don't have feelings. But, if you create this kind of impression--"Oh, they're snooty and they have all the electrons they need and that's why they don't need to interact with the other elements"--that's a little different than explaining it in dry technical terms about valence shells.

Now, you can still understand the connection, but the second is not only more memorable, but it also helps you understand the idea better because it creates a connection between the reason that they won't react (not having valence shells) and something that you understand more intuitively, which is someone not needing to interact with someone because they don't have anything that they need.

So, try this with your own concepts that you're studying in school. Take the idea and try anthropomorphizing on it. Try adding wants, desires, and motives and see if that doesn't create a starting point for metaphors. You have to understand the difference between the two--between actually having motivations and using it as an analogy--but it can create great analogies to help you understand the concepts better, connect ideas, deeply understand them more, and then use that to help remember them.