A cliche is a stale, commonplace, worn out word, phrase, or figure of speech that many speakers and writers fall into using out of hurry or sheer laziness.

It is one of the ironies of language that vivid comparisons soon become cliches precisely because they initially express an idea so well. These comparisons catch on, are picked up by many people, and quickly become trite and dead in the sense that they no longer strike us as original or clever.

The prevailing triteness in modern writing led the English novelist and critic George Orwell (Animal Farm, 1984) to lament that "prose consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated henhouse."

Take the hackneyed formula "(adjective) as a (noun)." Offer the first half of the phrase and instantly into the minds of almost everybody flashes the second half. If, for example, I say "dead as a . . .," most readers will say "doornail." In fact, this expression has been wheezed for more than 600 years, back to at least 1350, when an anonymous poet, describing the hunting of a deer, wrote:

And happened that I hitt hym be-hynde the left sholdire. Dead as a dornayle was he fallen.

The very fact that the second half of such comparisons skips so easily into the mind is a danger sign. It means that everyone else would use the same simile, and this is exactly what makes for triteness. To prove my point, I present over one hundred " . . . as a . . ." cliches; see how many you can complete correctly. The first set is completed by inserting members of the animal kingdom:

| 1. blind as | 8. cross as | 15. happy as |
| 2. brave as | 9. drunk as | 16. happy as |
| 3. busy as | 10. dumb as | 17. healthy as |
| 4. clean as | 11. fat as | 18. hungry as |
| 5. crazy as | 12. free as | 19. loose as |
| 6. crazy as | 13. gentle as | 20. mad as |
| 7. crazy as | 14. hairy as | 21. mad as |
Complete the following by using types of food:

22. naked as apple
23. nervous as gourd
24. plump as pear
25. poor as prune
26. proud as peach
27. quiet as mushroom
28. sick as melon
29. silly as squash
30. slippery as eel
31. sly as potato
32. snug as onion
33. strong as beef
34. strong as cabbage
35. stubborn as asparagus
36. wise as mushroom
37. American as hot dog
38. brown as potato
39. cool as ice cream
40. easy as pie
41. flat as pancake
42. nutty as monkey nut
43. pleased as lemon
44. red as tomato
45. red as apple
46. slow as potato
47. soft as cream
48. sweet as peach
49. warm as pumpkin
50. wrinkled as prune
51. bald as bald
52. big as potato
53. black as coal
54. cute as baby
55. dead as dead
56. deaf as deaf
57. dull as dull
58. hard as stone
59. high as sky
60. limp as towel
61. neat as neat
62. pretty as peach
63. rough as stone
64. safe as safe
65. sharp as knife
66. smooth as silk
67. soft as cream
68. stiff as cane
69. tight as rope
70. tough as leather
71. white as snow
72. cold as ice
73. dry as dusty
74. dry as dust
75. easy as easy
76. fast as swift
77. fresh as fresh
78. good as nice
79. hard as hard
80. hot as hot
81. light as light
82. old as old
83. pure as pure
84. right as right
85. solid as solid
86. as an arrow
87. as a bell
88. as a bell
89. as Croesus
90. as day
91. as the day is long
92. as the day you were born
93. as a dollar
94. as a drum
95. as a fiddle
96. as a ghost
97. as a hatter
98. as a judge
99. as life
100. as a lord

Now, for a change in approach, fill in the beginning of each cliche by inserting the appropriately hackneyed adjective:

101. as Methuselah
102. as a new-born babe
103. as a new penny
104. as night
105. as a pistol
106. as a rail
107. as shootin'
108. as sin
109. as thieves
110. as a tomb
111. as a two-dollar bill
112. as a whip
113. as a whistle
114. as a wink

"I can live a bear in a big O! So-so herd and we miles from each time."

"I'm in Hawaii."