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## **Descriptive Essay Writing**

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## **What Is a Descriptive Essay?**

A descriptive essay offers a vivid description of a particular subject. Good descriptive writing can take the form of newspaper articles, book reports, research papers, accounts of a single event, travelogues, and memoirs of a personal experience. It helps readers to imagine the subject of discussion through the help of sensory descriptions and interpretations made by the writer. A descriptive essay can be deemed as effective if it can help readers form an impression or an image of the subject/object being described. A descriptive essay describes or tells about something that the writer has experienced. Topics may include an object, place, person, or event. Strong descriptive essays remain focused at all times.

- Choose a specific topic. ...
- Compile information. ...
- Make an outline. ...
- Write the introductory paragraph. ...
- Write body paragraphs. ...
- Summarize the essay in the concluding paragraph. ...
- Look for ways to enliven your language

## **What Is the Purpose of a Descriptive Essay?**

Descriptive essays give readers a more robust understanding of a particular topic by fleshing it out with concrete details and figurative language. After reading a descriptive essay, you should walk away with a clear picture of the subject at hand, whether it's a historical episode, a geographic location, or a work of art.

Descriptive essays also benefit the person writing them. Whether the subject of your essay is

something personal, like your favorite movie or favorite food, or something of cultural importance, this type of essay is fundamental to learning the art of descriptive writing.

### **How to Write a Descriptive Essay**

The best descriptive essays are organized, full of detail and sensory language, and focused more on fact than opinion. The writing tips below can provide a step-by-step template for writing descriptive essays.

1. Choose a specific topic
2. Compile information
3. Make an outline
4. Write the introductory paragraph
5. Write body paragraphs. 6. Summarize the essay in the concluding paragraph

### **Structuring a Descriptive Essay**

A descriptive essay simply describes something or someone by appealing to the reader's senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Here are the basic steps to writing an effective descriptive essay:

#### **1. Select a subject**

Observation is the key to writing a good description. For example, if you are writing about a place, go there and take notes on the sights, sounds, and smells. A descriptive essay paints a picture for the reader, using descriptive devices and the senses. Create a thesis statement that informs the reader who or what you are describing. Examples:

“The wooden roller coaster in Coney Island is a work of art.” “My bedroom is an ocean sanctuary.”

## **2. Select dominant details**

Select only the details that support the dominant impression (your thesis statement).

## **3. Organize details**

The paragraphs in a descriptive essay can be structured spatially (from top to bottom or from near to far) or chronologically (time order) or from general to specific. Descriptive essays can also use other patterns of organization such as narrative or exemplification.

## **4. Use descriptive words**

Do not use vague words or generalities (such as good, nice, bad, or beautiful). Be specific and use sensory, descriptive words (adjectives). For example:

I ate a good dinner. OR I devoured a steaming hot, cheese-filled pepperoni pizza for dinner.

Provide sensory details:

- Smells that are in the air (the aroma of freshly brewed coffee)
- Sounds (traffic, honking horns)
- Sights (“The sun scattered tiny diamonds across dew-covered grass as it peeked out from beyond the horizon.”)
- Touch (“The texture of the adobe hut’s walls resembled coarse sandpaper.”)
- Taste: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, tart (“Giant goose bumps formed on my tongue when I accidentally bit into a sliver of lemon.”)

## **5. Draw a logical conclusion**

The conclusion may also use descriptive words; however, make certain the conclusion is logical and relevant.

### **Description Sample**

#### **Summer Escape**

My family has always looked forward to leaving Florida during the torrid summer months. It is a tremendous relief to get out of the heated hustle and bustle of summer living in Florida. Each summer, we follow the yellow brick road to our hometown in upstate New York.

As we drive through state after state, it becomes apparent that the world around us is changing. In South Carolina, we already begin to notice changes. The trees appear to be touchable, offering soft, plush leaves which sway in the breeze, and the grass actually invites us to share its place rather than scaring us away with mounds of intruding fire ants. As each state brings new surroundings, our anticipation builds, and home seems closer all the time.

Leaving the flatlands and entering an area where we are suddenly surrounded by hills of purple and blue are by far the most awakening moments. Virginia and Pennsylvania offer brilliant scenery with majestic hills and checkerboard farmlands.

As we descend through the curves and winds of the northern region of the United States, home is now very close: we are almost there. Suddenly, we have driven from wide-open flatlands to a narrow, winding road surrounded by hillsides of stone and trees. Around every curve, orange and black tiger lilies claim their place

in the world as they push themselves out toward the car, waving hello and flashing their mysterious black spots toward us as we drive by.

The journey home is almost complete. As we begin our final descent through the state of Pennsylvania into upstate New York, the surroundings become comfortably familiar. Before long, we are welcomed by a sign that reads “Waverly, 18 miles” and the familiar fields of grazing cattle. Through the last stretch of Pennsylvania, the bursting foliage seems to envelop us and carry us over the hills like a carriage created by nature. It is at this point that our family, even the youngest member, knows that our vacation in New York is about to begin. Our eldest son has joked for years that he can “smell” Grandma’s apple pie already. Approximately fifteen minutes pass and as our vehicle takes us over the final crest, we see the smoke stack from the local factory as we cross the border of Pennsylvania and New York and are aware of our surroundings. A couple of turns later, we are there. We have reached our destination; we are home.

### **Why teach descriptive writing?**

- It helps students make their writing more interesting and engaging to read.
  
- It creates opportunities for students to practice using new words in meaningful contexts, a key strategy for building vocabulary.
  
- Descriptive writing tends to include figurative language, such as simile, metaphor, and onomatopoeia. Noticing figurative language in mentor texts and incorporating it into their own writing help students build critical verbal reasoning skills. To find out more about verbal reasoning and other components of language comprehension,

see the “In Depth” section from the Comprehension module of our Reading 101 Course.

- It encourages students to learn from—and be metacognitive about—the techniques other authors use to write vivid descriptions.
- It can help students clarify their understanding of new subject matter material and remember more of what they learn.

### **What effective descriptive writing looks like**

Authors of descriptive writing use a variety of styles and techniques to connect with readers, but effective descriptive writing often shares these characteristics:

- **Vivid details.** Specific details paint a picture in the reader’s mind and appeal to the reader's senses. Descriptive writing may also go beyond creating a strong sensory impression to give the reader a “picture” of the feelings the description evokes in the writer.
- **Figurative language.** Tools of the writer’s craft such as analogy, simile, and metaphor add depth to authors’ descriptions.
- **Precise language.** General adjectives, nouns, and passive verbs are used sparingly. Instead, specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs give life to the picture being painted in the reader's mind.
- **Thoughtful organization.** Some ways to organize descriptive writing include: chronological (time), spatial (location), and order of importance. Descriptive writing about a person might begin with a physical description, followed by how the person thinks, feels and acts.



## **What effective instruction in descriptive writing looks like**

There isn't one right approach to teaching descriptive writing, but effective instruction often includes:

- **Mentor texts.** Reading aloud and analyzing high-quality mentor texts to help students understand how authors use descriptive writing to connect with readers.
- **Focus on the five senses.** Helping students make the connection between sensory input (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) and descriptive writing.
- **Teacher modeling.** Modeling different ways to generate descriptive writing.
- **Guided practice.** Repeated, structured practice scaffolded to meet students' needs.
- **Feedback and revision.** Cycles of constructive teacher and peer feedback followed by thoughtful revision.