

Descriptive Essay Characteristics

1. GOAL: Create a *single, dominate impression* of your person or place.
- ✓ Do NOT describe everything about your topic.
 - ✓ Focus only on details that support your *single, dominate impression*.

My favorite place is peaceful and calming.

2. “SO, WHAT?” Show us readers why your person or place *matters to you*. Why does your topic even matter enough to write about?

- ✓ This answer will be two-fold.

GENERAL, SIMPLE

Roaring Fork in the Great Smokey Mountains is one of the world’s most peaceful, beautiful places.

SPECIFIC TO THE WRITER: How does this single, dominate impression *affect* you?

This incredible place calms my fears when they become unbearable, allows me to relax away from life’s pressures, and helps me think without distraction.

3. SHOW your readers what you mean. Do NOT TELL them.

TELL = The water sounds loud on the rocks.

SHOW = Falling water crashes over large boulders and spills over small stones, creating a deafening roar.

Show readers your place or person by using a variety of descriptive details.

OBJECTIVE Details

- concrete, undeniable, factual
- easily observed by everyone
- scientific and very exact

The cracked boulders, covered in light green lichen, stand nearly ten feet tall.

SUBJECTIVE Details

- personal observations that reveal your opinion/feelings
- similes, metaphors, personification

The tall boulders, covered in lichen, look old, unused, and forgotten. Some find them imposing; I think they are solemn and dignified.

4. Organization: Spatial OR Order of Importance

Planning your descriptive essay:

1. What or whom do you want to describe?
2. What is your reason for writing your description?
3. What are the particular qualities that you want to focus on?
4. What sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures are important for developing your description? (Make a chart.)
5. What words can you use to convey your emotion or perspective toward your topic?
6. How will you organize your essay? Spatial order OR order of importance?