

Guidance for Descriptive Writing

Descriptive Writing is used to describe a person, place or thing in such a way that a picture is formed in the reader's mind. This is also creating an image or imagery. Capturing an event through descriptive writing involves paying close attention to the details by using all of your five senses. This is called sensory language. Using the various skills needed for descriptive writing will make it more interesting and engaging to read.

Descriptive writing shares the following characteristics:

1. Good descriptive writing includes many vivid sensory details that paint a picture and appeals to all of the reader's senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste when appropriate. Descriptive writing may also paint pictures of the feelings the person, place or thing invokes in the writer.
2. Good descriptive writing often makes use of figurative language such as personification, similes and metaphors to help paint the picture in the reader's mind. HAMOPS (an acronym to memorise the different figures of speech) will help you to remember all the components of figurative language to use in descriptive writing: **H**yperboles, **A**lliteration, **M**etaphors, **O**nomatopoeia and **S**imiles.
3. Good descriptive writing uses precise language. General adjectives, nouns, and common verbs do not have a place in good descriptive writing. Use specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs to give life to the picture you are painting in the reader's mind.
4. Good descriptive writing is organised. Some ways to organise descriptive writing include: chronological (time), spatial (location), and order of importance. When describing a person, you might begin with a physical description, followed by how that person thinks, feels and acts.

How to write a descriptive essay:

1. Take time to think about who or what you want to describe. The common topics are person, animal, place, object or experience. Try to make choices from your own life, this makes your writing unique.
2. Once you have chosen who or what you are describing, spend time thinking about the qualities you want to describe. Think about all the details associated with the topic. Even when not writing about a place, reflect on the surroundings. Where is the object located? Where does the person live? Consider not just physical

characteristics, but also what memories, feelings, and ideas the subject evokes. Memory and emotion play an important role in conveying the subject's significance.

3. When writing the descriptive essay remember the goal is to give the reader a rich experience of the subject. **You are not to write a story or recount.** Keep in mind, the most important part of writing a descriptive essay is **show, don't tell**. One of the best ways to show is to involve all of the senses—not just sight, but also hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Write so the reader will see the sunset, hear the song, smell the flowers, taste the pie, or feel the touch of a hand.
4. Once you've finished, review and modify your work with the goal of making it the best it can be. Always keep the reader in mind from opening to concluding paragraph. A descriptive essay must be precise in its detail, yet not get ahead of itself. It's better to go from the general to the specific. Otherwise, the reader will have trouble building the image in their mind's eye. For example, don't describe a glossy coat of fur before telling the reader the essay is about a dog! Watch out for clichés and loading up on adjectives and adverbs.

Show not Tell!

Use descriptive and figurative language, as well as concrete images to describe the subject. Personification, Similes and metaphors work well. Here are some examples:

Telling

The man was old.

The clock had been in our family for years.

Showing

The man frowned with a wrinkled brow, and with every step he took, you could almost hear his creaking joints.

The clock stood by our family, faithfully marking the minutes and hours of our lives.

Enjoy the process of describing the subject—it can be a rewarding experience. A descriptive essay doesn't rely on facts and examples, but on the writer's ability to create a mental picture for the reader.

Tips

Allow the reader to see, hear, feel, taste – even smell. Create a vivid description in the reader's mind. A good description can evoke a particular mood or atmosphere that will put a reader into the right frame of mind to picture the object and setting better. Recognising what to include and what to leave out of a piece of description is vital to making it effective and worthy of a high grade. Avoid unnecessary details! Describing how you felt at the time

(even if it is an imaginary time), will allow your reader to feel the same way. Using sensory description achieves this. Describe what you saw, heard, tasted, smelled, felt... at the time. You need adjectives to do this, of course, but avoid strings of these. Don't use words such as happy or sad. Choose instead more precise words (from a Thesaurus) as these can be far more interesting; also use vivid or original similes and metaphors – if particularly vivid and original, it is these that can etch their images onto a reader's imagination. Show and not tell the reader what a thing is like. If you are 'told' an experience was exciting, you might think, 'Hey! Let me decide that... *show me* why it was exciting, then I'll believe you.'

Review:

Is your description vivid and original?

Do your paragraphs follow a logical sequence?

Does it create 'pictures' and 'feelings' in the mind?

Does it 'show' rather than 'tell'?

Does it use good figurative and sensory language?

Have you used advanced punctuation?

Do all your sentences start the same way?

Have you used more precise vocabulary?