

## Descriptive Writing—Introduction

- Before you leave your home each day, you probably use description.
- For example, you might describe how well you slept or how a new cereal tasted.
- Through description, patients tell doctors about their illnesses, travel agencies tempt homebodies to new horizons, victims lead detectives to criminals, and screen writers portray environments for movie producers to build or find.
- Description also takes written form.
- For example, you might write a description about last night's championship game in an e-mail to a friend, or you might describe a chemical reaction in a report for your chemistry class.
- In the workplace, too, description plays a vital role.
  - Precise descriptions may convey company procedures, explain benefits packages, or provide detailed instructions for accessing a phone-mail system

**For the Teacher:** Use this lesson to develop your students' descriptive abilities. There are assignment suggestions at the end of this unit, along with a progress chart and a scoring rubric.

**For the Student:** Enjoy this look at description in everyday life. Use it to improve your communication skills with your friends, your teachers, and your parents.

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# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—Definitions

## What is Descriptive Writing?

- **Descriptive Writing** enables you to recreate your experiences vividly and share them with others.
- **Descriptive Writing** includes:
  - Sensory language that shares what the writer sees, hears, tastes, smells, and touches
  - Precise language, including vivid verbs and precise nouns
  - Figurative language, such as personification, exaggeration, simile, and metaphor
  - A logical organization, such as chronological or spatial order

## Types of Descriptive Writing

- **Descriptions of a person, place or thing** contain sensory details that bring to life actual people, places, and things
- **Observations** describe an event the writer has witnessed. Often, the event takes place over an extended period of time.
- **Travel brochures** contain factual information as well as persuasive language to encourage tourism
- **Character sketches** describe fictional characters—their appearances, personalities, hopes, and dreams





# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—PreWriting

## Choosing a Topic

- Memorable people, remarkable places, unusual events, and intriguing ideas all make great topics for description.
- Following are more ideas for coming up with a topic for description.
  - **Draw or Sketch:** use a drawing pencil and paper to sketch a person, place, thing, or event you find interesting. Your sketch may be as abstract or realistic as you like. When you are finished sketching, choose an aspect of the drawing to develop into a description.
  - **Browse in a Calendar.** Look through this year's or last year's calendar or date book to spark memories of people and events of the past year. For example, a certain date might remind you of someone you met, a game you played, or your grandfather's birthday party. Choose one of those memories to form the heart of your description.
  - **Make a blueprint:** Draw the floor plan of a place you know well. Next, label each room or area with a name that makes it personal for you, such as *My Studio*, *Kai's Hideout*, or *Mom's Den*. Also, jot down memories or ideas you associate with each room. Then, select the most interesting idea, and make it the topic of your description.
  - **Describe an Idea:** Example = Democracy: Think about the concept of democracy and the images it conjures up for you. For example, you may think of a person voting, a town meeting, or a king losing his crown. Then, develop this idea, and write a description of "democracy."
  - **Recall a Challenging Moment:** What was the last big challenge you faced? Write some adjectives or sensory images that arise from your memory of facing that challenge. Then, work your ideas into a description.
  - **Go through your family photo album and choose a picture with enough detail to write about—a wedding photo, for example. Write a description of what you see, as though speaking to a friend far away. You may describe what is actually in the picture or what you imagine it was like with the full wedding party in sight.**
  - **Responding to Literature:** In "Jazz Fantasia," the poet Carl Sandburg uses vivid descriptive language to bring jazz music to life. Read the poem, then write a description in response to it by bringing to life your ideas about jazz or any other type of music you like.





## Narrowing Your Topic

- Use a topic web to explore several aspects of a topic. Then, choose the aspect that most interests you to write about.
  - To make a web:
    - Write your broad topic at the top of a piece of paper,
    - and then write subtopics in circles connected to your broad topic by lines.

## Considering your Audience and Purpose

- Choose details for your description that your audience will understand and appreciate.
- Your choice of details and your tone, or attitude toward your subject, will also help you to achieve your purpose, your overall reason for writing.

## Gathering Details

- Gather a wide range of descriptive details using the cubing technique which is explained below:
- Just as a cube has six sides or aspects, so may your description topic have different aspects.
- Following are six ways to look at your topic. Jot down your responses to the directions. Then use your responses to draft your description.
  - **Describe It**: Provide details about your subject's appearance, importance, or personality
  - **Associate It**: Tell what related thoughts come to mind when you think of your subject.
  - **Apply It**: Provide examples of what you can do with or learn from your subject
  - **Analyze It**: Describe your subject aspect by aspect, using factual terms
  - **Compare and Contrast It**: Tell what your subject is similar to or different from
  - **Argue for or Against It**: Give details that explain your subject's value or problems



# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—Drafting & Revising

## Drafting

- Shaping Your Writing
  - Create a Mood
    - Once you have gathered a wide range of details that appeal to the senses, choose the ones that create an overall mood, or atmosphere.
    - The mood your description provides will add to your reader's understanding and to their enjoyment of your writing.
- Providing Elaboration
  - Create Figurative Language
    - As you draft, use figurative language to make your description memorable and unique.
    - Following are some commonly used types of figurative language:

## Revising

- Revising your Overall Structure
  - Review your description to be sure that you've used a consistent, logical, and effective structural organization.
- Outlining Details to Check your Organization
  - Create an outline to show the content and order of each paragraph in your description.
  - Then, review your outline and rearrange paragraphs, if necessary, to make your description more effective.
  - **General to Specific:** Use this structure when describing a person, thing, or an idea.
  - **Chronological Organization:** Use chronological, or time order to bring events to life for readers.
  - **Spatial Organization:** Use spatial organization to describe where things are located in relation to each other: for example, a place, building, or an object.
- Revising your Paragraphs
  - Check Unity
  - Review the paragraphs in your description to be sure that the main idea of each describes an aspect of your overall topic.
  - Make sure that individual sentences within a paragraph support the topic sentence.
- Revising your Sentences
  - Add Modifiers to Enhance Your Description





## The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—Drafting & Revising

- Enliven your description by adding modifiers to dull sentences
- Through the use of modifiers, you give more information about the subject or verb of a sentence.
- Modifiers may be single words (adjectives and adverbs) or they may be in the form of a phrase (adjectival and adverbial phrases and clauses).
- Adding Modifiers
  - First, read through your draft and circle any passages that seem terse, dull, or incomplete.
  - Then, add descriptive details, answering the questions *Who? What? Where? When? Why? And How?* through the use of modifiers.
  - Your modifiers may be single words, phrases, or clauses.
- Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers
  - A **modifier** is a word or phrase that helps describe nouns or verbs in a sentence.
    - An essential ingredient of clear writing is effectively placed modifiers.
    - A modifier should be placed as close as possible to the word it modifies.
  - A **misplaced modifier** appears to modify the wrong word in a sentence. In the sentence below, the reader may at first think that “we” were covered with cobwebs and mold, not the cabinet:
    - Covered with cobwebs and mold, we cleaned the old cabinet.
    - We cleaned the old cabinet that was covered with cobwebs and mold.
  - A **dangling modifier** appears to modify either the wrong word or no word at all because the word it should logically modify is missing. In the sentence below, the reader may wonder what, exactly, is “pistoning like spark plugs”?
    - Pistoning like spark plugs in a human engine, the track was pounded.
    - Pistoning like spark plugs in a human engine, the runner's feet pounded the track.
  - Revising your modifiers
    - Review your draft to identify and correct any dangling or misplaced modifiers.
    - Be sure you have placed your modifiers near their subjects.
    - Be particularly careful about sentences that contain passive voice; they are more likely to contain dangling modifiers.





# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—Drafting & Revising

- Revising your Word choice
  - Replace Vague Words
    - A vague word—whether it is a noun, a verb, or a modifier—cannot communicate your unique experience.
    - Reread your draft and replace words that are vague with more precise words.
  - Circling and Replacing
    - Read through your description and circle words that are vague, dull, or inaccurate.
    - Then replace those circled words or phrases with choices that better reflect what it is you are describing.
- Peer Review
  - One way to get feedback on your description is to work with a group of peers and have them comment on the effectiveness of your writing.
  - Use the following activity as you edit your description
    - Work in a group of three to five students
    - Prepare a chart like the one shown and give copies to peers
    - Read your description aloud to your peers
    - Then, read the first entry on the chart and ask your peers to make a thumbs-up sign if their response is positive and a thumbs-down sign if their response is negative
    - Enter your peers' responses on your chart
    - Review the responses and make revisions to your draft as necessary.

Feature Description	#1	#2	#3	#4
The title is appropriate and interesting.				
The description contains details like vivid verbs and precise nouns.				
The description creates a definite mood, or atmosphere.				
The writing is unified				





# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing— Plus/Minus Chart

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Group Member #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Group Member #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Group Member #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Group Member #4 \_\_\_\_\_

Group Member #5 \_\_\_\_\_

- Work in a group of three to five students
- Give copies of the Plus/Minus Chart to peers
- Read your description aloud to your peers
- Then, read the first entry on the chart and ask your peers to make a thumbs-up sign if their response is positive and a thumbs-down sign if their response is negative
- Enter your peers' responses on your chart
- Review the responses and make revisions to your draft as necessary.

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The title is appropriate and interesting.					
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# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—Editing and Proofreading, Publishing and Presenting

## Editing and Proofreading

- Before you share your description with others, take time to polish it. Correct errors in grammar and punctuation, and make sure that you have spelled everything correctly.
- Review your description carefully, and check to be sure that you have correctly used commas to separate adjectives of equal rank and to separate a series of adjectives.
- Using Commas Correctly:
  - **Serial Commas:** Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series.
    - **The restless, tired, and hungry crowd gathered near the mountaintop.**
  - **Adjectives of Equal Rank:** Use commas to separate adjectives of equal rank, called coordinate adjectives.
    - **The sweet, delicious pie was a hit after dinner.**
  - **Adjectives of Unequal Rank:** If one adjective has a closer relationship to the noun than the other, no comma appears between them.
    - **Twenty talented acrobats** appeared in the circus ring.
    - Check your description to make sure that you have used commas with adjectives correctly. Find items in a series of adjectives. If there are none, challenge yourself to add a series of adjectives.

## Publishing and Presenting

- Display—Request a bulletin board at school where you can post your description. Place photos or illustrations around your paper to further enhance its effectiveness.
- Audiotape—Capture your description on audiotape. First, rehearse yourself reading your paper. Mark on your copy where you will pause and what words require special emphasis. Then, record your reading. Play the tape back for family and friends.
- Reflecting on your Writing
  - After you have finished your description, think about the experience of writing it.
  - Use these questions to direct your reflection, and record your responses in your journal.
    - What did you learn about the subject you chose?
    - Which strategy for choosing a topic would you use for a future descriptive essay?





# The Writing Process—Descriptive Writing—Rubric for Self-Assessment

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Essay Title \_\_\_\_\_ Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Score 4</b>	<b>Score 3</b>	<b>Score 2</b>	<b>Score 1</b>	<b>Your Score</b>
<b>Audience and Purpose</b>	Contains details that work together to create a tone	Creates a tone through use of details	Contains extraneous details that detract from the tone	Contains details that are unfocused and create no tone	
<b>Organization</b>	Is organized consistently, logically, and effectively	Is organized consistently	Is organized but not consistently	Is disorganized and confusing	
<b>Elaboration</b>	Contains creative use of figurative language, creating interesting comparisons	Contains figurative language that creates comparisons	Contains figurative language, but the comparisons are not fresh	Contains no figurative language	
<b>Use of Language</b>	Contains sensory language that appeals to the 5 senses	Contains some sensory language; contains few errors	Contains some sensory language; contains some errors in mechanics	Contains no sensory language; contains many errors in mechanics	





## Description—Assignment

Descriptive Essay

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Essay \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Choose one of the following options and write your best-ever 5-paragraph descriptive essay. Be sure to write your full thesis at the bottom of this page first. Give your essay a title as well.*

1. Think about the concept of democracy and images it conjures up for you. For example, you may think of a person voting, a town meeting, or a king losing his crown. Then, develop this idea, and write a description of "democracy."
2. What was the last big challenge you faced? Write some adjectives or sensory images that arise from your memory of facing that challenge. Then, work your ideas into a description.
3. Choose a place with which you're familiar. Write a description of that place as though speaking to a friend far away. Use specific and concrete terms that appeal to the senses.

