

Description

Description covers many writing applications, from the creative prose you might use to describe scenery to the precise and concrete information needed by law enforcement officers, medical staff, architects, etc. to provide detailed reports. A description is a verbal picture of an object, a scene, a person or an event. In all descriptive writing, the objective is to provide readers with a picture of what it was like to be there.

Tips:

- 1) engage all the senses, if possible: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. You should be able to do this **without saying** "I can see..." or "I smell..." etc.
 - 2) Describe precisely, using words that create specific images. Don't say that something is "beautiful" or "impressive" or "wonderful" without telling your readers specifically how the object or event exhibited those qualities.
 - 3) Select words with care. Never use a general word where a more specific, descriptive one could be used.
 - 4) Choose a viewing point for your description. As the describer, you must take a position and describe what you see from that spot. Tell what is visible from left to right or from far to near.
- **Appealing-to-the-Senses Description:** Let the reader see, smell, hear, taste, and feel what you write in your essay.

The thick, burnt scent of roasted coffee tickled the tip of my nose just seconds before the old, faithful alarm blared a distorted top-forty through its tiny top speaker. Wiping away the grit of last night's sleep, the starch white sunlight blinded me momentarily as I slung my arm like an elephant trunk along the top of the alarm, searching for the snooze button. While stretching hands and feet to the four posts of my bed, my eyes opened after several watery blinks. I crawled out of the comforter, edging awkwardly like a butterfly from a cocoon, swinging my legs over the side of the bed. The dusty pebbles on the chilled, wood floor sent ripples spiraling from my ankles to the nape of my neck when my feet hit the floor. Grabbing the apricot, terri-cloth robe, recently bathed in fabric softener and October wind, I knotted it tightly at my waist like a prestigious coat of armor and headed downstairs to battle the morning.

Things to Consider as You Write Your Descriptive Paragraph

- Think of an instance that you want to describe.
- Why is this particular instance important?
- What were you doing?
- What other things were happening around you? Is there anything specific that stands out in your mind?
- Where were objects located in relation to where you were?
- How did the surroundings remind you of other places you have been?
- What sights, smells, sounds, and tastes were in the air?
- Did the sights, smells, sounds, and tastes remind you of anything?
- What were you feeling at that time?
- Has there been an instance in which you have felt this way before?
- What do you want the reader to feel after reading the paper?
- What types of words and images can convey this feeling?
- Can you think of another situation that was similar to the one you are writing about? How can it help explain what you are writing about?
- Is there enough detail in your essay to create a mental image for the reader?

Conventions of Descriptive Paragraphs Illustrated by Sample Paragraphs

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- **Spatial-Order Description: Show the reader where things are located from your perspective.**

Billy Ray's Pawn Shop and Lawn Mower Repair looked like a burial ground for country auction rejects. The blazing, red, diesel fuel tanks beamed in front of the station, looking like cheap lipstick against the pallid, wrinkled texture of the parking lot sand. The yard, not much larger than the end zone at General G. Patton High School on the north end of town, was framed with a rusted metallic hedge of lawn mowers, banana seat bicycles, and corroded oil drums. It wasn't a calico frame of rusted parts, but rather an orchestra of unwanted machinery that Billy Ray had arranged into sections. The yellow-tanked mowers rested silently at the right of the diesel fuel. Once red, now faded orange, mowers stood at attention to the left. The oil barrels, jaded and pierced with holes, bellared like chimes when the wind was right. The bikes rested sporadically throughout the lot. In the middle of it all was the office, a faded, steel roof supported by cheap two-by-fours and zebra paneling. Billy Ray was at home, usually, five blocks east of town on Kennel Road.

