

How to Write:

A Descriptive Essay

More than many other types of essays, descriptive essays strive to create a deeply involved and vivid experience for the reader. Great descriptive essays achieve this affect not through facts and statistics but by using detailed observations and descriptions.

USE YOUR WORDS!!



Why are you writing a descriptive essay?

It's a great creative exercise to sit down and simply describe what you observe. It's actually harder than it seems.

When writing a descriptive essay, you often have a particular reason for writing your description. Getting in touch with this reason can help you focus your description and imbue your language with a particular perspective or emotion.

Example:

Imagine that you want to write a descriptive essay about your grandfather. You've chosen to write about your grandfather's physical appearance and the way that he interacts with people.

However, rather than providing a general description of these aspects, you want to convey your admiration for his strength and kindness. This is your reason for writing the descriptive essay.

To achieve this, you might focus one of your paragraphs on describing the roughness of his hands, roughness resulting from the labour of his work throughout his life, but you might also describe how he would hold your hands so gently with his rough hands when having a conversation with you or when taking a walk

What do you want to describe?

As you get started on your descriptive essay, it's important for you to identify exactly what you want to describe.

Often, a descriptive essay will focus on portraying one of the following:

- a person
- a place
- a memory
- an experience
- an object

Ultimately, whatever you can *perceive* or *experience* can be the focus of your descriptive writing.



How should you write your description?

If there's one thing you should remember as you write your descriptive essay, it's the famous saying: **Show, don't tell.** But what's the difference between showing and telling?

Consider these two simple examples:

- I grew tired after dinner.
- As I leaned back and rested my head against the top of the chair, my eyelids began to feel heavy, and the edges of the empty plate in front of me blurred with the white tablecloth.

The first sentence tells readers that you grew tired after dinner.

The second sentence shows readers that you grew tired. The most effective descriptive essays are loaded with such showing because they enable readers to imagine or experience something for themselves.

As you write your descriptive essay, the best way to create a vivid experience for your readers is to focus on the five senses →



Revising your descriptive essay:

Be sure that you are able to check off each of the boxes. If you are unable to, return to your essay and introduce more of the subject that you are missing.

For example, if you are unable to check off “Does each paragraph of your essay focus on one aspect of your description?” then make sure that you have a singular focus for each paragraph.

- ☐ Have I provided enough details and descriptions to enable my readers to gain a complete and vivid perception?
- ☐ Have I left out any minor but important details?
- ☐ Have I used words that convey my emotions or perspective?
- ☐ Are there any unnecessary details in my description?
- ☐ Does each paragraph of my essay focus on one aspect of my description?
- ☐ Are my paragraphs ordered in the most affective way?