

# HOW TO WRITE A DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

## Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will learn how to paint a picture for a reader using descriptive writing. You'll also review some important rules about adjective order. Let's start by doing some freewriting using the five senses.

## Warm-Up

### A. Writing

Get a blank piece of paper and freewrite for five minutes about a person, place, or object that you think is amazing. When you're finished writing, discuss questions 1–4 with your classmates.

1. What amazing subject did you choose and why?
2. What adjectives did you write down?
3. Which senses did you use to describe this amazing person, place, or thing (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste)?
4. What personal value does this person, place, or thing have for you?

### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. meaningful        | a) a memory trick   |
| ___ 2. catchy            | b) having personal importance or value  |
| ___ 3. significance      | c) a describing word that helps defines what a noun is  |
| ___ 4. vividly           | d) in a clear, detailed way   |
| ___ 5. purpose adjective | e) memorable  |
| ___ 6. mnemonic          | f) more than one  |
| ___ 7. multiple          | g) something you can experience through the five senses   |
| ___ 8. concrete noun     | h) importance   |
| ___ 9. attributive noun  | i) a noun that modifies another noun and acts like an adjective   |
| ___ 10. abstract noun    | j) an idea or concept that you don't experience directly through the senses (e.g., courage, friendship) |

## Structure

In some cases, a descriptive paragraph will be part of a larger piece of work, such as a short story. For this lesson, your descriptive paragraph will stand alone. There are four basic parts to this type of descriptive paragraph.

### A. Title

Choose a meaningful subject and a catchy title to attract your readers.

**Note:**

A descriptive paragraph that is part of a larger piece of work will not have a title, but it can still be helpful to think of a title for a paragraph to make sure it is about one subject.

### Task 1

Think of three possible subjects from your childhood. Then come up with a catchy title for each.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### B. Topic Sentence

The first sentence of a descriptive paragraph identifies the subject in a meaningful way.

**Examples**

- The street I grew up on was like a never-ending summer camp.
- The best part of Polish school was the lunch hour.
- My earliest memory is nursing a baby squirrel back to life.

### Task 2

Write a topic sentence for each of the titles you wrote in Task 1.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Structure cont.

### C. Details

#### SENSORY DETAILS

The body of your paragraph features all of the details and paints a complete scene or image. Use the five senses to vividly describe the person, place, thing, or experience for your reader. These details must support your topic sentence.

#### Task 3

Choose one of the subjects from Task 1. Write five sentences describing the meaningful person, place, thing, or experience from your childhood. Try to use all of your senses to describe your subject.

1. sight \_\_\_\_\_
2. smell \_\_\_\_\_
3. hearing \_\_\_\_\_
4. taste \_\_\_\_\_
5. touch \_\_\_\_\_

#### ADJECTIVES

In the planning stage, make a list of adjectives that describe your subject. You can use these in the body of your paragraph.

#### Task 4

Brainstorm all of the adjectives you can think of that describe the subject you chose in Task 3.

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#### ORDER OF DETAILS

Decide how you will present your sensory descriptions and adjectives. Will you describe a scene from start to finish? Will you describe a person's inner, then outer qualities? Will you describe an experience that went from bad to worse?

#### Task 5

Plan a logical order to present your details for the subject you chose in Task 3.

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### D. Concluding Sentence

The final thought or sentence in a descriptive paragraph describes the personal value or significance of the subject. It should leave a lasting impression on the reader.

#### Examples

- I'll never forget the street that turned me into an entrepreneur.
- To this day, I shiver every time I drink warm milk.
- When Scrawny scrambled away, I knew I could change the world.

## Adjective Review

### HELPFUL TIPS

Adjectives are describing words that help paint a picture for a reader. Here are a few adjective rules to remember.

### A. Adjective Order

When using multiple adjectives in a sentence, follow this order:  
**opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material, purpose.**

- They bought a **shiny, new, European** car. (*opinion, opinion, origin*)
- Kelly has your **curly, red** hair. (*opinion, color*)
- He owns two **ugly, leather** jackets. (*opinion, material*)

#### Note:

Adjectives may follow a determiner, such as an article (*a, the*), a number (*three*), or a possessive adjective (*my, his*).

#### Memory Trick

Your sentence will sound funny to native English speakers if you don't use adjectives in the correct order. Try to remember this mnemonic: **OSASCOMP**.

### B. Punctuation

#### Coordinate Adjectives

Multiple adjectives of equal importance are separated with commas before a noun. These are called *coordinate adjectives*. If you switch them around, they still make sense (even if they aren't in the correct OSASCOMP order).

- She has curly, red hair.
- She has red, curly hair.

#### Attributive Nouns

Descriptive words that aren't separated by commas are often *attributive nouns* (nouns that act as adjectives).

- I ate a delicious **cucumber** sandwich.  
(*the noun cucumber defines the sandwich, no comma*)

#### Non-Coordinate Adjectives

Some adjectives need to be in a specific position to make sense. These are called *non-coordinate adjectives*. These words could not be switched around because they would not make logical sense. Do not use a comma between these types of adjectives.

- I have a **dark** green van.  
(*the shade defines the color and must be directly in front of it, no comma*)

#### The Final Adjective

Notice also that a comma is never used between the final adjective and the noun.

- ✗ I know three beautiful, young, Italian, models.
- ✓ I know three beautiful, young, Italian models.

## Adjective Review cont.

### C. Describing People, Places, and Things

1. Complete the Noun column below with the name of some people, places, and things that everyone in your class is familiar with. Don't show anyone your list.
2. Write at least five adjectives describing each person, place, or thing in the Adjectives column. Try to use a variety of OSASCOMPs!
3. Choose one noun (shh!) and share your adjectives out loud. Your classmates will try to guess your noun. If they can't guess, give them a category hint (person, place, thing) or think of another adjective.

#### Did You Remember?

opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material, purpose

#### Note:

Adjectives from the same category (e.g., opinion) can be read in any order, just as they can appear in any order in writing.

Type of Noun	Noun	Adjectives
People	Barack Obama	tall, tired, intelligent, hardworking, famous, middle-aged, American
Places	beach	sandy, warm, wet, sunny, busy, wide, turquoise, beautiful, European
Things	doughnut	sticky, sweet, delicious, iced, chocolate, baked, fresh, round, Canadian

## Noun Review

Adjectives aren't the only useful describing words! Concrete nouns are also important. A concrete noun is something that you can experience through the five senses. You can touch, see, hear, smell, or taste these things. Use as many concrete nouns as possible in your descriptive writing.

**Note:**

The opposite of a concrete noun is an abstract noun. Ideas, concepts, and emotions such as freedom, love, and religion are abstract nouns.

## A Sample Descriptive Paragraph

### A. Paragraph

Close your eyes and listen to your teacher read the sample descriptive paragraph. Try to picture the scene.

**Grumpy, Grumpy Grandpa**

Our grandfather's name was Glenn, but we called him Grumpy. Grumpy's favorite spot to hide from us was behind his Sunday newspaper on his royal blue recliner. "Grumpy, Grumpy Grandpa!" we would shout as we scrambled into the living room and onto his bony knees. Grumpy would growl and drop his newspaper before tickling us to the floor. One, two, three—down we'd go, squealing in defeat. Then Grumpy would pick up his wrinkled newspaper, stretch his legs back out, and dangle his monstrous feet over the recliner. We'd steal the giant's slippers and run into Grandma's kitchen to collect her hugs and honey sandwiches. Then we'd tiptoe back into the den and wait for the roar. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

### B. Find the Words

1. Now read the paragraph and circle the concrete nouns.
2. Then underline the adjectives.
3. Now write down one example of each sensory detail.

*I can see*

*I can smell*

*I can hear*

*I can taste*

*I can feel*

## My Descriptive Paragraph

Choose a meaningful subject from your childhood and write your own descriptive paragraph in your notebook. Make sure to include sensory details, adjectives, and concrete nouns.

## Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What is the purpose of a topic sentence in a descriptive paragraph?
2. What type of details should be included in the body of a descriptive paragraph?
3. What should your reader be able to do while reading your descriptive paragraph?
4. What is an attributive noun?
5. What does OSASCOMP stand for, and what is it an example of?
6. What is a concrete noun?
7. What is an abstract noun?

## Peer Editing

After you complete the checklist, share your completed descriptive paragraph with a partner.

Read your partner's paragraph. Circle the concrete nouns and underline the adjectives. Which senses did you use to picture your partner's description?

## A Checklist

### BEFORE SHARING YOUR PARAGRAPH

- ☐ Did I write a title (for a stand-alone paragraph)?
- ☐ Did I include a catchy topic sentence that introduces my subject?
- ☐ Did I use sensory details?
- ☐ Did I use adjectives?
- ☐ If I used multiple adjectives, did I check my adjective order?
- ☐ Did I paint a complete scene or image with a satisfying ending?
- ☐ Will my reader be able to picture my description?
- ☐ Did I check my spelling and punctuation?

## Writing Challenge

Do you want to write another descriptive paragraph? Here are some more topics to choose from.

- Describe an experience from elementary school.
- Describe your most interesting relative.
- Describe a childhood friend.
- Describe your favorite place to relax.
- Describe your most embarrassing moment.
- Describe a nightmare or dream that you had.