



Writing a Description

WHAT IS A DESCRIPTION ESSAY?

Description is using figurative language and sensory details (touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight) to describe a person, place, thing, situation, emotion, or experience. A descriptive essay, then, is one in which many descriptions are used to describe the paper's main subject or help the reader better understand its topic.

WHEN WRITING...

Description is used in many types of essays aside from a strictly description essay. For example, in a narrative essay, the author might situate themselves in their kindergarten classroom to tell their readers how they first came to love reading. It might be important to the story for readers to know that there was a reading nook in the classroom filled with soft pillows in the school's colors, maroon and gold, and overflowing shelves of books, where the author and her friends were allowed to huddle after lunch to practice, or pretend to practice reading. These descriptions allow the reader to better understand the location (place), which shows them why the author grew to love reading over the course of her kindergarten year.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REVISION

- Make sure that you are only describing **important people/places/things/events/situations/** experiences from your paper. It's easy to go off on a tangent describing irrelevant details that distract from the main point of your paper.
- Too many descriptions can be distracting, so **be selective** in what you choose to include & exclude when describing each item or event.
- If you use similes and metaphors in your descriptions, make sure to **keep a common theme**. In other words, don't compare one item to a lake and another to a dragon. Think of other water or lake related similes or metaphors to use if you compare an item to a lake so it remains consistent throughout your paper. It helps, too, if these relate in some way to the topic. For example, if you are writing a literacy narrative, the similes and metaphors could relate to books or reading.
- **Avoid cliches and idioms.** These are shortcuts and don't convey much meaning to your reader. Instead, describe what you really hear, see, smell, or feel.
- You do not have to use flowery language to describe something. Plain language gets the point across and helps your readers understand exactly what you are describing. If it's a brown leather boot, write that it's a brown leather boot, not that it's a dark tan cowhide balmoral.
- In lieu of using sensory descriptions, in certain circumstances, you can use the "elements of circumstance," otherwise known as **"who, what, when, where, why, and how,"** to describe what was or what should/will be done.