

Descriptive Essays

Contributed by Business Letters Admin
Monday, 24 March 2008

How
to Write a Descriptive Essay

by
Jesse Seldess, Professional Writer

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.

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)
a person

b)
a place

c)
a memory

d)
an experience

e)
an object

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

Why
are you writing your descriptive essay?

It's
a great creative exercise to sit down and simply describe what you observe. However, 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 labor 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.

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:

a)
I grew tired after dinner.

b)
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.

a)
sight

b)
sound

c)
smell

d)
touch

e)
taste

When you focus your descriptions on the senses, you provide vivid and specific details that show your readers rather than tell your readers what you are describing.

Quick Tips for Writing Your Descriptive Essay

Writing a descriptive essay can be a rich and rewarding experience, but it can also feel a bit complicated. It's helpful, therefore, to keep a quick checklist of the essential questions to keep in mind as you plan, draft, and revise your essay.

Planning your descriptive essay:

a)
What or who do you want to describe?

b)
What is your reason for writing your description?

c)
What are the particular qualities that you want to focus on?

Drafting your descriptive essay:

a)
What sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures are important for developing your description?

b)
Which details can you include to ensure that your readers gain a vivid impression imbued with your emotion or perspective?

Revising your descriptive essay:

a)
Have you provided enough details and descriptions to enable your readers to gain a complete and vivid perception?

b)

Have you left out any minor but important details?

c)

Have you used words that convey your emotion or perspective?

d)

Are there any unnecessary details in your description?

e)

Does each paragraph of your essay focus on one aspect of your description?

f)

Are your paragraphs ordered in the most affective way?