

# Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing provides an illustration of people, places, events, situations, thoughts, and feelings. Description presents sensory information that makes writing come alive. It expresses an experience that the reader can actively participate in by using imagination.

Descriptive details aid in developing the overall **dominant impression**. The dominant impression is a basic idea or theme that the writer wants to express from the complexity of the story's construction. A city, for example, can be described as exciting or scary depending on carefully chosen words, or from a subtly crafted mood. A thesaurus will help to achieve this. It lists a variety of words with similar meanings or connotations. Use the thesaurus to generate a word bank of comparable words that will help to develop "unity with variety." This means the writing is focused and interesting because it has a dominant impression.

Descriptive writing provides literary texture to a story. Texture *shows* rather than *tells*. A writer shows the reader through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, as well as through emotional feelings. Descriptive details enable the reader to visualize elements in the story. Vivid adjectives and active verbs help the writer to develop specific sensory descriptions.

For example:

- The woman on the beach watched the sun set over the ocean. TELLS
- Shades of neon illuminated the edges of clouds, backlit by the sizzling sun that slipped beneath a cerulean sea. SHOWS

Notice that sentences that TELL tend to be direct. They are objective. Sentences that TELL record verifiable facts as a scientist or journalist might. Sentences that SHOW are subjective; they may be influenced in part by the writer's personal experiences. Sentences that SHOW create mental images, and elicit emotional response.

To develop description think about what observations could be made, for example, when walking down a city street. How could the writer describe the smells of food coming from vendor's carts? How would the food taste? Being specific paint a literary picture with your words.


- Is the food *spicy*? Does it *drip with grease*?
- Does *steam rise up* from the cart?
- Does *shade spill across* the street?
- Does *sunlight sparkle* on a skyscraper's windows?

Consider what might be heard by a character who exists in a particular setting like this busy city. Do police sirens *shriek*? In a restaurant, do wine glasses *clink*? Specific words create the experience of the sound.


Fill the scene with motion using active verbs. Make the city setting spring to life. Rather than say, the waitress is busy, consider if she might *spin* in every direction serving the requests of her customers in a crowded restaurant? Does she *crash* into the deliveryman in the back of the kitchen?

What do characters say audibly, as well as in their thoughts? The reader comes to know the moods and personalities of the characters through expressive dialogue. Do the characters speak their dialogue in a whisper or demanding shout? Do they *bristle* their words?

**Practice: Look around the Tutoring Center. What do you...?**

	SEE	HEAR	SMELL	TOUCH	TASTE	MOOD
Use a thesaurus to find comparable alternative words						
Dominant impression =	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Brainstorm ideas for your assignment: What do you...?**

	SEE	HEAR	SMELL	TOUCH	TASTE	MOOD
Use a thesaurus to find comparable alternative words						
Dominant impression =	+	+	+	+	+	+