

THE LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION

**Describe
this
image**



What is Descriptive Writing?

- Descriptive writing creates a picture of a person, place, thing, or event.
- Description tells what something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels like.

What is Narrative Writing?

- Narrative writing that tells a story by presenting events in an orderly, logical sequence.
- Narratives always have a purpose- the writer has a reason he/she wants to tell this story.

Descriptive writing

- In Composition tasks, you may have a choice of descriptive and narrative titles. Although narratives need to contain some description of character and setting-enough for the reader to be able to envisage both - the two kinds of writing are fundamentally different, so it is important not to confuse them, or to start a description which becomes a narrative. You are likely to be better at one kind of writing than the other.
- Descriptive compositions may be completely imaginary, but it is safer to base your description on an actual memory or experience. This will make your response more convincing and original, and it will be easier for you to think of material.

Descriptive language & style

- Descriptions are often written in the present tense to give a sense of immediacy. Your vocabulary level and ability to structure varied and sophisticated sentences are assessed, so should avoid repeating words or using non-sentences (without main verbs). Don't start every sentence in the same way, e.g. with *There is* or *The storm* or *It*, but vary the subject and, verb, and the word order. Variety is the key to good descriptions, so try to avoid ordinary language and include the following:
- unusual (**polysyllabic**) vocabulary as many of the five senses as possible
- multiple adjectives
- **similes** and **metaphors**
- varied sentence lengths and types
- sound effects (e.g. alliteration, assonance, **onomatopoeia**).

Polysyllabic words are words which have two or more syllables, for example: children. melting. shampoo

Task 1 Are the following statements about descriptive writing true or false?

- A Descriptive writing must be based on the truth.
- B You need a wide vocabulary to be good at descriptions.
- C It is difficult to make descriptive writing interesting.
- D Descriptive writing is the easier choice.
- E You should use only the sense of sight when describing something.
- F Descriptive writing doesn't need a structure.
- G You don't need to write in full sentences for description.
- H Descriptions are often written in the present tense.

Task 1 Are the following statements about descriptive writing true or false?

- A Descriptive writing must be based on the truth. **FALSE**
- B You need a wide vocabulary to be good at descriptions. **TRUE**
- C It is difficult to make descriptive writing interesting. **TRUE**
- D Descriptive writing is the easier choice. **FALSE**
- E You should use only the sense of sight when describing something. **FALSE**
- F Descriptive writing doesn't need a structure. **FALSE**
- G You don't need to write in full sentences for description. **FALSE**
- H Descriptions are often written in the present tense. **TRUE**

Adjectives

- Adjectives are the key to effective descriptive writing; nouns need to be qualified by at least one adjective, and usually more, to enable the reader to picture what is being described, whether it's a person, place or object. The more precise, varied and uncommon your adjectives are, the more the reader will be able to engage with your description. Atmosphere can best be created by appealing to all five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. (Taste can be included through choice of imagery, e.g. bitter, salty, mouth-watering; touch by references to temperature as well as texture, e.g. blistering, chilling.) Colour is essential for conveying mood, and size and shape are also important elements in descriptive writing.
- When more than one adjective is used before a noun, size and shape adjectives go first, colour next, and other types of adjective closest to the noun (e.g. *the large, silver-framed, speckled, antique mirror; the tiny, square, black, velvet-covered box*).

Adjectives - Word Order

English Grammar



The general order of adjectives before a noun is the following:

Opinion	Size	Shape	Condition	Age	Colour	Pattern	Origin	Material	Purpose	Noun
ugly	small	thin	dirty	old	red	striped	Italian	cotton	sleeping	bag
beautiful	--	long	--	--	white	--	French	silk	wedding	dress
--	large	--	broken	ancient	--	--	Greek	clay	flower	vase

OPINION Attitude / Observations

delicious, lovely, nice, cool

SIZE Size / Height

big, small, tall, huge, tiny

SHAPE Shape / Weight / Length

round, square, long, fat

CONDITION Condition / State

clean, wet, rich, hungry

AGE How old is it?

old, young, new, antique

COLOUR Colour / Approximate Colour

green, blue, reddish, purple

PATTERN Pattern / Design

spotted, checked, flowery, zigzag

ORIGIN Where is it from?

American, British, Arabic, Turkish

MATERIAL What is it made of?

gold, wooden, plastic, synthetic

PURPOSE What is it used for?

gardening, shopping, riding

Adjectives - Word Order



The general order of adjectives before a noun is the following:

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ugly	small	old	thin	red	Italian	cotton	sleeping	bag
beautiful	--	--	long	white	French	silk	wedding	dress
--	large	ancient	--	--	Greek	clay	flower	vases

O S A S C O M P

<p>OPINION Attitude / Observation</p> <p>delicious, lovely, nice, cool</p>	<p>COLOR Color / Approximate Color</p> <p>green, blue, reddish, purple</p>
<p>SIZE Size / Height</p> <p>big, small, tall, huge, tiny</p>	<p>ORIGIN Where is it from?</p> <p>American, British, Indian, Turkish</p>
<p>AGE How old is it?</p> <p>old, young, new, antique</p>	<p>MATERIAL What is it made of?</p> <p>gold, wooden, plastic, synthetic</p>
<p>SHAPE Shape / Weight / Length</p> <p>round, square, long, fat</p>	<p>PURPOSE What is it used for?</p> <p>gardening, shopping, riding</p>

Before adjectives + noun we normally have a *determiner*:
- a, an, the, my, your, her, four, this, those, some, etc.

Examples: - a wonderful large round Spanish marble table.
- my brown leather riding boots - the little old man



A wonderful large round Spanish marble table.



I love my brown leather riding boots.

Task-1

- Look at the underlined words in the following sentences and replace them with more unusual and ambitious adjectives.

a The students went on a good day trip.

b The weather yesterday was so bad that the match was cancelled.

c I think your new track suit is very nice.

d The flight to Madagascar was awful.

e What a pretty view!

For ex: The students went on a stimulating/ beneficial/productive/ enjoyable day trip.

Task-2 a) Rewrite the following phrases, adding two adjectives before each noun.

Think of adjectives with interesting sounds and avoid clichés (obvious and common phrases such as busy street or delicious food).

1. the house on the corner of the street
2. the girl with the cat in the garden
3. the car in the car park by the river
4. the meal in the restaurant in the city center
5. the toddlers on the swings in the park.

b) Now extend each of your rewritten phrases into full sentences using verbs and adverbs which are unusual, precise and vivid.

They circumspectly navigated round the dilapidated , rambling house on the overgrown, shady corner of the littered, ill-maintained street.

Task 3 With your partner, list all the verbs you know which **refer to a manner of walking** (e.g. **shuffle**). Now use a thesaurus to add to your list. See which pair in the class can the longest list in ten minutes. (Make sure that you understand what the words mean! Write the words which are new to you in your personal vocabulary list, with an example of usage.

Task tip 3

The man was walking along the street is much less effective than The ancient bearded tramp in his tattered grey overcoat and filthy shoes was shuffling along the damp and littered pavement.

Verbs of locomotion describe more than just movement: they can convey the gender, age, social status health, mood and personality of the character.

Reading

- Read the following novel extract about the sinking in the Pacific of a cargo ship on which an Indian boy called Pi is travelling to Canada with his family and the contents of Pondicherry Zoo



It was dark still, but there was enough light to see by. Light on pandemonium it was. Nature can put on *a thrilling show*. The stage is vast, the lighting is dramatic, the extras are innumerable, and the budget for special effects is absolutely unlimited. What I had before me was a spectacle of wind and water, *an earthquake of the senses*, that even Hollywood couldn't **orchestrate**. But the earthquake stopped at the ground beneath my feet. The ground beneath my feet was solid. I was a spectator safely ensconced in his seat.

It was when I looked up at a lifeboat on the bridge castle that I started to worry. The lifeboat wasn't hanging straight down. It was leaning in from its davits. I turned and looked at my hands. My knuckles were white. The thing was, I wasn't holding on so tightly because of the weather, but because otherwise I would fall in towards the ship. The ship was listing to port, to the other side. It wasn't a severe list, but enough to surprise me. When I looked overboard the drop wasn't sheer any more. I could see the ship's great black side.

A shiver of cold went through me. I decided it was a storm after all. Time to return to safety. I let go, **hotfooted** it to the wall, moved over and pulled open the door.

Inside the ship, there were noises. Deep structural groans. I stumbled and fell.

No harm done. I got up. With the help of the handrails I went down the stairwell four steps at a time. I had gone down just one level when I saw water. Lots of water. It was blocking my way. It was surging from below *like a riotous crowd*, raging, frothing and boiling. Stairs vanished into watery darkness. I couldn't see with my eyes.

What was this water doing here? Where had it come from? I stood **nailed** to the spot, frightened and incredulous and ignorant of what I should do next. Down there was where my family was.

I ran up the stairs. I got to the main deck. The weather wasn't entertaining any more. I was very afraid. Now it was plain and obvious: the ship was listing badly. And it wasn't level the other way either. There was a noticeable incline going from bow to stern. I looked overboard. The water didn't look to be eighty feet away. The ship was sinking. My mind could hardly conceive it. It was as *unbelievable as the moon catching fire*.

Where were the officers and the crew? What were they doing? Towards the bow I saw some men running ' the gloom. I thought I saw some animals too, but I dismissed the sight as illusion **crafted** by rain and snow. We had the hatch covers over their bay pulled open when the weather was good, but at all times the animals were kept confined to their cages.

These were dangerous wild animals we were transporting, "farm livestock. Above me, on the bridge, I thought I heard some men shouting.

The ship shook and there was that sound, *the monstrous metallic burp*. What was it? Was it the collective scream of humans and animals protesting their oncoming death? Was it the ship itself giving up the ghost? I fell over. I got to my feet. I looked overboard again. The sea was rising. The waves were getting closer. We were sinking fast.

I clearly heard monkeys shrieking. Something was shaking the deck. A gaur - an Indian wild ox - **exploded** out of the rain and **thundered** by me, terrified, out of control, berserk. I looked at it, dumbstruck and amazed. Who in God's name had let it out?

From Life of Pi, by Yann Martel

Task 4 Read the following novel extract about the sinking in the Pacific of a cargo ship on which an Indian boy called Pi is travelling to Canada with his family and the contents of Pondicherry Zoo.

In groups of three, discuss and make comments for class discussion on:

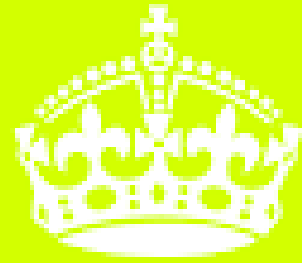
- a the underlined phrases
- b the italicised phrases
- c the words in bold
- d how the description changes during the course of the passage
- e how an atmosphere of fear is created.

In the same style (short sentences and questions for dramatic effect) and using a range of powerful adjectives and verbs, **write approximately another 150 words to continue the description of the sinking of the ship and the 'pandemonium' on board.**

Read it to the class.

Be happy

Be healthy



**KEEP
CALM**

AND

**WORK FROM
HOME**