

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING TECHNIQUES

ABOUT DESCRIPTIONS



A good description creates a vivid picture of a person, place or thing and, sometimes, how the author feels about it. Often the author will describe what happens or what something or someone is like as well as expressing their emotions. To do this they need to create an image, feeling or emotion in words.

Descriptions are found in many different types of texts: narratives, reports, persuasive texts, biographies, etc.

The key to a good description is capturing the 'mood' through describing details – not just what you see but what you can hear, smell, taste and touch.

TECHNIQUES TO CREATE A PICTURE IN WORDS

Below are some of the common techniques writers use to create a picture in words. Writers of good descriptions wouldn't use all the techniques in the one description. They would use ones that suited what or who they were describing. However, the more techniques you are familiar with and know how to use, the more 'tools' you have to write good descriptions.

USING DESCRIPTIVE WORDS

Writers use descriptive language to express feelings and emotions or to create pictures.

This may mean using adjectives to modify or add detail to a noun. For example,

The man wore a neat, chocolate brown business suit, shiny from wear.

tells you a lot more about the man and the suit than -The man wore an old brown suit.

Adverbs can also be used to add detail to verbs by telling how something happened, not just what happened.

For example,

The woman *carefully* considered her options before jumping *nervously* into the river.

USING YOUR SENSES

If you want to create a picture of something you have seen or an experience you have had you need to recreate it as vividly as possible for your reader. A good way of doing this is to use your senses:

- sight
- sound
- touch
- taste
- smell.

When you experience something you experience it with your senses. There are very few things you do that you experience with only one of your senses. When you eat something you see it, smell it and taste it. When you walk along a beach you see the waves, the sand, and possibly the seagulls, you hear the waves and the wind and the cry of the birds and you smell, and sometimes taste, the salt.

For example, when you eat an apple you:

See: **the green skin of the apple, the white flesh**

Hear: **the crunching sound as the crisp apple is bitten in to, chewing, swallowing**

Touch: **smooth skin of the apple, the sticky drips of juice**

Taste: **sweet taste of apple**

Smell: **the soft and subtle smell of the fruit.**

When you walk along a bush track you might:

See: **tall, slender trees reaching high up into the sky, leaf-littered track, dappled patterns of sunlight on the leafy floor, wildflowers, lizards**

Hear: **birds chirping, leaves rustling, the incessant scream of cicadas, feet falling on the rough ground**

Touch: **the rough/smooth bark of the trees, smooth leaves, prickly grass or bushes**

Taste: **hints of dust, perhaps salty taste of sweat**

Smell: **heavy smell of eucalyptus, clean country air, sweat, sweet odour of sun cream.**

USING FIGURES OF SPEECH TO CREATE IMAGES IN WORDS

Using similes

A simile is when you liken or compare something to something different. Usually a simile uses the words like or as.

For example,

Her mouth snapped shut like an iron trap.

His personality was as scarred and marked as his pock marked face.

Using metaphors

A metaphor is saying something is something else completely different – not saying it is like something completely different.

For example,

Your brother is a pig when he eats.

The test was a breeze.

Using personification

Personification is giving human qualities to things.

For example,

The breeze played with his hair.

The waves caressed her hot body.

Using alliteration

Alliteration is using the same initial sound for a string of words

For example,

She is a bright and bubbly baby.

... the whispering of the wind.

USING SYMBOLIC OBJECTS TO SUGGEST IDEAS OR EMOTIONS

Some **objects** are associated with **emotions or ideas**.

For example,

white doves are associated with peace;

the devil is associated with evil;

prisons and zoos are associated with lack of freedom;

stones and rock are associated with strength or coldness.

Some **colours** are also associated with **ideas and emotions**. In western society black is often associated with evil or death and white with purity and weddings. Different cultures may associate different things with these colours.