

APSU Writing Center
Descriptive Essay

Descriptive Essay

- A descriptive essay vividly portrays a person, place, object, event, or experience using sensory details and figurative language.
- Its purpose is to create a clear and immersive impression for the reader while conveying a central idea or dominant impression.
- Descriptive writing appeals to the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Thesis in a Descriptive Essay

- Your thesis should express the dominant impression you want the reader to experience.
- Instead of simply describing something, ask:
 - What does this subject represent?
 - Why is it meaningful?
 - What impression do I want the reader to leave with?
- **Weak thesis (too general):**
 - “The beach is a beautiful place.”
- **Stronger thesis (clear impression):**
 - “The deserted winter beach feels less like a vacation spot and more like a quiet refuge from the noise of daily life.”

Key Features of a Strong Descriptive Essay

- Focuses on one clear subject
- Creates a dominant impression or central theme
- Uses specific, concrete details
- Appeals to the senses
- Maintains organized structure
- Avoids vague or generic descriptions

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Steps to Write a Descriptive Essay

Choose a Topic

- Select a subject that allows for vivid detail and meaningful reflection.
- **Examples:**
 - Describe a place that feels significant to you.
 - Describe the experience of standing in a thunderstorm.
 - Describe the emotion of envy or relief.

Organize Your Essay

- Introduction
 - Introduce the subject and establish the dominant impression.
- Body Paragraphs
 - Focus each paragraph on one specific aspect (appearance, atmosphere, emotion, etc.)
- Conclusion
 - Reinforce the overall impression and reflect on its meaning or significance.

Use Sensory Details

- Describe the imagery:
 - What does it look like?
 - What sounds are present?
 - Are there noticeable smells or textures?
 - Is there a distinct taste?
- **Example:** The bonfire crackled as sparks leapt into the night air, its warmth pressing gently against my chilled skin.

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Describe Emotions

- Show emotions through actions and physical reactions.
 - Instead of:
 - “She was nervous.”
 - Try:
 - “Her fingers twisted the edge of her sleeve, and her voice caught in her throat before each sentence.”

Use Figurative Language

- Enhance imagery with literary devices, but avoid overuse.
- Examples:
 - **Simile:** The stars shimmered like scattered glass.
 - **Metaphor:** His voice was thunder rolling through the room.
 - **Personification:** The wind whispered through the trees.
 - **Hyperbole:** The wait felt like an eternity.
 - **Alliteration:** The silent snow settled softly.

Choose Precise Language

- Use strong, specific verbs and adjectives.
- A thesaurus can help, but avoid words that sound unnatural or forced.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Listing details without focus
- Overloading with adjectives
- Mixing too many impressions
- Forgetting organization

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Descriptive Essay Outline

Introduction: Briefly introduce the topic, and state a thesis showing the dominant impression.

Body Paragraph 1: Present your first aspect, and support it with evidence and examples.

Body Paragraph 2: Present your second aspect, and support it with evidence and examples.

Body Paragraph 3: Present your third aspect, and support it with evidence and examples.

Body Paragraph 4: Present your fourth aspect, and support it with evidence and examples.

Conclusion: Restate your thesis in new words, summarize the impression, and explain significance.



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