

Description Notes -- 075/110 A Descriptive Paragraph/Essay

1. A descriptive paragraph/essay takes a sensory approach. It explains what the topic of the paragraph/essay looks, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels like. NOTE: Not all the senses have to be covered in a descriptive paragraph/essay. The writer decides which senses best apply to the topic.
2. Although a descriptive paragraph/essay can deal with almost anything, it is wise to avoid a description of an event since it will tend to become more of a narrative than a description.
3. To arrive at an opinion word in your topic sentence/thesis, ask yourself: “What is my overall impression of the person, place, or object I am describing? What impact did it have on me?”
4. If you have difficulty arriving at an opinion word, try a fill-in-the-blank approach.

EXAMPLE: A trip through the Smithsonian Institute is very _____.
(Your opinion word could be “educational,” “boring” or “exciting.”)

EXAMPLE: Pizza is a _____ snack. (Your opinion word could be “delicious,” “messy,” or “disgusting.”)

5. Apply some type of order to your description. One type of order commonly used is spatial.
6. Don't forget transitions. Common spatial transitions: *above, below, under, underneath, beside, next to, behind, to the left, to the right, around the corner, across the street, etc...*
7. Include considerable concrete detail. Concentrate as many of your senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) as possible on the topic.
8. There are two types of details in a description--literal (factual) and imaginative. Do not neglect the imaginative details. Do not, for example, be satisfied with telling the reader that the forest is full of tall green trees. Go further--try to convey vividly the serenity, the mystery, and the scariness of the forest.

EXAMPLE: As I walked through the woods, monstrous trees bent over me threateningly, creating shadows which were sure to conceal ferocious bears and wolves.

9. You might want to insert a few metaphors (comparisons) or similes (comparisons using “like” or “as”) into your paragraph/essay to enliven it a bit.

EXAMPLE: icy stare (metaphor), solid as a rock (simile)

10. Do not conclude your descriptive paragraph/essay with a literal, mechanical repetition of the main idea.

TOPIC SENTENCE/THESIS STATEMENT: Pizza is a delicious snack.

CONCLUDING SENTENCE: Whenever a snacker craves a truly scrumptious treat, he should buy or make a pizza.