Descriptive Writing
Lesson 1

Student objectives:
I. Writing
   What is descriptive writing?
   What is focus?
   How to write a descriptive paragraph.
II. Grammar
   What makes up a sentence?
       Subject
       Predicate
   When can I use compound subject and predicates in my writing?
III. Figurative Language
   What is figurative language?
       Similes
       Metaphors

What is Descriptive Writing?
Descriptive writing utilizes sensory details to create an image in the minds of your readers. Perhaps you can describe what a photograph looks like, the smell of the kitchen when an apple pie is baking in the oven, or what it feels like when your feet sink in the muck at the bottom of a creek. Good description includes all of your senses.

Descriptive writing focuses on several details about a single subject, such as one ride at Disneyland, an important breakfast, or a strange animal at the zoo. Strong descriptive writing does not list details and directions like you would on a grocery list or travel directions. Focused descriptive writing does not describe a broad event, such as an entire vacation. Rather, it describes an image, event, or item using specific and colorful language that creates a picture or movie in the mind of your readers, as well as enticing your audience to read and keeping them interested and engaged until the piece comes to a satisfying end.

What is Focus?
You can find the focus in your writing by identifying a single important topic. This could be an event on a vacation, one interesting feature of an animal, or an enticing entrée on a menu. Then you can describe that one thing using interesting and colorful details.
When writing about an event, for example, many writers try to include everything that happened from beginning to end. Including everything does not always create writing that is interesting for your audience. Instead, take a microscope to an event and pick out the one instant you remember most vividly. Then use as many emotions and sensory details (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) as you can to captivate your reader from beginning to end.

Read the examples below and decide which one is most focused and why. It may help to ask yourself, “Which example creates more of a picture in my mind, as if I am watching a movie?”

**Example 1:**

The Snow Hut Trip

We should have known when we started out that the trip was going to be a challenge. First, we needed to drive 30 minutes in the opposite direction to pick up the warm jacket I had left at my friend’s house. Then, the snow started to fall on our way up the mountain. We had to wait for half an hour just to put chains on our tires. As we approached Lake Tahoe, I really had to go to the bathroom. Apparently, all of the gas stations were closed due to the snow. Finally, we found a place with a restroom. Relief! Four hours later, we made it to the trail head and greeted our friends. Next, we unpacked our gear and began our journey. Little did we know how treacherous it was going to be. The first hour was pleasant and beautiful, but then the snow started to fall. We encountered drifts over six feet tall and had to trek off the trail. We continued for several hours not entirely sure of where we were or if we were heading in the right direction. As the sun began to set, we felt really nervous. If we didn’t find the cabin, we would have to sleep outdoors in the freezing temperatures on a bed of snow. The sun finally set, and it was pitch black. Different members of our group were beginning to panic when we heard Eoin, my husband, yell, “Over here!” That was when we knew everything was going to be all right.

**Example 2:**

Lost in the Snow

The snow fell harder. As the sun sank, so did my heart. The wind blew across my ears, freezing them into ice cubes, while my fingers stiffened into icicles inside my sodden gloves. My husband and I had asked all of these people to come on this “easy” hike through the snow. Were we only leading them into nature’s trap? Time would tell.

We were still breaking trail through snow as deep as I was tall. I hoped I would not sink down past my waist. Dion, who had been trudging through the snow all afternoon, stopped. Had we lost the trail? Perhaps Eoin would know what to do. He always finds the answer when all hope is lost. I just hoped he could find the cabin in the dark. I was not sure we would see another sunset after that cold night if he did not find it.
Record your thoughts to the following questions and be prepared to discuss them in class.

*If you have a difficult time typing quickly in class, you may want to type your responses in a text document and be ready to copy and paste them into the classroom text window. To copy text, highlight it and then press the CTRL key and the letter C simultaneously. To paste the text into the chat room, be sure your cursor is in the classroom text box, then press the CTRL key along with the letter V. Your text should appear in the classroom text box. You may want to practice this ahead of time and email me if you have any questions.*

Which example above is more focused? Why?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Which example did you enjoy reading more? Why?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What have you learned by reading these examples that you will apply in your own writing?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

**How to Write a Descriptive Paragraph**

Your writing assignment for this week will be to write a paragraph describing a time in your life. Remember, you do not need to include everything that happened; pick out the most interesting moment and describe it using specific nouns, vivid verbs, colorful adjectives, and lively adverbs. You must include many details to make your readers feel as if they are actually there.
Step 1: Choose your topic. *(Think of a moment in time, shorter than 10 minutes.)* Possible examples:

- Your first roller coaster ride
- The moment you saw your sister or brother for the first time
- The first time you were left home by yourself
- Your very first airplane ride
- The happiest you have ever felt
- The saddest you have ever felt
- The scariest moment you have ever experienced
- The first time you saw the ocean
- The most exciting moment of your life

Choose a moment that you remember clearly, and that you can describe using several senses.

**Example Topic: Snowmobile trip of terror**

Step 2: Use the graphic organizer to record your sensory details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I saw…</th>
<th>I heard…</th>
<th>I smelled…</th>
<th>I tasted…</th>
<th>I touched…</th>
<th>I felt…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-A field of white snow with straw popping out the top. -A gully made by a small creek (that felt like the Grand Canyon). -My dad’s, sister’s, and brother’s faces turned white as the snow falling on the creek.</td>
<td>-All four of us gasp in terror. -The running engine of the snowmobile. -Dad say, “Kids, do NOT get off the snowmobile.”</td>
<td>-Gasoline. -The <em>sick</em> frigid Wisconsin air.</td>
<td>-Blood leaking into my mouth from biting my lip. -The snowflakes falling from my eyelashes to my mouth like tears.</td>
<td>-I clutched my dad’s leg for dear life.</td>
<td>-Sudden terror. -Convinced we were all going to die.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3: Write a topic sentence to introduce the moment to your reader.
Example: Even though many years have passed, I still love to recount the near
death experience I shared with my dad, sister, and brother on a snowmobile.

Step 4: Write a closing sentence that ties the paragraph together and connects with the topic sentence.
Example: I knew this frightening adventure would end with a cup of hot cocoa and
a story that I would tell for years to come.

Step 5: Complete the paragraph using the details you listed in your graphic organizer.
(Please remember to use MLA format!)

Ima Student
Ms. Julie
Descriptive Writing
April 25, 2014

Trip of Terror

Even though many years have passed, I still love to recount the near death
experience I shared with my dad, sister, and brother on a snowmobile. We were whizzing
through a field of white with tufts of honey-colored straw popping out of the snow
blanket when, without warning, the snowmobile teetered on the edge of a ravine through
which an icy creek gurgled. We may as well have been looking into the Grand Canyon;
all four of us gasped, then held our breath as time stood still. The creek beckoned us as
we waited to tumble to our deaths. All I could hear was the engine of the snowmobile
chugging away. The frigid Wisconsin air shot up my nose, carrying a whiff of gasoline
along with it. As the taste of blood trickled onto my tongue, I realized I must have bitten
my lip. Fortunately, the taste was diluted by flakes of snow that fell from my eyelashes
onto my lips like tears. My dad broke our silence by yelling at my brother not to get off
the snowmobile, as he was the anchor keeping us from plunging into the ravine. Slowly,
Dad guided me from the snowmobile, followed by my sister. When I saw my brother
stand tall and my dad pull the snowmobile away from the edge, a feeling of relief poured
over my entire body. I knew this frightening adventure would end with a cup of hot cocoa
and a story that I could tell for years to come.
Step 6: Read your paragraph to ensure that it is focused, uses specific vocabulary, and includes many sensory details. Use your thesaurus to find colorful, interesting, and specific words.

Step 7: Beginning with the last sentence, proofread each sentence in your paragraph to correct errors in spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and MLA format.

Step 8: Think of a creative title for your descriptive paragraph. If you want, you may add a picture to your assignment.

Grammar

What makes up a sentence?

A *complete sentence* is a group of words put together to describe a complete thought. A sentence always consists of two parts: a subject and a predicate.

**Subject**

The *subject* of a sentence answers *who* or *what* the sentence is about.

**Example:** The hikers searched for the best views along the trail.

The *simple subject* is the main noun or pronoun in the complete subject. In the example above, the simple subject is **hikers**.

To find the subject, simply ask, “Who?” or “What?” Then insert the verb and finish the question using the words from the sentence. The answer will be the complete subject.

**Example:** Who or what searched for the best views along the trail? The hikers

Sometimes a sentence can have two simple subjects. When a sentence has more than one simple subject, the sentence has a *compound subject*.

**Example:** Both owls and bats hunt their prey at night.

If you ask the question, “Who or what hunts their prey at night?” the answer is both owls and bats. In this sentence there is a compound subject, so the sentence has two simple subjects: owls and bats.

**Predicate**

The *complete predicate* of a sentence tells what the subject does, did, has, was, or is. It is the main verb plus any other words that modify the verb and complete its meaning.

**Example:** The hikers searched for the best views along the way.
To find the *predicate*, ask yourself, “What did the subject do?” The answer will be the complete predicate. Let’s try it.

What did the hikers do? searched for the best views along the way

The *simple predicate* is the main verb or verb phrase (verb plus helping verb) in the complete predicate. In the example above, the simple predicate is searched.

Sometimes a sentence can have two simples predicates, which is called a *compound predicate*.

**Example:** The hawk caught and killed its prey.

If you ask, “What did the hawk do?” the answer is caught and killed its prey. This sentence has a compound predicate, so the sentence has two simple predicates: caught and killed.

**When can I use compound subjects and predicates in my writing?**

Compound subjects and predicates can be useful in correcting run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

A *run-on sentence* is a writing error that occurs when a sentence contains more than one thought. Below is an example of a run-on sentence.

**Example:** Johnny sprinted up the steps Jaime followed him.

The writer has included two complete thoughts about two different characters. Both characters are performing the same action. This run-on sentence can be corrected by creating a compound subject.

**Example:** Johnny and Jaime sprinted up the steps.

Below is another example of a run-on sentence.

**Example:** The writer wrote two paragraphs then edited them to complete the assignment.

Here the writer has two complete thoughts in one sentence as well. This time one character is completing two different actions. This error can be corrected by creating a compound predicate.

**Example:** The writer wrote and edited two paragraphs to complete the assignment.

A *fragment* occurs when a writer leaves an incomplete thought to stand on its own.

**Example:** Swinging up, down, and all around. The monkeys played in the trees.

*Swinging up, down, and all around* is a fragment because it is missing the subject of the sentence. If the writer meant that the monkeys were swinging up, down, and all around, she could combine the two ideas using a compound predicate.

**Example:** The monkeys played and swung up, down, and all around.
Here is another example of a sentence fragment:

**Example:** The lovable lemurs were messing about high in the forest’s canopy. *And the mischievous monkeys.*

*And the mischievous monkeys* is a fragment because it is missing the predicate of the sentence. If the writer meant that the monkeys were messing about with the lemurs, he could combine the two sentences using a compound subject.

**Example:** The mischievous monkeys and lovable lemurs were messing about high in the forest’s canopy.

Using **compound subjects and predicates** improves the flow of your writing and adds to your sentence fluency. Having a variety of sentences helps keep your readers interested. We use compound subjects and predicates every day in conversation.

Take a moment to reflect on a situation in which you mentioned two people performing the same action (compound subject) or one person performing two actions (compound predicate) in a conversation. If you can’t think of one now, be mindful over the next week and see if you find yourself using compound subjects and predicates in your own conversations.

**Now You Try It**

1. Find the complete subject and complete predicate in the following sentence. Then find the simple subject and simple predicate.

   **The adorable chicks and goslings chirped and honked loudly in the farmyard.**

   Complete subject: ____________________________________________

   Simple subject(s): ______________________

   Complete predicate: __________________________________________

   Simple predicate(s): ______________________

2. Revise the following run-on sentence using a compound subject.

   **The cows grazed on the green grass the steers grazed as well.**

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________
3. Revise the following run-on sentence using a compound predicate.

The elephants munched on peanuts they then sprayed themselves with water at the zoo.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Figurative Language

What is Figurative Language?

Figurative language is a tool used by fiction and nonfiction writers to grab and hold their readers’ attention. Rather than using plain language to describe a noun, authors will use other creative means to convey their ideas. Examples of such means are comparison and exaggeration.

Example: Rather than saying the man’s voice was really loud, the writer might say, his voice boomed like a tuba.

Example: Rather than saying the rain was coming down really hard, the writer might say, it was raining buckets of nails.

As you can see, figurative language can be more fun to read and write. However, writers need to take care in choosing the words that they use, as readers will need to translate the figurative language into plain language.

So far in your writing classes, you have been asked to include details using vivid verbs, colorful adjectives, and lively adverbs. These are very important tools. However, you have many more ways to add imagery and detail to your writing. Using figurative language, you can create a picture in the mind of your readers and keep the attention of your audience.

Each week, we will explore different forms of figurative language. In this lesson, we will look at similes and metaphors.
Similes

A *simile* is a comparison using the words “like” or “as.” The author will compare two objects that are alike in some way.

**Example:** The sunset was *like* a painting in the sky.

*What is being compared?* The sunset is being compared to a painting.  
*What does this mean in plain language?* The sunset was colorful and beautiful.

**Example:** The feathers were *as soft as* silk.

*What is being compared?* Feathers are being compared to silk.  
*What does this mean in plain language?* The feathers were really soft.

**Now You Try It**

Underline the two objects being compared in the simile below.

**Summer is like a pot of boiling water.**

*What does this mean in plain language?*

Metaphors

A *metaphor* also compares one object to another; however, the writer does not use the words “like” or “as.” Instead, the two objects are compared directly.

**Example:** The lightning was a *fork* in the sky.

*What is being compared?* Lightning is being compared to a fork.  
*What does this mean in plain language?* The lightning in the sky had several prongs coming off a central point.

**Example:** The sun was a *lemon drop* in the sky.

*What is being compared?* The sun is being compared to a lemon drop.  
*What does this mean in plain language?* The sun was bright yellow and has a spherical shape.

When using a *metaphor*, you can also use one object in place of the other.

**Examples:** The lemon drop in the sky burned my skin.  
The booming thunder followed up the glowing fork in the sky.
**Now You Try It**

Underline the two objects being compared in the sentence below.

**The crowd was a raging sea moving toward me.**

What does this metaphor mean in plain language? __________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

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**Descriptive Writing – Lesson 1 Assignments:**

**When typing your assignments, please make sure to use MLA format.** When naming your documents, please be sure to include the class name (DW), your name, and the assignment number.

**Example:** *DW-Your name-1A*

Also, when you e-mail your assignments to me as an attachment, be sure the subject line of your email includes the name of your assignment. If you attach several assignments, your subject line should look like the sample below:

**Example:** *DW-Your name-1A, 1B, 1C (and so on)*

1A. **Vocabulary**: For this week’s vocabulary, please choose two new vocabulary words from a book you are reading. *Make sure to choose words that you do not know.* You will look up the definition, synonyms, and part of speech for each of your words. You will also use the word in your own sentence. Do not copy the sentence from the book. Using Word or Open Office, you should create two word entries using the following format:

- **Word:**
- **Definition:**
- **Synonyms:**
- **Part of Speech:**
- **Sentence:**

Remember to use MLA format!
**1B. Figures of Speech Journal:** In a book you are reading, find two examples of metaphors and two examples of similes. On one side of an index card or a piece of paper, copy down the metaphor or simile and beneath it draw a picture to represent the comparison. On the other side of the card or paper, identify whether the figure of speech is a simile or metaphor. Then write down what the metaphor or simile means in plain language. I highly encourage you to hand write and hand draw these cards.

When you have finished your cards, type out each of these cards (minus the picture) into Word or Open Office. These must be written in complete sentences.

Example:

![The falling rain sounded like bullets cascading onto the roof of our house.](image)

This sentence is a simile.

It means a downpour of rain made loud banging noises on the roof.

**1C. Descriptive Writing Assignment:** In this assignment, you will describe a memorable moment in your life for me, your eager teacher.

**In this assignment you will need to include an example of a metaphor or a simile in addition to using MLA format.**

**Step 1: Topic:**

(Remember to choose a moment shorter than 10 minutes.)

**Step 2: Record your details.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I heard...</th>
<th>I saw...</th>
<th>I tasted...</th>
<th>I smelled...</th>
<th>I touched...</th>
<th>I felt...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3: Write a topic sentence: _____________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Step 4: Write a closing sentence: _________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

(Your closing sentence should tie up your paragraph and connect to your topic sentence.)

Step 5: Complete the paragraph using the details you listed in your chart.
(Please remember to use at least one simile or metaphor.)

Step 6: Read your paragraph to ensure that it is focused, uses specific vocabulary, and includes
many sensory details. Use your thesaurus to find colorful, interesting, and specific words.
(Double check to be sure you used at least one example of a simile or metaphor.)

Step 7: Beginning with the last sentence, proofread each sentence in your paragraph to correct
errors in spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and MLA format.

Step 8: Think of a creative title for your descriptive paragraph. If you want, you may add a
picture to your assignment.