



What Is a Descriptive Essay?

A **descriptive** essay is an essay whose purpose is to describe or portray something, someone, or some place with enough detail to help the reader create a mental picture of what is being written about. When you write a descriptive essay, your job is to paint a mental picture of the person, place, or thing for your readers.

There are two kinds of descriptive essays. The first kind is an objective essay. In an **objective** descriptive essay, the writer describes objects, as any person would see them – color, shape, length, height, width, weight, etc. Objective essays do not contain any of the writer’s likes or dislikes or feelings about the object being described. A good example of an objective descriptive essay is a Police Report of an Accident. The policeman does not say whether or not one of the cars is his or her favorite color or whether or not the accident happened in front of the best skateboard store in town. These are personal likes and dislikes. The second kind of descriptive essay is an **impressionistic** or **subjective** essay. These kinds of essays describe objects and people as the writer sees them. They rely on the writer’s five senses to paint a picture in the reader’s mind.

The first step in prewriting for a good descriptive essay is planning. Your planning should include: **1.** choosing a topic (if you are given a choice); **2.** gathering information about the topic; and **3.** using a graphic organizer to map out the structure of the descriptive essay.

It is very important to remember that descriptive essays should contain colorful language. Try to use as many **adjectives** as you can in your essay. Descriptive essays do not tell a story, convince someone to think a certain way, or present a report about something. In a descriptive essay, your purpose is to describe as many characteristics of a person, place, thing, or feeling as you can.

All descriptive essays: **1.** present one, clear picture in the reader’s mind; **2.** can be objective or subjective; and **3.** have one purpose, which is to help the reader visualize the things that are being described. Therefore, it is necessary for all descriptive essays to contain a number of descriptive words and phrases.



**The Writing Watch Dog says,
“Great descriptive essays use
detailed observations and
descriptions to project complete
pictures into the minds of your
audience.”**

NAME: _____



What Is a Descriptive Essay?

The first paragraph in your descriptive essay is the introduction. This paragraph should have four or five powerful sentences that introduce the topic you are describing to your readers.

The first sentence of your introductory paragraph is your chance to grab your readers' attention. One way to do this is to make a general statement about your topic. For example, if your topic is your favorite season of the year, you might say: "If spring fever is an illness, I'm ready to be sick!" This sentence will be your topic sentence. It grabs your readers' attention and lets them know that the paragraph is going to be about spring. The topic sentence is the first sentence in your introductory paragraph.

The thesis statement follows the topic sentence in the introductory paragraph. Remember that topic or grabber sentences catch the reader's eye and tell what the paragraph is about. A thesis sentence goes a bit further. A thesis sentence states what you want your readers to know, believe, or understand after reading your essay. In your essay about your favorite season of the year, the thesis sentence could be, "Each of my senses is filled up with the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings of spring." The sentence following the thesis sentence should give more information about it, and the fourth and fifth sentences should summarize your thoughts and transition to the next paragraph.

The second, third, and fourth paragraphs of a descriptive essay are the body of your writing. In your spring essay, each paragraph could describe how spring affects one or more of your five senses.

The last paragraph of a descriptive essay is the conclusion. In it, you should restate the thesis sentence of your first paragraph, "Each of my senses is filled up with the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings of spring," and then summarize all the reasons you have presented for loving spring.



**The Writing Watch Dog says,
"Here are some important tips to remember
about writing descriptive essays:"**

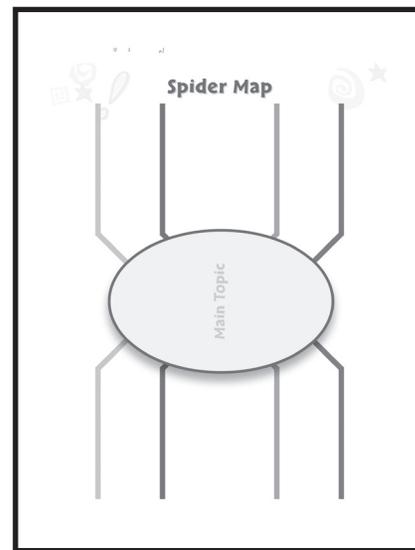
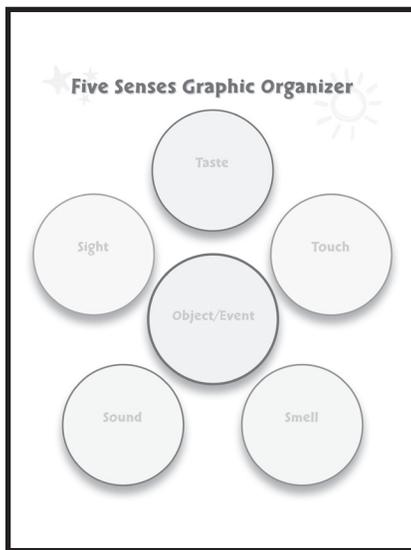
1. Take time to brainstorm.
2. Choose your words carefully.
3. Use vivid, colorful language.
4. Use your 5 senses!
5. Clearly describe your thoughts to your readers.
6. Leave your reader with a clear impression of what you think.
7. Be organized!



Using Graphic Organizers with Descriptive Essays

There are several types of graphic organizers suitable for descriptive essays. The two best ones to use are the **Five Senses Graphic Organizer** and the **Spider Map**. Both of these graphic organizers are designed to help you describe the topic of your essay in great detail.

Graphic Organizers for Descriptive Essays



The **Five Senses Graphic Organizer** is an excellent organizer to use during your prewriting work on a descriptive essay. Write the object or event in the middle circle. Then, record how the object or event affected your own five senses in the circles surrounding the middle one.

The **Spider Map** graphic organizer asks you to write the main topic of the essay on the body of the spider and all the supporting details on each of the spider's eight legs.