

# Week 2: Describing Geographical Features

## 1. Introduction and Objectives

In this session, we deepen our understanding of how to describe geographical features clearly and accurately in English. Being able to describe both physical and human landscapes is a core skill for geographers and planners. This includes not only using the right vocabulary, but also understanding how grammar – especially adjectives and prepositions – plays a role in forming clear, accurate geographical descriptions.

**By the end of the session, students will be able to:**

- Identify and define key physical and human geographical terms.
- Use descriptive structures to talk about locations and landscapes.
- Apply correct adjectives and prepositions in context.
- Write a short descriptive paragraph of a real place using studied vocabulary.

## 2. Importance of Descriptive Language in Geography

Geography relies on clear and detailed description to communicate the characteristics of space and place. Whether in academic writing, field reports, or cartographic analysis, geographers describe terrain, climate, landforms, and land use. Descriptive precision is necessary in environmental impact assessments, land use planning, and urban development strategies. Moreover, many international journals and professional contexts require English for communication, making mastery of descriptive language in English essential.

### Reference 1:

De Blij, H. J., & Murphy, A. B. (2011). *Human Geography: People, Place, and Culture*. Wiley.

### Reference 2:

Cresswell, T. (2013). *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.

### 3. Key Vocabulary with Multiple Definitions and Examples

Below are five essential geographical terms, each defined with two academic sources, followed by rich usage examples.

#### **Mountain**

##### **-Definition 1:**

“A natural elevation of the earth’s surface rising more or less abruptly from the surrounding level and attaining an altitude which, relatively to the adjacent elevation, is impressive or notable.”

— *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2023 Edition.

##### **-Definition 2:**

“Mountains are significant landforms that rise prominently above the surrounding terrain, typically having steep slopes and a summit area.”

— *National Geographic Society Glossary*, 2022.

##### **Examples:**

- *The Atlas Mountains stretch across northwestern Africa, separating the Mediterranean coast from the Sahara Desert.*
- *Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania is the highest mountain in Africa and is known for its snow-capped peak despite being near the equator.*

#### **River**

##### **-Definition 1:**

“A river is a natural stream of water of considerable volume, larger than a brook or creek, flowing in a definite course or channel.”

— *Cambridge Dictionary of Earth Sciences*, 2020.

##### **-Definition 2:**

“A river is a large flowing body of water that usually empties into a sea or ocean.”

— *Longman Dictionary of Geography*, 2018.

### **Examples:**

- *The Nile River flows northward through eastern Africa and is the longest river in the world.*
- *The Amazon River in South America carries more water than any other river on Earth.*

### **Valley**

#### **-Definition 1:**

“A valley is a long depression in the landscape that usually contains a river and is surrounded by hills or mountains.”

— *Geographical Dictionary for Students*, Routledge, 2016.

#### **-Definition 2:**

“An elongated lowland between ranges of mountains or hills, often having a river or stream running along the bottom.”

— *Oxford Reference – Geography & Environment*, 2023.

### **Examples:**

- *The Jordan Valley is a significant geological feature running between Israel and Jordan.*
- *Many agricultural activities are located in the Nile Valley due to its fertile soil.*

### **Plain**

#### **-Definition 1:**

“A plain is a broad area of relatively flat land with few changes in elevation and often suitable for agriculture.”

— *Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*, 2020.

#### **-Definition 2:**

“Plains are extensive, flat, or gently rolling areas with little relief, often formed by sediment deposition.”

— *UNESCO World Landforms Glossary*, 2022.

### **Examples:**

- *The Great Plains of North America are important for wheat production and cattle grazing.*
- *In Algeria, the Mitidja Plain is a fertile area used intensively for agriculture.*

## **Environment**

### **-Definition 1:**

“The totality of physical, chemical, and biological factors that surround an organism or ecological community.”

— *United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), GEO-6 Report, 2022.*

### **-Definition 2:**

“The natural and built surroundings in which people live, including air, water, land, flora, fauna, and human structures.”

— *Botkin & Keller, Environmental Science: Earth as a Living Planet, 9th Ed., 2014.*

### **Examples:**

- *Urban environments are heavily influenced by human activity, including pollution and land use.*
- *Protecting the natural environment is critical for sustainable development and biodiversity.*

## **4. Grammar Focus: Using Adjectives and Prepositions in Description**

Descriptive language often combines **adjectives** (to qualify nouns) and **prepositions** (to describe location or relation). These structures allow geographers to write or speak precisely about places.

### **Common Adjectives for Geography**

- steep, fertile, arid, flat, hilly, remote, populated, industrial, coastal, tropical

### **Useful Prepositions**

- across, along, near, between, within, beside, underneath, on top of, beyond, at the edge of

## Examples in Context

- *"The city is located between two major rivers."*
- *"A fertile plain stretches along the coastline."*
- *"The forest lies at the foot of the mountain."*
- *"The village is situated beyond the hills."*

## Grammar Reference:

- Murphy, R. (2012). *English Grammar in Use*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thomson, A. J., & Martinet, A. V. (2010). *A Practical English Grammar*. Oxford University Press.

## Examples of Adjectives in Geographical Description

Adjectives help to give more detail and quality to the geographical nouns we use.

Adjective	Use in Sentence Example
<b>Steep</b>	<i>"The trail climbs a steep hill that overlooks the valley."</i>
<b>Fertile</b>	<i>"The Nile Delta is one of the most fertile regions in North Africa."</i>
<b>Arid</b>	<i>"Southeastern Algeria has an arid climate with little rainfall throughout the year."</i>
<b>Populated</b>	<i>"The northern coast of Algeria is heavily populated compared to the south."</i>
<b>Remote</b>	<i>"The village is in a remote area far from any major cities."</i>
<b>Coastal</b>	<i>"Oran is a coastal city with access to the Mediterranean Sea."</i>
<b>Mountainous</b>	<i>"Kabylia is a mountainous region characterized by its rugged terrain."</i>

## Examples of Prepositions in Geographical Description

Prepositions indicate **location**, **movement**, or **relation** between geographical features.

Preposition	Use in Sentence Example
<b>Along</b>	<i>"A river flows along the edge of the village."</i>
<b>Between</b>	<i>"The plain lies between two mountain ranges."</i>
<b>Near</b>	<i>"The city is near the border with Tunisia."</i>
<b>At the foot of</b>	<i>"A small forest grows at the foot of the mountain."</i>
<b>Beyond</b>	<i>"Beyond the desert lies a chain of rocky hills."</i>
<b>Beside</b>	<i>"The farmland is located beside the river."</i>
<b>Across</b>	<i>"The road stretches across the valley connecting both towns."</i>

## Combined Example Sentences Using Both Adjectives and Prepositions

These examples show full, natural usage of both types of structures:

1. *"A fertile plain stretches along the coastline, where agriculture is the main economic activity."*
2. *"The steep mountains rise behind the village, creating a natural barrier against strong winds."*
3. *"The desert begins just beyond the populated area, where the vegetation becomes sparse."*
4. *"An industrial zone lies between two residential districts in the outskirts of the city."*
5. *"A tropical forest covers the land near the river, providing habitat for many species."*

## 5. Practice Task: Descriptive Writing Exercise

### Activity Instructions:

Write a paragraph (5–6 full sentences) describing any geographic area you are familiar with.

Use:

- At least **4 geographic terms**
- At least **2 adjectives**
- At least **2 prepositions**

### Example Paragraph:

“The Aurès Mountains are located in northeastern Algeria. They form a rugged landscape with steep peaks and deep valleys. A small river flows through the valley near my village. The area is mostly rural and rich in natural beauty. Green forests cover the mountain slopes, especially during spring. It is a peaceful region with a mild climate.”

## 6. Homework Assignment

Choose one of the following regions in Algeria:

- **The Sahara Desert**
- **The Tell Atlas**
- **The High Plateaus (Hauts Plateaux)**

### Task:

Write a paragraph describing the region in English (minimum 6 sentences).

- Use **5 vocabulary words** from today.
- Use **3 prepositions** and **3 adjectives**.
- Underline the target words.

- Submit next class and prepare to read it aloud.

## 7. References

- De Blij, H. J., & Murphy, A. B. (2011). *Human Geography: People, Place, and Culture*. Wiley.
- Cresswell, T. (2013). *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- National Geographic Society Glossary (2022).
- Oxford English Dictionary (2023).
- Murphy, R. (2012). *English Grammar in Use*. Cambridge University Press.
- Botkin, D. B., & Keller, E. A. (2014). *Environmental Science: Earth as a Living Planet*. Wiley.
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