

CEE

First year students

Ms. Alliouche

The Descriptive Paragraph

1. Definition

A good descriptive paragraph is like a window into another world. Through the use of careful examples or details, an author can conjure a scene that vividly describes a person, place, or thing. The best descriptive writing appeals to multiple senses at once—smell, sight, taste, touch, and hearing—and is found in both fiction and nonfiction.

A descriptive paragraph is a focused and detail-rich account of a specific topic. Paragraphs in this style often have a concrete focus—the sound of a waterfall, the stench of a spray—but can also convey something abstract, such as an emotion or a memory. Some descriptive paragraphs do both. These paragraphs help readers feel and sense the details that the writer wants to convey.

2. Structure of a descriptive paragraph

Every descriptive paragraph will take a somewhat different form, but the model is a straightforward way to get started:

1. A topic sentence that identifies the topic and briefly explains its significance
2. Supporting sentences that describe the topic in specific, vivid ways, using the details you've listed during brainstorming
3. A concluding sentence that circles back to the topic's significance

Arrange the details in an order that makes sense for your topic. (You could easily describe a room from back to front, but that same structure would be a confusing way to describe a tree.) If you get stuck, read model descriptive paragraphs for inspiration, and don't be afraid to experiment with different arrangements. In your final draft, the details should follow a logical pattern, with each sentence connecting to the sentences that come before and after it.

Showing, Not Telling

Remember to *show*, rather than *tell*, even in your topic and concluding sentences. A topic sentence that reads, "I am describing my pen because I love to write" is obvious "telling" (the fact that you're describing your pen should be self-evident from the paragraph itself) and unconvincing (the reader cannot *feel* or *sense* the strength of your love of writing).

Avoid "tell" statements by keeping your list of details handy at all times. Here's an example of a topic sentence that *shows* the subject's significance through the use of detail: "My ballpoint pen is my secret writing partner: The baby-soft tip glides effortlessly across the page, somehow seeming to pull my thoughts down from my brain and out through my finger."

4. Steps for writing a good descriptive paragraph

4.1. Finding a Topic

The first step in writing a strong descriptive paragraph is identifying your topic. If you received a specific assignment or already have a topic in mind, you can skip this step. If not, it's time to start brainstorming.

Personal belongings and familiar locations are useful topics. Subjects that you care about and know well often make for rich, multilayered descriptions. Another good choice is an object that at first glance doesn't seem to

warrant much description, like a spatula or a pack of gum. These seemingly innocuous objects take on entirely unexpected dimensions

4.2. Examining and Exploring Your Topic

After you've selected a topic, the real fun begins: studying the details. Spend time closely examining the subject of your paragraph. Study it from every possible angle, beginning with the five senses: What does the object look, sound, smell, taste, and feel like? What are your own memories of or associations with the object?

If your topic is larger than a single object—for example, a location or a memory—you should examine all of the sensations and experiences associated with the topic. Let's say your topic is your childhood fear of the dentist. The list of details might include your white-knuckled grip on the car door as your mother tried to drag you into the office, the gleaming white smile of the dental assistant who never remembered your name, and the industrial buzz of the electric toothbrush.

Don't worry about writing full sentences or arranging the details into a logical paragraph structure during the prewriting phase. For now, simply write down every detail that comes to mind.

4.3. Organizing Your Information

After you've compiled a lengthy list of descriptive details, you can begin assembling those details into a paragraph. First, consider again the goal of your descriptive paragraph. The details you choose to include in the paragraph, as well as the details you choose to *exclude*, signal to the reader how you feel about the topic. What message, if any, do you want the description to

convey? Which details best convey that message? Reflect on these questions as you begin constructing the paragraph.

4.4. Edit and Proofread Your Paragraph

The writing process isn't over until your paragraph has been edited and proofread. Assess whether the paragraph clearly conveys the message you intended to express. Read your paragraph to check for awkward phrasing or cumbersome sentences.