

FEATURES OF DESCRIPTIVE COMPOSITION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Summary: In this article the peculiar features of descriptive composition writing in the English language.

Key words: descriptive composition, describing people, describing objects, describing places.

When you hear the word 'describe,' what does it mean to you? For most people, describing is a way of illustrating something with words. You can describe a feeling, a sound, or even an emotion.

Descriptive essays are just the same: they help you illustrate something in a way that your reader can see, feel, or hear whatever it is you're talking about. A descriptive essay allows a reader to understand the essay's subject using illustrative language. [2]

Descriptive composition is a kind of composition where you explain the physical appearance of somebody, something, or a place. One reason for writing a descriptive essay is so that your reader can identify what you have described once he or she sees it. There are four types of composition and they are:

1. Describing people
2. Describing place
3. Describing objects
4. Describing events/festivals/ceremonies

Every type has its own features.

The composition of describing a person should consist of:

a) an introduction giving brief information about who the person is, where/how you met him/her. How you heard about him/her, etc.

b) a main body which may include description of such things as physical appearance, personality, manner/mannerisms and details of the person's life and lifestyle, (hobbies, interests, everyday activities, etc.)

c) a conclusion in which you comment on why the person is of interest, express your feelings/opinion concerning the person, etc. [1; 4]

In a descriptive composition of a person, you may also be asked to explain why this person is successful/admirable/unusual, etc. why he/she made such a strong impression on you, how he/she has influenced you etc.

Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence which summarizes the paragraph. The content of the paragraph depends on the topic itself and where the emphasis is placed.

Descriptions of people may be included in several other types of writing tasks such as narratives, letters, assessment reports, etc.

To describe physical appearance you should give details of the person's height/build, age, facial features, hair, clothing, etc. moving from the most general aspects to the most specific.

To describe personality you can support your description with examples of manner and mannerism.

To describe life, lifestyle and beliefs, you should talk about the person's habits, interests, profession, daily routine, opinions, etc.

If the instructions for the writing task ask you to describe someone related to the present e.g. 'Describe a person who is unusual...' we will describe the person using Present tenses. If you are asked to describe somebody related to the past, somebody who is no longer alive, or somebody whom we met some time ago you will describe the person using past tenses and if you describe a famous person we met who was not as you expected we will describe the person using Past tenses.

Physical appearance of a person should be described as follows:

A description of a person's appearance could include such aspects as height build, age, facial features expression, hair, clothes, etc.

We may describe visual details (e.g. A tall, heavily-built man wearing a black leather jacket...) and use words and phrases which describe the general impression created by the person's appearance (e.g. Donna's slender, youthful build makes her look younger than she is, while her face, with its bright smile and friendly expression, is very attractive).

Note that when we describe someone for official purposes e.g. a police report, you emphasize the person's physical appearance, giving the most accurate description possible. [1;5]

While writing descriptive composition of a person, one may include personality and behavior can be described in the following way:

In descriptions of people we can include a clear description of a person's personality and behavior with a variety of character words. e.g. He is friendly and honest.

These words should be justified in an explanation or example, e.g. Brian, who is very sociable, enjoys going to parties and meeting people.

If we describe negative qualities, you should use mild language. We use: tend to, seem to, is rather, can sometimes be, etc. e.g. Sarah is an excellent worker, but she can sometimes be rather impatient (not She is impatient)

We may describe personality and behaviour with examples of manner and mannerisms (the gestures people use, the way they speak/walk, etc.) e.g. Timothy is a very tolerant father, no matter what his children do he doesn't lose his temper.

Note that personality characteristics should be stressed in certain types of writing, for example when you recommend someone for a job.

Composition tasks in examinations ask you to describe a person or people; however, this description may be only one part of the composition. Composition tasks often ask you to describe a person and explain something about them.

In order to complete such a composition task successfully, we should not describe every aspect of appearance, personality, etc. We should choose the aspects which are most relevant to the particular question. e.g. "Describe a person who has done a great deal for others, and explain how he or she has managed to achieve so much.

In answering this question, it is not as relevant to describe appearance e.g. "He is a tall, well-built man with pale blue eyes..." as it is to describe the person's character, achievements and so on. e.g. "She is strong-willed, outgoing, and dedicated to..."

It is important to interpret the instructions carefully. The instructions contain certain key words and phrases which you must not ignore; for instance, if the instructions say "Describe a famous person ..." we cannot describe someone who is unknown to the general public.

The instructions may also ask you to explain the reasons for your impressions/reactions, for somebody's success, etc. Describe a person who has influenced us greatly and explain the reasons for this influence. We should state each reason in a separate paragraph with a clear topic sentence which summarises the main idea of each paragraph, and supports this with examples and justification.

e.g. The main reason I found him eccentric was the way he dressed.

Describing Places/Buildings

A composition describing a place/building should consist of:

a) an introduction giving brief information about the name and location of the place /building and stating the reason for choosing to write about it (e.g. What It Is famous for, what makes it so special, etc.)

b) a main body giving both general and specific details about the place/building usually moving from the general features to specific ones, when we describe a place we should give the overall impression by referring to landscape, buildings, landmarks, etc. and particular details (sights to see, places to go, things to do) , when we describe a building we should write about its surroundings (e.g. situated in Oxford Street...), then give a detailed description of its exterior and interior;

c) a conclusion in which you express your feelings or opinion concerning the subject or give a recommendation. [1;18]

We may also be asked to explain why a particular place is important to us, popular, etc. Note that the number and length of paragraphs varies depending on the topic. Descriptions of places/buildings may be included in several other types of writing tasks, such as stories, assessment reports, articles, brochures, letters and magazine articles.

Descriptions of places/buildings may include: factual information such as age, size, colour, materials, etc. (e.g. The temple, with 10-metre tall marble columns, was built In 800 BC.), details relating to the senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) to suggest mood and atmosphere (e.g. Visitors' footsteps on the worn stone floors echo through the cool, dark corridors, disturbing the tranquil silence.), opinions/impressions of the place or building (e.g. Tourists are fascinated by its air of mystery.)

Each aspect of the description should be presented in a separate paragraph beginning with a clear topic sentence.

The use of descriptive vocabulary (e.g. exquisite, exclusive, towering, etc.), a variety of linking words and structures as well as narrative techniques will make our writing more interesting.

Present tenses are normally used when describing a place for a tourist brochure or a magazine article. Past tenses are normally used when describing a visit to a place/building. First and second conditionals (will/would) can be used

when you describe your ideal city/house, etc. Note that when we give factual information about a place or building this is normally given using Present tenses. (e.g. I flew to Madrid last Monday. Madrid is situated in the central point of the Iberian peninsula with a population of about 3,000,000.)

Describing place should consist of:

Introduction: location, population, reason

Main Body: general features, particular details

Conclusion

There are a number of verbs used to describe the location and surroundings of a place. These may explain position (e.g. the old house is situated next to his surrounded by..), they may also give some suggestion of movement (e.g. the road leads up to/winds past...) and action (e.g. the statue towers above/stands at the top of...).

These verbs are naturally used with prepositions and prepositional/adverbial phrases (e.g. leads up to - winds past - stands at the top of, etc.).

Thus, the ability to describe something convincingly will serve a writer well in any kind of essay situation. The most important thing to remember is that your job as writer is to show, not tell. If you say that the tree is beautiful, your readers are put on the defensive: "Wait a minute," they think. "We'll be the judge of that! Show us a beautiful tree and we'll believe." Do not rely, then, on adjectives that attempt to characterize a thing's attributes. Lovely, exciting, interesting – these are all useful adjectives in casual speech or when we're pointing to something that is lovely, etc., but in careful writing they don't do much for us; in fact, they sound hollow.

References:

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