

Descriptive Language

Handout 3

Writing with descriptive language is about using details to make your writing come to life. It helps readers "see" what you're talking about, like they are experiencing it themselves.

Everyone sees the same thing, but no view is the same.

Here are some tips to help you write more descriptively:

1. Use the Five Senses

When describing something, think about how it would feel, look, sound, taste, and smell. Including sensory details pulls readers in.

2. Use Similes and Metaphors

Similes (like or as) and metaphors compare two things to help paint a clearer picture.

- **Simile:** "The lake was as still as glass, not a single ripple disturbing its surface."
- **Metaphor:** "The night was a velvet blanket, soft and dark, wrapping the world in quiet."

3. Show, Don't Tell

Instead of just telling the reader what's happening, show it through action or feeling.

- **Telling:** "She was nervous." (How did she demonstrate she was nervous?)
- **Showing:** "Her hands trembled, and she bit her lip, her eyes darting around the room."

4. Be Specific

Instead of using general words like "nice" or "big," try to be specific and creative with your language.

- Instead of: "The food was good," try: "The pasta was creamy and rich, with a hint of garlic and fresh basil."
- Instead of: "The dog was big," try: "The dog was a massive, shaggy German Shepherd, its fur thick and glossy."

5. Use Strong Verbs (Verbs show action, occurrences, or state of being.)

Choose verbs that are specific and alive, rather than weak or common ones.

- Instead of "He walked," try "He sauntered, his steps slow and deliberate."
- Instead of "The car moved fast," try "The car zoomed down the street, its engine roaring like a lion."

6. Create Atmosphere with Mood and Tone

The mood and tone of your writing can set the stage for the emotions you want to evoke in the reader.

- **Mood:** "The misty woods were eerie, the silence broken only by the occasional distant hoot of an owl."
- **Tone:** "Her voice was sharp, cutting through the calm of the room like a knife."

Example of Descriptive Writing:

Here is an example where all elements come together:

Descriptive Example:

The forest was misty and alive with sound. The leaves rustled in the trees, whispering secrets to the wind, while the distant croak of frogs sang from the marsh. Moonlight filtered through the branches, casting long, twisting shadows on the forest floor. The air was damp, thick with the earthy scent of wet soil and moss. I could feel the cool mist on my face, making my skin prickle. The ground beneath my boots was soft, the earth spongy and thick with the scent of pine. Somewhere nearby, a branch snapped, making my heart race, but I kept walking, my footsteps muffled on the carpet of fallen leaves.

Notice how the scene doesn't just tell you what is there but paints a picture, bringing the forest to life. Use descriptive words in the telling of your family stories. You want them to be interesting and paint a picture for your descendants to want to read. Think about your favorite authors and how their words make you feel. Why do you feel that way? Because they have invited you into the story using descriptive verbs.