

THE DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY

The purpose of a descriptive essay is to create an impression on the reader. This type of theme should **excite the reader's senses (touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell) through the use of vivid words and details.**

Most descriptive essays will be subjective or impressionistic instead of objective. A subjective theme expresses the opinion or attitude of the writer while an objective theme only states factual details.

Subjective: *The tall young lady looked like a covergirl model.*

Objective: *The sixteen-year-old girl was 5'10" and weighed 120 pounds.*

Descriptive essays are usually organized in one of several ways:

Spatial Organization can take many forms. For example, you can organize the description of a room from your point of view, as an observer sitting in the middle describing the things around you. However, if your subject is a physical object, you should select an orderly method of describing it. You may move from **top to bottom** or **left to right**, and so on. For example, you could describe a sculpture as you walk around it.

Chronological Organization lends itself to many subjects for description. For example, if you want to describe a rock concert, you could describe what the hall is like **before** the show, **during** the show, and immediately **after** the show. The same pattern could be applied to the description of a classroom, a stadium, or a parking lot. The description of a person might be arranged around how he appears **in the morning, at noon, and in the evening.**

Order of Importance may be an excellent approach when more than one type of sensory impression is included. You may choose to *start with the most important and put the least important last* or, alternatively, to *begin with the least important and save put the most important last.*

NOTE: Whichever form of organization you use, be sure to be consistent and logical. Include specific, concrete detail that appeals to the senses (the way something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels) in order to create a strong impression.

Read the following paragraph and note the writer's attitude, how it incorporates the five senses, and the organizational pattern:

An **air of death** haunts my grandfather's **old, red brick** house. As I walk through **the creaky** oak door, the **light barely creeps through** the **dirty old** windowpanes. Slowly, I move into the **once-lively** living room. While I reach for the light switch, the **soft wisp** of a spider's web brushes against my hand. The **smell and taste of dust** are thick in the air. The new **gray, crushed velvet** furniture is covered with thick, clear, plastic sheets. The white walls and ceiling are now a **dull, dingy gray**, and there are little **wisps of dust** about the floor. Hearing nothing except my own heartbeat, I feel the **loneliness and emptiness** crash out even louder and harder. Standing there waiting for the kind, loving old gentleman to speak is the only thought in my mind. Then, with sadness, I realize—he's gone.