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BSc Degree

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English – 1 (Basic English)
Professor Shreesh Chaudhary
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Describe a Photo

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WRITING



Hello, welcome to this the next session of the module in writing. It is quite true that language is primarily a spoken medium, but there are lots of occasions when we write, and one of these occasions is when we describe something visual which otherwise, we see but for those that are not with us we describe what we see, say, imagine until about photography came until, about portable cameras came, how did people describe one thing to another?

How did they describe things they had seen in some strange land, in some strange country for people back their home? Imagine foreigners in India; they come to a country where the tree has hanging roots, they came to a country where animals had a nose that touched the ground. Imagine a country where trees had fruits not from their branches but from the stems of the trees.

There are lots of things everyone observes, everyone sees in a strange land, in a foreign land or when one goes for the first time from a village to a city or the other way round from a city to a village. I remember a child from New Delhi visiting a village in Bihar, and at as soon as the child saw some kinds of good, the child cried to her mother mama, mama see there is a vegetable on the roof or the rooftop, the child had never seen that kind of thing.

And it is so common for most places in rural India, that the creepers climb up to the roof or up to the thatched, roof of the house and there different kinds of goods are grown, eaten, sold. So, you often describe things which you see for those who may not be able to see them. How do you do

that? Let us look at that. In this session today, we will talk about describing the contents of a photograph or contents of any other visual medium. Let us take a look.

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QUESTION



Description of Ladies' Compartment:

Look at the following photograph carefully, and then in no more than 150 words, describe all that you see.



Typically, you get examination questions of this kind, look at the following photograph carefully and then in no more than 150 words describe all that you see. Lots of people see lots of things, many people do not see much, some people hardly see anything, some people would say well this is the ladies compartment, and then they go quiet, what is there to say, in a ladies compartment there are ladies, and then they do not know what to describe. Let us look at the photograph.

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Take a look, take about a minute, you will notice a variety of things begin with the sailing of the compartment. We know it is a ladies compartment because we have been told it is a ladies compartment; otherwise, there is nothing special here it. An immense compartment in a railway train perhaps it is an Indian railway train, but it could also be Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, some other countries in Asia, perhaps also in Europe, but from what passengers are wearing, we feel inclined to believe that this is a ladies compartment of a railway train in a south Asian country, could be India, could be Bangladesh, could be Pakistan or some other places perhaps.

Now, what do we see? So, we see passengers. How many different kinds of passengers? Not many, gender-wise there are only, there are only one set of passengers, all ladies. There are small children girls, but I can hardly see a boy they all appear to be ladies except perhaps one in the front who may be a boy but I am not too sure.

Then the other thing that, other things attract your attention, what these passengers are wearing? Almost without exception children are in frocks, and all adults seem to be in a Saree, Sarees of various colours I do not think, I have the vocabulary to describe all the colours, but the colours I can see are red, orange, pink, black, purple, dark, very dark black, maybe some green, white as well, and there are other colours, so with children's dresses.

What else do we notice? We notice that nearly all seats are occupied, and some passengers are also standing, but none of them is standing holding the grip, holding the grip that has been provided for in the train, you see those hanging things, things hanging from a rail or a tube attached to the ceiling of the train, attached to the ceiling of the compartment. But no passenger is holding that grip, perhaps that grip is meant for passengers to hold and stand steady so that when the train is in motion or the train suddenly breaks and stops you do not fall down, the passengers do not fall down.

But I cannot, I do not know for some reason, no, even I mean there are, actually I can see at least about half a dozen passengers on their feet, but none of them is holding the grip. So, maybe it is given there, perhaps women do not perhaps men do they hold their grip, but that is the compartment.

Then there are some ceiling fans attached to the compartment of the train which means this train runs in a tropical country where you have heat and humidity; it perhaps is not Europe or North America or such other cold countries, this has to be some tropical country with a lot of heat and humidity.

Then what else do you notice? The design of seats, the design of compartments there is, of course, ventilation. So, take a look whenever you are confronted, whenever you are, you have a writing assignment, a writing task which asks you to look at a photograph and then describes the contents the good thing is to take a good look at everything you can see, passengers, fittings, furnishing, the design of the coach.

I mean which way is the train headed, is it coming towards us or going away from us difficult to make out from the compartment at least I get no clue which way it is headed. So, there may be some questions which might remain unanswered, but that is beyond the compartment. Whatever is within the compartment can be described. Now, let us look at some description. Let us see how somebody has described it.

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ACTIVITY

Read and compare the first draft and the final draft based on the following parameters:

	First Draft	Final Draft
No. of words		
No. of sentences		
Content		



We are going to look at two descriptions perhaps by the same writer. The first draft where anything can be written and the final draft which has come after several revisions which is a little better than the first job, may not be perfect, maybe it can be still better, but there are these two drafts.

And what shall we compare these two dots for? We will compare them for a number of words; you remember we see that we have a limit; it should not exceed 150 words. Now, that does not mean it can be only ten words, you can be five words fewer or five words more if you have been asked to describe something in 150 words, it could be 145 words it could be, 155 words but no more and no less, the margin of one or two words is all right, is given, but not many more.

So, we will compare them, these two drafts, the first and the final, the final that was submitted by the writer to the reviewer, to the teacher evaluating the paper. And we will look at the number of words in both a number of sentences in both and contents in both, what has been said and what has not been said. Let us go.

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FIRST DRAFT



The photograph presents a view of a second class ladies' compartment in a railway train in India. Most probably it is a local train commuting between the suburbs and the city, bringing the ladies to work and taking them back to their homes.

The compartment appears to be a fairly large one, and crowded, it seems lots of ladies and children are packed in it like fish in cans. There also appear to be quite a few children, though it is not very clear what they are doing there.



Read it carefully; the photograph presents a view of a second-class ladies compartment in a railway train in India. Most probably it is a local train commuting between the suburbs and the city, bringing the ladies to work and taking them back to their homes. The compartment appears to be a fairly large one, a fairly large one and crowded, it seems lots of ladies and children are packed in it like fish in cans. There also appear to be quite a few children, though it is not very clear what they are doing there. And go to the next.

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The compartment has also provided hand grips hanging from a tube attached to the roof of the compartment so that standing passengers can hold it and travel without falling. No lady passenger in this compartment is holding the grip just now. May be they do not mind falling!

All the ladies there in the compartment are wearing very beautiful and colourful saris. They are red, pink, black, green, purple with matching blouses. They generally seem to be very happy and peaceful. Children are also very quiet. Though not all of them are seated. On the whole it is a very typically Indian situation.



This way you can read the rest of it, take a minute, take your time, read it carefully, if necessary rewind, come back and read it again, go next.

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FINAL DRAFT

This is a photograph of a ladies compartment in a railway train. All seats here are occupied. Some passengers are also standing. Hand grips hanging from the tube attached to the ceiling show that the compartment takes both, sitting passengers and some standing passengers. There seem to be above 50 passengers in the compartment.

Most passengers are adults, and seem to be going to or coming from their day's work. The compartment also has a few girls. It is not clear why they are there.



Now, look at the final draft, this is a photograph of a ladies compartment in a railway train, all seats here are occupied, some passengers are also standing, hand grips hanging from the tube attached to the ceiling show that the compartment takes both sitting passengers and some standing passengers. There seem to be above 50 passengers in the compartment, and it goes on, you can read the final draft as well, go next.

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ANSWERS



	First Draft	Final Draft
No. Of words	192	146
No. of sentences	13	14



Now, let us compare the first draft has 192 words, whereas it is expected to have no more than 155, so it has nearly 40 words more, almost one-fourth more than there ought to be, one-third, one-fourth more than. And then how many sentences? The first draft has 192 words in only 13 sentences which mean you have lots of complex sentences there, lots of sentences difficult to understand.

The final draft has only 146 words and 14 sentences with fewer words the final draft has more sentences which means the final draft has many simple sentences, and the final draft is easier to understand. Let us go and compare.

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FIRST DRAFT	FINAL DRAFT
Presents a view	X
Bringing the ladies to work and taking them back to their homes.	X
It seems lots of ladies and children are packed in it like fish in cans.	X
No lady passenger in this compartment.	No passenger...
May be they do not mind falling!	X



FIRST DRAFT



The photograph presents a view of a second class ladies' compartment in a railway train in India. Most probably it is a local train commuting between the suburbs and the city, bringing the ladies to work and taking them back to their homes.

The compartment appears to be a fairly large one, and crowded, it seems lots of ladies and children are packed in it like fish in cans. There also appear to be quite a few children, though it is not very clear what they are doing there.



The compartment has also provided hand grips hanging from a tube attached to the roof of the compartment so that standing passengers can hold it and travel without falling. No lady passenger in this compartment is holding the grip just now. May be they do not mind falling!

All the ladies there in the compartment are wearing very beautiful and colourful saris. They are red, pink, black, green, purple with matching blouses. They generally seem to be very happy and peaceful. Children are also very quiet. Though not all of them are seated. On the whole it is a very typically Indian situation.



We will compare what the first draft says and what the final draft says, should it be, is it necessary? The photograph, it obviously presents a view, so you do not have to say the photograph presents a view of ladies compartment, you can say the photograph has a ladies compartment, that is enough you save words.

Please remember, very often, in my experience with learning and using the English language both as a student and as a teacher has shown me that a lot of mistakes in writing occur, not because we do not know the language, but because we write more than necessary and we write unnecessarily difficult words and sentences.

And in the process, our writing or our speech becomes difficult to understand, and it also makes it also then becomes prone to errors more mistakes. So, just take a look here, presents a view not necessary when it is a photograph. What else can a photograph do? It can only present a view. Similarly, bringing the ladies to work and taking them back to their home. When we already use the word like commute, come to the first draft, please.

Commuting between, third line, the third word from the end 'commuting between. Now, the very meaning of the word commute is go to someplace and come back from where you have gone to, from where you left this morning or this evening that is the meaning of the word commute. So, you do not have to say this is the commuter train which takes people from home to their work and brings them back from work to their home; you are unnecessarily making it difficult, it is like saying the sun which is also called Sulei, you do not really have to do that.

So, this is what we mean by redundant use, unnecessary use, not that it is an error, not that it is a mistake, but it is totally unnecessary. So, that is why some people call them redundant; they can be done away with, come back to the table, please. So, bringing the ladies to work and taking them back from their work, taking them back to their homes, unnecessary, when you use a word like a commute that is enough.

Look at the next; it seems lots of ladies and children are packed in it like fish in cans. Now, this is what we mean by cliché, words which sound like, which are mouthful you have too many words. But what are you trying to say, are they really packed like fish like sardines as they say in English?

Of course, all seats are occupied, but people are still standing on their feet, nobody jostling or pushing anybody else, at least from the photograph that we see. Similarly, what is 'lots of children' and 'lots of women?' You could count them, or if you cannot count them you can say many, you can say quite a few, indicate number, 'lots' indicates nothing, pardon me, it only indicates your ability to, your inability to count that you cannot count, you cannot say definitely, because when a photograph gives you a definite view, the writer describing the content of these photographs should give a concrete view to their reader.

So, it seems lots of ladies and children are packed in it like fishing; it is only a mouthful of words it does not convey anything, not much very clearly. No lady passenger in this compartment, come to the script, just see how hilarious this part is, look at this the first paragraph, the fourth line. No lady passenger in this compartment is holding the grip just now.

What do you mean by no lady passenger? Is it that there are gentlemen there who are holding the grip? So, you can say, men are holding the grip, but women or ladies are not. It is a very misleading kind of sentence; moreover, if it is a ladies compartment then you do not have to use even this word is redundant, you do not have to say, lady passenger, just say no passenger, no passenger in this compartment is holding the grip just now.

Even if you do not say just now, it is obvious because holding means action in progress, action now. And then it is a bad joke maybe they do not mind falling, one should not write this way, it is an insult to the people you describe, it is an insult to the subject photographed there and presented there, one should not write.

All you have to do is, do not write sentences of the kind which mean nothing, which means nothing, write meaningful, simple sentences, no redundancies, etc. Come back to the table, please. I mean it is a bad joke, maybe they do not like mind falling, you should never write like that, you are making fun of people, passengers who deserve otherwise to be respected. Presents a view similarly redundant, bringing the ladies to work and taking them back to their home. As I said, redundant, it seems lots of ladies does not say anything, go ahead, excuse me.

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All the ladies there in the compartment are wearing very beautiful and colourful saris.	All ladies/passengers are wearing colourful saris.
They generally seem to be very happy and peaceful. Children are also very quiet. Though not all of them are seated. On the whole it is a very typically Indian situation.	They seem to be peaceful. Children are also quiet.



All the ladies there are in the compartment are wearing very beautiful and colourful Saree. So, this is fine, all the ladies is fine, you do not have to say 'there' in the compartment because we decided once that we will describe everything we see, or we can see in that compartment. So, once you see all the ladies, it means all the ladies that are there in the ladies compartment, you do not have to write ladies compartment, it is a very painful elaboration of the obvious. Just say, 'all the ladies.'

All the ladies there, or all the ladies in this compartment, you do not have to say even 'there', all the ladies are wearing very beautiful and colourful Sarees. What is the meaning of the word very? It is again another attitude marker. What is very colourful, what is very beautiful? It is all right in spoken language, but not too many adjectives, too many adverbs are not good in written language, they are like roadblocks, they prevent, or they create obstacles in the way of communication, in the process of communication happening.

So, have fewer words, have simple sentences and write well. So, for example, what is beautiful? What is a beautiful Saree? Is it cotton, is it silk, is it something else, is it thin or thick, is it red or white? Are there definitions what you think, what I think beautiful? Means the same thing, does it mean the same thing to people from another country, to people from another state or village?

So, these are subjective words, what is beautiful, one may not be beautiful for another, but what is three kilometres for one is three kilometres also for another. So, there are adjectives which are vague, things like beautiful, things like difficult and there are adjectives which are specific, which are clear.

Say, for example, you can say that teacher is visually challenged, yet he teaches one of the most interesting classes. So, it is a verifiable fact; it is not subjective that this particular teacher is visually challenged and yet he teaches one of the most interesting classes at this school. You can say that you can say visually challenged, but you cannot say very beautiful.

Similarly, interesting perhaps, yes, if all students in feedback have said that they like to hear this teacher, then you could say, interesting or highly interesting or universally interesting, otherwise a good principle is to avoid adjectives, if possible avoid adverbs, if not possible you can use them.

So, here rather than say all ladies are wearing very beautiful and colourful Sarees, I would much rather have all ladies or all passengers, we have already said it is a ladies compartment, so while summarizing this paragraph I may perhaps say, all passengers here now are wearing colourful Sarees, I would get rid of very beautiful, but I will keep colourful because this is what the photograph shows.

The photograph shows a variety of colours at least about half a dozen, black, white, red, pink, purple, green there may be more. So, we will retain the word colourful because it describes the photograph, but we will not retain the word beautiful because it is subjective, it is attitudinal and what is beautiful for one may not be beautiful for another. So, adjectives of this kind, adverbs of this kind are better avoided in a good piece of academic writing, look at the next sentence.

They generally seem to be very happy and peaceful. How do we know they are very happy? How do we know they are not? They are very glum? Have they all been fired from service? Nobody is laughing there? Of course nobody is crying there either, but we do not expect any decent adult to cry in public.

So, once again let us not use expressions that are subjective, let us instead be factual, peaceful yes because nobody appears to be talking to another person, nobody appears to be making noise, we can then venture a guess, we can then hazard a guess, and we can say, 'oh! It is a very quiet compartment'.

What do you mean by saying though not all of them are seated, on the whole, it is a very typically Indian situation? I am not clear about what is being meant, is it that in India all may not be seated if they have seats. So, what is the author trying to say? Once again it is vague, it will be better perhaps if we could if we had said they seem to be peaceful, children are also quiet because that we can make out, go next.

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INACCURATE	ACCURATE
a second class ladies' compartment	a ladies' second class compartment
The compartment has also provided hand grips....	The compartment has been provided with hand grips/ The compartment has hand grips...
Children are also very quiet. Though not all of them are seated.	Though not all of them are seated, children are also very quiet.



Look at some words that are accurate and some others that are not. A second class ladies compartment, are ladies second class or a compartment second class? But if it describes the compartment then it is better that we said a ladies, sorry a ladies second class compartment, the second class should come after ladies, not before ladies it should not be a second class ladies compartment, it should be a ladies second class compartment, a ladies first-class compartment, a ladies air-conditioned coach, we can see all that.

Similarly, the compartment has provided, has also provided hand grips. Who has provided them? Of course, the railway engineers, the railways, the company, so because we are focusing on grips and not on the provider it is better that we said we wrote it in a passive sentence, in a passive voice, the compartment has been provided with.

Then we do not have to focus on the donor who gave it; we need not ask, we just say, the compartment has been provided with hand grips the compartment has hand grips. So, in some places, you will find an active voice is accurate; in some other places, you will find that a sentence in passive voice is more accurate.

Yesterday we saw in some places the sentence in the past tense was better, but in many other places, we saw yesterday that a sentence was better in the present tense not in the past tense. So,

every word has a place, and every place has a word. But what is the accurate word? It is like answering this question, can we put a square nut on a round bolt, a square peg in a round hole?

No, we cannot, a square peg can only go in a square way hole, and a round peg can go only in a round hole. That is what we mean by accuracy, exactly what is required there; otherwise, it is not very good quality. Of course, you might not be charged for ungrammaticality, but then the communication will be compromised, people will not understand you and you will have, they will not enjoy you, and they will have, you will have difficulty being understood. Take your time, look at other examples I have given you, go next.

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ACTIVITY

Look at the following photograph, and in 150 words describe what you see in it. You can look at people, activities, decorations, lights, costumes, jewellery, and mood of people there. You can also look at furniture and other props, colours, kinds of people, etc.



Here is something you can do and learn from it, look at the photograph that comes, come back. You can look at people; you can look at what they are doing, you can look at decorations all around, you can see lights, costumes, jewellery and mood of people there, you can also look at furniture and other props, etc.

If you look at all of them, you will have plenty to write; you will not make the same mistakes as the writer here made in the first draft writing things that were not necessary. So, finally, this is how good and great writers are made, we look at something, we write the first draft, we revise it, revise it in the light of these things.

Have I made any mistake of grammar vocabulary punctuation spelling? Are the words inaccurate? Do have I written very long sentences? Have I written words that are not necessary? By doing these things you will find, your writing becomes better and better, and you become the wonderful writer that you have always wanted to become. Thank you, and good luck.