

Descriptive Writing Guide

Characteristics of descriptive writing

1. Good descriptive writing includes many vivid sensory details that paint a picture and appeals to all of the reader's senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste when appropriate. Descriptive writing may also paint pictures of the feelings the person, place or thing invokes in the writer.
2. Good descriptive writing often makes use of figurative language such as analogies, similes and metaphors to help paint the picture in the reader's mind.
3. Good descriptive writing uses precise language. General adjectives, nouns, and passive verbs do not have a place in good descriptive writing. Use specific adjectives and nouns and strong action verbs to give life to the picture you are painting in the reader's mind.
4. Good descriptive writing is organized. Some ways to organize descriptive writing include: chronological (time), spatial (location), and order of importance. When describing a person, you might begin with a physical description, followed by how that person thinks, feels and acts.

Guide to Literary Devices in Description

1. Imagery

Imagery is a literary device that refers to the use of figurative language to evoke a sensory experience or create a picture with words for a reader. By utilizing effective descriptive language and figures of speech, writers appeal to a reader's senses of sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound, as well as internal emotion and feelings. Therefore, imagery is not limited to visual representations or mental images, but also includes physical sensations and internal emotions.

There are five main types of imagery, each related to one of the human senses:

- Visual imagery (sight)
- Auditory imagery (hearing)
- Olfactory imagery (smell)
- Gustatory imagery (taste)
- Tactile imagery (touch)

2. Metaphors and Similes

A metaphor is a figure of speech that is used to make a comparison between two things that aren't alike but do have something in common. Unlike a simile, where two things are compared directly using *like* or *as*, a metaphor's comparison is more indirect, usually made by stating something *is* something else. A metaphor is very expressive; it is not meant to be taken literally. You may have to work a little to find the meaning in a metaphor.

For example, a river and tears aren't very alike. One is a body of water in nature, while the other can be produced by our eyes. They do have one thing in common, though: both are a type of water that flows. A metaphor uses this similarity to help the writer make a point:

- Her tears were a river flowing down her cheeks.

As a river is so much larger than a few tears, the metaphor is a creative way of saying that the person is crying a lot. There are so many tears that they remind the writer of a river.

Metaphors help writers and poets make a point in a more interesting way. They also help the reader see something from a new perspective. By describing tears as a river, for example, the writer found a creative way to describe how great the girl's sadness was and helped the reader see a similarity between tears and a river that they might not have noticed before. This makes reading more fun and interesting.

Similes are another way to compare two different things, but a simile does so more directly, using the words *like* or *as*. For example:

- Her tears flowed *like* a river down her cheeks.

In this case, the simile tells the reader that the tears are similar to a river, but not the same. A metaphor, on the other hand, says that something *is* something else; that is, the girl's tears *are equal* to a river. A metaphor is not exactly true. It's meant to be understood as a figure of speech, not a factual statement.

Examples of Metaphors:

- The classroom was a zoo.
- The alligator's teeth are white daggers.
- The snow is a white blanket.
- He is a shining star.
- Laughter is the music of the soul.
- America is a melting pot.
- Her lovely voice was music to his ears

Symbolism

Symbolism is a literary device that refers to the use of symbols in a literary work. A symbol is something that stands for or suggests something else; it represents something beyond literal meaning. In literature, a symbol can be a word, object, action, character, or concept that embodies and evokes a range of additional meaning and significance.

Common Examples of Symbolism in Everyday Life

Everyday words, objects, and even concepts often have more than a single meaning. Across time, certain aspects of everyday life and experience evolve in meaning and associated significance, making them symbols of something besides what they actually are. Here are some common examples of symbolism in everyday life:

- rainbow—symbolizes hope and promise
- red rose—symbolizes love and romance
- four-leaf clover—symbolizes good luck or fortune
- wedding ring—symbolizes commitment and matrimony
- red, white, blue—symbolizes American patriotism
- green traffic light—symbolizes “go” or proceed
- tree blossoms—symbolize spring season
- Pilgrim hat—symbolizes Thanksgiving holiday
- dollar sign—symbolizes money, earnings, wealth

Here are some examples of types of symbolism and their effects:

- **emotion:** symbols often evoke emotional responses in readers, allowing them to invest in the plot and characters. This emotional effect of symbolism also creates a lasting impression for the reader of the literary work.
- **imagery:** symbols can create imagery and provide visual elements that allow readers to understand complex literary themes. This also has a beneficial effect for writers so that they don't feel an overreliance on language to explain their intended meaning.
- **thematic connection:** symbols can connect themes for readers within a single literary work and across literature itself. This allows for greater understanding of literature as an art form.
- **character attributes:** symbols can represent different attributes of characters, both in a literal and figurative sense. This has an effect for readers in that they can identify character traits and understand their actions based on symbolism in the literary work.
- **deeper meaning:** symbolism also allows writers to convey deeper meaning in their work for the reader. This creates a layered effect of understanding so that different readers can find their own individual significance in a literary work, and individual readers can find different levels of significance with each exposure to the literary work.