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Part I Creative Thinking and Prewriting

创新思维与写前构思

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4 Narration and Description

Unit 记叙与描述

Assignment

Narrative or Descriptive Essay

You could choose either a narrative essay or a descriptive essay to write for this unit. For instructions on how to write either of the two essays, see the assignment sheets below:

Narrative Essay

Plumb¹ your memory for experiences that reveal your character. The experiences probably were not of earth-shaking importance to the world at large, but they did make a lasting impression on you and do illustrate the stuff you are made of. Maybe, when you were in high school, for example, you had a crush² on your school's star basketball player. Suppose you would slow down your walk home from school when you passed his house, hoping he'd be coming in or out. But one day, you were embarrassed by your hero, and that changed everything. The magic disappeared! You no doubt have many experiences worth sharing with others. Pick one and tell the story.

Here are some other possibilities for you to think about:

1. At some point in the past, you may have faced a conflict between what was expected of you—by parents, friends, family, teachers, coach—and your own personality or abilities. Describe one occasion when these expectations seemed unrealistic or unfair. Was the experience entirely negative or was it, in the long run, positive?
2. There are times when your life depends on keeping your mouth shut.
3. Think about the first part-time job you had. What mistakes did you make? What did you learn? Were there any humorous or serious misunderstandings between you and others?
4. Relate an exciting experience from which you developed a particular talent or interest.

1 plumb: to examine (something) in a careful and complete way in order to understand it

2 crush: a strong feeling of romantic love for someone that is usually not expressed and does not last a long time

作文提示:

这是我们第一次按写作目的和文体要求进行写作练习，同学们可以选择记叙文(narrative essay)或描述文(descriptive essay)。记叙文是同学们最愿意也是最容易上手的文体，而且故事当中也会有人物或场景描写的内容。描述文写作则对语言提出了更大的挑战。

记叙文的写作目的：通过讲故事来展现作者的某个性格特质。

记叙文的写作难点：故事力求语言生动、情节有趣、引人入胜。

描述文的写作目的：通过对人物或场景的感官描述来反映其总体印象。

描述文的写作难点：对感官词运用的要求比记叙文更高。

需掌握的写作技巧：这两个文体的关键是运用在Unit 3学过的“细节展开”(show more than tell)的写作技巧——用细节叙述或感官描述来展开我们所要表达的故事情节或描述内容。

5. Write a narrative that describes how you hid your true feelings about an event, such as going to the wedding of someone you disliked.
6. Tell about a family outing or vacation. What did you learn from that experience?
7. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you would do anything to get it? How did you feel after you received or attained what you desired? Did it make your life happier or more miserable? Tell about such an experience.
8. Think of a lesson or new outlook you gained from one of your past experiences: a dumb mistake that embarrassed you in public or the passing of a pet, friend, or relative.
9. You may also consider the following topics. Create suspense by concealing until the end how your conflict is resolved.
 - An educational experience outside school, such as something learned on the streets, in the family, or on a trip;
 - An experience in strange and frightening surroundings;
 - An experience with a bully;
 - An event where you gave in to peer pressure or were forced to lie in order to please someone;
 - A punishment you either saw or received; or an experience where you succeeded in something after overcoming hardship.

Prewriting

You may use some of the prewriting strategies to generate information for your topic. Let's try the reporter's formula, using Waverly's narrative in Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* for example¹:

Reporter's Formula

<i>When:</i>	Dinner night.
<i>Where:</i>	Waverly's parents' house.
<i>Who:</i>	Rich, mother, father, and Waverly (the first-person narrator "I").
<i>What:</i>	Details about Rich's looks, conversation between mother and the narrator, Rich's mistakes at the dinner table.
<i>How:</i>	Time sequence of the narrative; how Waverly's mother treated Rich; how she responded to his mistakes.
<i>Why:</i>	To let Rich meet Waverly's parents.

Now you may use the formula to generate all the information you need for your story. Write non-stop for 10 minutes, especially about the "what," "how," and "why."

¹ We have used an extended version of the same example in Part I.

Guidelines for Writing a Narrative Essay

1. For your own clarification, state in one sentence the main point of your essay. Then decide whether this point is clearly embodied or dramatized by the story.
2. What details or incidents are essential to the story? Decide where you need to slow your pacing with details and where a quick summary will allow you to pick up your pace.
3. Decide on a point of view and stick to it. How close do you want to be to the action? Do you want to tell the story in your own voice (first-person point of view) or allow another character to tell it for you (third-person point of view)?
4. Which time sequence will work best, a chronological¹ order or a flashback²?

Descriptive Essay

Write a descriptive essay on a person or place to create a dominant impression of the person or place with concrete, specific details (preferably appealing to all five senses).

You may recall an adult who influenced your early childhood and then, for whatever reason, passed out of your life. A teacher, neighbor, or relative, for example. Decide who your readers might be. How would you describe this person for those readers? Make sure you paint a picture of the person with words appealing to as many of the five senses as possible. List important physical characteristics, mannerisms³, and personality traits, especially those which will help to make your subject unique. For example, look for features like the way he or she smiles, laughs, talks, sits, moves his or her hands, dresses or wears his or her hair.

You may also consider a place for description. It can be a place that you have only seen once, a place that you never want to return to again, a place that holds happy or sad memories for you, or a place that you dream about. It can be a beach, a library, a park, a museum, a cafeteria/restaurant, a train station, a shopping mall or marketplace on a Saturday morning, a dance party, a polluted pond, a crossroads on a busy street, etc.

Record all the sounds you hear, the colors you see, the scents you smell, the tastes you savor⁴, and/or the touch you feel when you have to push your way through the crowds in the place. List the important feelings, events, and people that contribute to making this place different.

Prewriting

We could use examples for prewriting strategies introduced in Part I for generating ideas for this assignment. One such an example is making a list of all the points you can come up with for a description of a place (a messy apartment here):

1 chronological: arranged in the order that things happened or came to be

2 flashback: a scene in a movie, play, book, etc that shows something that happened before that point in the story

3 mannerism: a way of speaking or moving that is typical of a particular person

4 savor: to enjoy the taste or smell of (something) for as long as possible

Listing

Topic: My Apartment

1. Beer cans on the kitchen floor.
2. Greasy patches of the carpet next to the kitchen.
3. Textbooks, notebooks, scratch paper scattered on the carpet.
4. Cola stains and popcorn on the couch.
5. A spring sticking out from a tear in its upholstery.
6. Cigarette butts lying around beside the half-empty ashtray on the coffee table.
7. Several more on the carpet, which must have rolled off the table.
8. Continuous gear grating sounds of the morning garbage truck.
9. The gray exterior of the apartment building is peeling away.
10. A broken window upstairs rattling in the wind.
11. Abandoned plastic cups and other litter crushed by cars pulling out of the parking lot outside the window.
12. Smoke of burning engine oil from old cars' tailpipes.
13. Faded paint of my only window facing the parking lot.
14. Poor sound-proof thin walls.
15. Cracks on walls and ceiling.
16. Often woken up by next-door neighbors' morning fights.
17. Water stains running down the still wet plaster in one corner.
18. Friday evening parties upstairs and outbursts of shrill laughter.
19. Neighbors coming back from night clubs, their car brakes screech.
20. Bottles shatter against outside walls.

We need to shape the points of description here into a coherent piece of writing about a dominant impression by organizing them into a certain pattern or spatial order. The following list indicates one of the organizing methods for paragraph development in the description, the details being arranged from outside to inside and from daytime to night:

Ordered list of points:

Dominant impression: It is depressing to live in my apartment.

Outside (from apartment building to parking lot)

1. The gray exterior of the apartment building is peeling away.
2. A broken window upstairs rattling in the wind.
3. Faded paint of my only window facing the parking lot.
4. Continuous gear grating sounds of the morning garbage truck.
5. Abandoned plastic cups and other litter crushed by cars pulling out of the parking lot outside the window.
6. Smoke of burning engine oil from old cars' tailpipes.

Inside (from living room to kitchen, from top to bottom, from morning to night)

7. Poor sound-proof thin walls.
8. Often woken up by next-door neighbors' morning fights.
9. Cracks on walls and ceiling.
10. Water stains running down the still wet plaster in one corner.

11. Cola stains and popcorn on the couch.
12. A spring sticking out from a tear in its upholstery.
13. Cigarette butts lying around beside the half-empty ashtray on the coffee table.
14. Several more on the carpet, which must have rolled off the table.
15. Textbooks, notebooks, scratch paper scattered on the carpet.
16. Beer cans on the kitchen floor.
17. Greasy patches of the carpet next to the kitchen.
18. Friday evening parties upstairs and outbursts of shrill laughter.
19. Neighbors coming back from night clubs, their car brakes screech.
20. Bottles shatter against outside walls.

Besides listing, there is another prewriting technique from Part I, attribute listing, for a description of a person (in this case, a mother) (see Pages 39-40).

After you have collected as many details as you feel you will need, decide what overall impression your subject has made on you. Work this impression into a specific statement (called the thesis statement) and list the points you plan to describe beneath it. Then this list can be used as a working outline.

Guidelines for Writing a Descriptive Essay

1. What is the purpose of your writing? What is the dominant impression you want to create in your description? What would your audience “feel” or “see” about your subject? Remember to use concrete, vivid words. This is the best way you will be able to convey a colorful, memorable picture to the reader. Avoid the use of clichés or overused expressions like “black as coal,” “covered like a blanket,” etc.
2. Who is your audience? How would you get the reader’s attention? What concrete details and sensory words do you need to make your description vivid and interesting?
3. A descriptive essay has one, clear dominant impression. Think of a scene that has grabbed your attention recently. If, for example, you are describing a snowfall, it is important for you to decide and to let your readers know if it is threatening or lovely; in order to have one dominant impression it cannot be both.
4. A descriptive essay can be objective or subjective, giving the author a wide choice of tone, word choice, and attitude. For instance, an objective description of one’s dog would mention such facts as height, weight, coloring, and so forth. A subjective description would include the above details, but would also stress the author’s feelings toward the dog, as well as its personality and habits. It employs all the senses to convey the desirable meaning and achieve the necessary effect. This type of description tends to be very sensual, emotional and thoughtful.
5. Try moving your readers through space and time. For instance, you might want to describe a train ride from start to destination, or a stream from its source to where it joins the river.
6. What organizational strategy do you plan to use that would allow you to guide the reader through your description in a coherent way? For example, in describing a messy room, you might start with eye level and then move to what you see on the floor. Generally speaking, you could arrange your description from top to bottom, from near to far, and/or from inside to outside, or vice versa.

7. What are your main supporting points? Make a list of the main points you want to include to support the dominant impression. Each of the sentences in your description must add to the overall picture and help to build your description one piece at a time.
8. End your description in an interesting way. You might “come full circle” and end where you began. Or you might end with what you have learned, how you feel about the subject, or what makes your subject worth knowing.

Peer Evaluation



Narrative Essay

Writer's Name _____

Reader's Name _____

Read your partner's essay and answer the following questions.

1. Has the writer chosen a worthwhile experience to relate? Did it reveal something about the writer's character?
2. I found the time order clear and easy to follow:
Yes No Partly
(If your answer is "No" or "Partly," explain why.)
3. Read the paper carefully about its pacing and decide whether some scenes of the story need to detail every movement and others should be sketched in the roughest strokes.
4. What do you see as the purpose of this essay?
5. Is the main point of the essay clear to you?
Yes No
(In either case, try to write out in one sentence what you think is the main point of the essay.)
6. Did the essay hold your interest?
Yes No
(List three interesting details, descriptions, or situations in it.)
7. If the essay didn't completely hold your interest, try to explain why and where.
8. The following situations, experiences, or descriptions might need more details:
(In paragraphs 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10, etc)

Peer Evaluation



Descriptive Essay

Writer's Name _____

Reader's Name _____

Read your partner's essay and answer the following questions.

1. What do you see as the purpose of this essay? Is the dominant impression of the description clear to you?
Yes No
(In either case, try to write out in one sentence the dominant impression the writer has created in the essay.)
2. Is every detail related to this dominant impression?
Yes No
(If your answer is "No," explain which part fails to contribute to the dominant impression.)
3. I found the spatial order clear and easy to follow:
Yes No Partly
(If your answer is "No" or "Partly," explain why.)
4. How does the essay structure its description, from top to bottom, from near to far, and/or from inside to outside? Explain.
5. What sensory words did the writer use in the essay?
(List at least five sensory details in it.)
6. If the essay didn't reach as many senses as possible, explain why and where.
7. Did the writer use any figurative devices (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, etc) to create the dominant impression?
8. The following paragraphs might need more details: Paragraphs 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.

I Narration

记叙

What to Look for in This Section

Exploring past experiences for writing: The personal experience essay or narrative essay is about something meaningful in your own life. But rather than state the significance up front in a thesis, you may let it unfold in a story-like fashion.

Plot: A plot is all the events in a story rendered toward the achievement of some particular artistic or emotional effect. In other words, it is what mostly happened in the story or what the general theme of the story is based on, such as the characters, setting, and conflicts occurring in the story.

Pacing: Like the tempo of a symphony, pacing is a writing device used to control the speed at which a plot advances.

Time sequence: A time sequence is the time order in which a story is told.

First-person point of view: The first-person narrative makes it necessary that the narrator is also a character within his or her own story, so that the narrator reveals the plot by referring to this character as “I” (or, when plural, “we”).

■ Exploring Past Experiences for Writing

记叙个人经历

A personal experience essay is a narrative about a real or imaginative experience of the writer's. Why do we write about our past experiences? Perhaps out of nostalgia for the past, or perhaps to make sense of the past. When we write about significant events in our lives, we come to know ourselves better, bringing into focus what's truly important to us and clarifying our beliefs and values. We also examine the forces—within ourselves and in our social structures—that have shaped our lives. In a word, a personal experience essay can help us explore, deepen, and complicate our perceptions of the world.

A personal experience essay on any significant event or moment in your life usually employs narrative elements like plot, character, and setting to develop tension, move the story forward, and give it significance. In considering topics for such an essay, you should think *significant* not as *unusual* or *exciting*, but as *revealing*, to convey an unexpected meaning or insight.

As a writer, you must remember that a personal experience essay is public, not private. While it invites self-disclosure, such writing does not have to be confessional. You get to choose how you want to represent yourself, to decide what aspect of your life to write about and expose and what

side of yourself to reveal. Your choice depends on the rhetorical situation in which you are writing: who you expect to read your story (your audience) and what you want them to learn about you from it (your purpose).

Some of the most memorable personal experience essays relate ordinary experiences in a vivid manner that shares the writer's humiliations, aspirations, self-discoveries, and revelations. For example, most of us have experienced a first day of school or a conflict with a parent, teacher, or friend. Everyone enjoys hearing good writers describe their unique approaches of coping with and understanding these universal situations. It is precisely because readers have experienced these things that they can project themselves easily into the writer's world.

To some extent, good writing is rooted in the writer's perception of a problem. In effective past experience essays, the problem usually takes the form of a **conflict**, two or more things in opposition—ideas, characters, expectations, forces, worldviews, or whatever. Six kinds of conflicts that frequently form the plots of personal experience essays are as follows:

1. Problems accepting limitations and necessities: confronting the loss of dreams, the death of intimates, the failure to live up to ideals, or the difficulty of living with a chronic illness or disability.
2. Problems with people: problems in maintaining relationships without compromising your own growth or denying your own needs.
3. Confrontation with the unknown: people or situations that challenged or threatened your old identity and values.
4. Moments of enlightenment or coming to knowledge: understanding a complex idea for the first time, recognizing what is meant by love or jealousy or justice, mastering a complex skill, seeing some truth about yourself or your family that you previously hadn't seen.
5. Moments of crisis or critical choice: moments that tested your system of values.
6. Major choices: about the company you keep (friends, love interests, larger social groups) and the effects of those choices on your integrity and the persona¹ you project to the world.

*GROUP ACTIVITY²

Brainstorm for about 10 minutes on episodes in your own life that fit one or more of the above typical plots. Then, get together with the other members of the group (in groups of four) and “try out” your stories on one another. Your goal is to begin seeing that each person's past is a rich source of stories. After each story is told, go around the group for each member to say something about what the incident told (or suggested) about its author. Does everyone “hear” the same thing?

Then, as a group, discuss those past experience stories by considering the following points:

1. Why did you choose the incident to relate?
2. How did the audience—that is, the group—affect your choice?
3. What exactly did you want the others to learn from your story?
4. Are you surprised by the things they learned about you?
5. What have you learned about telling stories purposefully by working in a group that you might not otherwise have learned?

1 persona: the image or personality that a person presents to other people

2 There is no key to any of the open-ended exercises marked by a star (*).

■ Narrative Techniques

记叙文技巧

Plot

By **plot** we mean the basic action of the story, including the selection and sequencing of scenes and events. What you choose to include in your story and where you place it are concerns of plot.

Plots typically unfold in the following stages:

- An arresting opening scene;
- Introduction of characters and the filling in of background;
- Building of tension or conflict through oppositions embedded in a series of events or scenes;
- Climax or pivotal moment when the tension or conflict comes to a head¹;
- Reflection on the events of the plot and their meaning.

Pacing

The amount of detail you choose to devote to each scene is also a function of plot. How a writer varies the amount of detail in each scene is referred to as a plot's **pacing**.

The writer of a personal narrative needs to make choices similar to those made by a film editor. Think about how movies work. The events of two days, or two weeks, or two years are condensed into a product that takes about two hours to view. The boring parts are left out. So is with the personal narrative essay. Events taking hours or days can be covered in a relatively small number of paragraphs if the writer carefully selects what is central to the narrative and ignores what is not.

When you write a personal narrative, the duration of the event about which you're writing becomes a raw resource; you can use it, alter it, and control it. Of course, you could write a "straight" narrative that sticks closely to chronological time, but very few narrative topics work well this way. Think about it: You can read the body paragraphs of a 600-word essay in less than five minutes. Do you want to write your essay about a five-minute life experience? Perhaps, but searching for such a topic would truly restrict your opportunities.

More likely, you will want to depend on the use of **psychological time**—time as we remember it, time as it is important in a narrative structure. This approach can sometimes result in the expansion of time, as you describe your reaction to a small but extremely important event. Normally, however, you will need to condense a longer event into a narrative that is more compact and therefore more compelling.

Time Sequence

Chronological order naturally fits in narration, because when we tell a story, we usually follow the order in which events occur. This pattern is marked by such transitions as *next*, *then*, *the following morning*, *a few hours later*, *still later*, *that Wednesday*, *by noon*, *when she was 17*, *before the sun rose*, and so on. However, stories do not have to open with the earliest chronological moment; they may start *in medias res* ("in the middle of things") at a moment of crisis and then flash backward to fill in earlier details that explain the origins of the crisis. This is what is called a **flashback**.

¹ come to a head: if a problem or difficult situation comes to a head, it suddenly becomes worse

Dialogue

One way of dramatizing narrative action is **dialogue**. Writers use it to reveal conflict directly, without the narrator's intruding commentary. Dialogues are not mere recordings of conversation, but pointed representations of conversation. Through dialogue, readers gain insight into the personality and motives of the characters.

Point of View

Another way of dramatizing narrative action is using **the first-person point of view**. In this point of view, the narrator is a participant in the action and uses the pronoun "I." Oftentimes, the first-person narrative is used as a way to directly convey the deeply internal, otherwise unspoken, thoughts of the narrator.

EXERCISES

1. How does dialogue help the writer to reveal the tension between the man and the boy here in the narrative?

Black Boy

Richard Wright

- 1 I was hungry and he knew it; but he was a white man and I felt that if I told him I was hungry I would have been revealing something shameful.
- 2 "Boy, I can see hunger in your face and eyes," he said.
- 3 "I get enough to eat," I lied.
- 4 "Then why do you keep so thin?" he asked me.
- 5 "Well, I suppose I'm just that way, naturally," I lied.
- 6 "You're just scared, boy," he said.
- 7 "Oh, no, sir," I lied again.
- 8 I could not look at him. I wanted to leave the counter, yet he was a white man and I had learned not to walk abruptly away from a white man when he was talking to me. I stood, my eyes looking away. He ran his hand into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill.
- 9 "Here, take this dollar and buy yourself some food," he said.
- 10 "No, sir," I said.
- 11 "Don't be a fool," he said. "You're ashamed to take it. God, boy, don't let a thing like that stop you from taking a dollar and eating."
- 12 The more he talked the more it became impossible for me to take the dollar. I wanted it, but I could not look at it. I wanted to speak, but I could not move my tongue. I wanted him to leave me alone. He frightened me.
- 13 "Say something," he said.

***Pair Work**

Write about an incident that occurred between you and someone you know. Try to compose a dialogue that conveys a certain relationship between you and the person (intimate, indifferent, distant, etc). Then read aloud your dialogue to each other and comment on the impression it gives the reader and what it reveals about your relationship with this person.

2. What effect has the author of the following passage achieved with the first-person point of view? Some writers use the present tense in stories like this. What effect would that be if this narrative was written in that way?

North Toward Home

Willie Morris

One afternoon in late August, as the summer's sun streamed into the [railroad] car and made little jumping shadows on the windows, I sat gazing out at the tenement-dwellers¹, who were themselves looking out of their windows from the gray crumbling buildings along the tracks of upper Manhattan. As we crossed into the Bronx, the train unexpectedly slowed down for a few miles. Suddenly from out of my window I saw a large crowd near the tracks, held back by two policemen. Then, on the other side from my window, I saw a sight I would never be able to forget: a little boy almost severed in half, lying at an incredible angle near the track. The ground was covered with blood, and the boy's eyes were opened wide, strained and disbelieving in his sudden oblivion². A policeman stood next to him, his arms folded, staring straight ahead at the windows of our train. In the orange glow of late afternoon the policemen, the crowd, the corpse of the boy were for a brief moment immobile, motionless, a small tableau³ to violence and death in the city. Behind me, in the next row of seats, there was a game of bridge. I heard one of the four men say as he looked out at the sight, "God, that's horrible." Another said, in a whisper, "Terrible, terrible." There was a momentary silence, punctuated⁴ only by the clicking of the wheels on the track. Then, after the pause, I heard the first man say: "Two hearts."

3. How does the writer organize her narrative below?

Big Rocks⁵

- 1 One day, an expert in time management was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, "Okay, time for a quiz" and he pulled out a one-gallon mason jar⁶ and set it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside,

1 tenement-dweller: a person living in a large building divided into apartments, especially in the poorer areas of a city

2 oblivion: the state of being complete forgotten

3 tableau: a view or sight that looks like a picture

4 punctuate: to interrupt or occur in (something) repeatedly

5 From Rosa and Eschholz (2003).

6 mason jar: a glass container with a tight lid used for preserving fruit and vegetables

he asked, "Is this jar full?"

2 Everyone in the class yelled, "Yes."

3 The time management expert replied, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel¹. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was onto him².

4 "Probably not," one of them answered.

5 "Good!" he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel.

6 Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"

7 "No!" the class shouted.

8 Once again he said, "Good." Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim³. Then he looked at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

9 One eager beaver⁴ raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in it!"

10 "No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all. What are the 'big rocks' in your life—time with your loved ones, your faith, your education, your dreams, a worthy cause, teaching or mentoring others? Remember to put these BIG ROCKS in first or you'll never get them in at all."

11 So, tonight, or in the morning, when you are reflecting on this short story, ask yourself this question: What are the "big rocks" in my life? Then, put those in your jar first.

4. Work in pairs. Read the following story and answer the questions at the end of the narrative.

The Perfect Picture⁵

James Alexander Thorn

1 It was early in the spring about 15 years ago—a day of pale sunlight and trees just beginning to bud. I was a young police reporter, driving to a scene I didn't want to see. A man, the police-dispatcher's broadcast said, had accidentally backed his pickup truck over his baby granddaughter in the driveway of the family home. It was a fatality.

2 As I parked among police cars and TV-news cruisers, I saw a stocky⁶ white-haired man in cotton work clothes standing near a pickup. Cameras were trained⁷ on him, and

1 gravel: small pieces of rock

2 be onto (someone): used to say that you know about what someone is doing or has done

3 brim: the top edge of a glass or a similar container

4 beaver: an exceptionally active or hardworking person

5 From Reinking and Osten (1993).

6 stocky: short, heavy, and looking strong

7 train: to aim or point (something) toward something or in a particular direction

reporters were sticking microphones in his face. Looking totally bewildered¹, he was trying to answer their questions. Mostly he was only moving his lips, blinking and choking up.

3 After a while the reporters gave up on him and followed the police into the small white house. I can still see in my mind's eye that devastated² old man looking down at the place in the driveway where the child had been. Beside the house was a freshly spaded flower bed, and nearby a pile of dark, rich earth.

4 "I was just backing up there to spread that good dirt," he said to me, though I had not asked him anything. "I didn't even know she was outdoors." He stretched his hand toward the flower bed, then let it flop³ to his side. He lapsed back into⁴ his thoughts, and I, like a good reporter, went into the house to find someone who could provide a recent photo of the toddler.

5 A few minutes later, with all the details in my notebook and a three-by-five studio portrait of the cherubic⁵ child tucked in my jacket pocket, I went toward the kitchen where the police had said the body was.

6 I had brought a camera in with me—the big, bulky⁶ Speed Graphic which used to be the newspaper reporter's trademark. Everybody had drifted back out of the house together—family, police, reporters and photographers. Entering the kitchen, I came upon this scene:

7 On a Formica⁷-topped table, backlit by a frilly curtained window, lay the tiny body, wrapped in a clean white sheet. Somehow the grandfather had managed to stay away from the crowd. He was sitting on a chair beside the table, in profile to me and unaware of my presence, looking uncomprehendingly at the swaddled⁸ corpse.

8 The house was very quiet. A clock ticked. As I watched, the grandfather slowly leaned forward, curved his arms like parentheses⁹ around the head and feet of the little form, then pressed his face to the shroud¹⁰ and remained motionless.

9 In that hushed¹¹ moment I recognized the makings of a prize-winning news photograph. I appraised¹² the light, adjusted the lens setting and distance, locked a bulb in the flashgun¹³, raised the camera and composed the scene in the view-finder.

10 Every element of the picture was perfect: the grandfather in his plain work clothes, his white hair backlit by sunshine, the child's form wrapped in the sheet, the atmosphere of the simple home suggested by black iron trivets¹⁴ and World's Fair

1 bewildered: to confuse (someone) very much

2 devastate: to cause (someone) to feel extreme emotional pain

3 flop: to fall, lie, or sit down in a sudden, awkward, or relaxed way

4 lapse into: to begin to be in (a worse or less active state or condition)

5 cherubic: having a round, attractive face like that of a child

6 bulky: large and difficult to carry or store

7 Formica: a trademark of a type of hard plastic made into a thin sheet which is used to cover table tops and other pieces of kitchen furniture

8 swaddle: to wrap (someone, especially a baby) tightly with a blanket, pieces of cloth, etc

9 parenthesis: [*plural* parentheses] one of a pair of marks () that are used around a word, phrase, sentence, numbers, etc

10 shroud: a cloth that is used to wrap a dead body

11 hushed: quiet because people are listening, waiting to hear something, or talking quietly

12 appraise: to officially judge how successful, effective, or valuable someone or something is

13 flashgun: a piece of equipment that lights a special bright light when you press the button on a camera to take a photograph

14 trivet: an object placed under a hot pot or dish to protect the surface of a table, which is usually made of metal or wood

souvenir plates on the walls flanking¹ the window. Outside, the police could be seen inspecting the fatal rear wheel of the pickup while the child's mother and father leaned in each other's arms.

11 I don't know how many seconds I stood there, unable to snap² that shutter. I was keenly aware of the powerful story-telling value that photo would have, and my professional conscience told me to take it. Yet I couldn't make my hand fire that flashbulb and intrude on the poor man's island of grief.

12 At length I lowered the camera and crept away, shaken with doubt about my suitability for the journalistic profession. Of course I never told the city editor or any fellow reporters about that missed opportunity for a perfect news picture.

13 Every day on the newscasts and in the papers, we see pictures of people in extreme conditions of grief and despair. Human suffering has become a spectator sport. And sometimes, as I'm watching news film, I remember that day.

14 I still feel right about what I did.

Discussion Questions

- (1) When first reading the title of the story, you might think the story was about how the perfect picture had been taken. Now that you've read the whole story, what effect has the title achieved?
- (2) Thorn notes in his opening paragraph that he is "driving to a scene I didn't want to see." How does this statement foreshadow³ the later events?
- (3) Why did he decide not to take the picture in spite of its "powerful story-telling value"?
- (4) What specific details has Thorn used to show that the scene inside the house had the "makings of a prize-winning photograph"?
- (5) Comment on the pacing of the narrative. Notice the time signals Thorn has used in the essay: "after a while" (Paragraph 3), "a few minutes later" (Paragraph 5), "in that hushed moment" (Paragraph 9), "I don't know how many seconds I stood there (Paragraph 11), and "at length" (Paragraph 12). The kitchen scene (Paragraphs 6-12) might last just a few minutes, but the narrative about it is much longer than the earlier "a few minutes" scenes. Why is that?

*GROUP ACTIVITIES

- Task 1 In groups of four, write a short narrative (around 200 words) that features a conflict over a choice. State your point directly or indirectly and use time signals and dialogues if necessary.
- Task 2 Exchange your narrative with another group for revision.
- Task 3 Get your revised narrative back and prepare a comment on the peer revision.
- Task 4 Select a spokesperson from your group to do a presentation to the rest of the class on the narrative, peer revision, and your comment on the revision.

1 flank: to be on both sides of someone or something

2 snap: to move into a specified position with a short, sharp sound

3 foreshadow: to give a suggestion of something that will happen in the future

II Description 描述

What to Look for in This Section

Description and sensory details: Since words are tools used to create imagery, sensory words are tools needed to create vivid descriptions. The more senses that can be utilized, the better the description, and the more the reader can identify with what you are describing.

Figurative language: Descriptive writing requires you to paint pictures with words. You must use written language to make your readers see, hear, and even feel what it is you are writing about. With the help of figurative devices, this difficult task will be completed more successfully.

Describing a person: The objective of describing a person is twofold: to portray the person vividly so that readers can imagine what he or she looked like, and to show how the person was significant in your life.

Describing a place: In a description of a place, items are arranged according to their physical position or relationships, in a spatial order. Readers are shown where things are located from the writer's perspective.

A fixed observer: A fixed observer stays static and views things around him from a single perspective.

A moving observer: A moving observer is dynamic and can report things from a variety of perspectives, which offers you more flexibility in description.

■ Description and Sensory Details

感官词描述

You may ask, “What is a description? How do I write a descriptive essay?” A descriptive essay turns you into a creative artist. The pen transforms into a magic paintbrush which paints a captivating¹ picture of the described object using sensory words. Readers employ their imagination as they are reading, and descriptive details help to make the subject matter become real for them. Good descriptive writing can stimulate the reader's imagination to form sensory responses from all five senses. In other words, a good descriptive essay needs to involve the reader enough so he can actually see, hear, smell, taste, and/or feel the things being described. More than any other type of writing, a description needs sharp, colorful sensory details.

¹ captivating: attractive and interesting in a way that holds your attention

Five Senses

Sight

We often use visual details in our writing. Details appealing to our sense of sight ensure that the reader is able to give faces to characters, or add concrete details to a setting. For example, through visual details, a room can become more than just a blank, vague place. It becomes a small, square room with peeling maroon¹ wallpaper and cracked ceiling tiles. A visual description allows readers to place themselves within a text.

Sound

The human sense of hearing is an important means of communication. Next to visual details, we most commonly include auditory details in our writing. This is because sounds give us a primary experience of the world. Sounds can remind us of personal memories, or create images in our minds. For example, the sound of a ship's whistle might remind a person of a summer night in New York, or of a tour of duty in the military. Sounds recreate personal, sensory experiences. The addition of auditory details gives us the opportunity to create a more detailed texture in writing.

Smell

The sense of smell is commonly overlooked in writing. However, it is the human sense of smell that is most closely linked to the brain. According to research, the receptors in the brain responsible for processing smells are very close to the area of the brain responsible for the storage of memory. Because of this link, scents are able to cause vivid sensory recreations of memories. Our sense of smell has an uncommonly strong power over our feelings, thoughts, and emotions.

Touch

The sense of touch encourages us to investigate the world around us by feeling it and learning the texture, shape, and size of things. Tactile images can be powerful sensory triggers. They allow a reader not only to visualize a scene, but also to experience it. Inclusion of the sense of touch prevents the reader from remaining distanced or detached from a description.

Taste

The sense of taste allows us to do much more than simply select and enjoy food. By appealing directly to any of these tastes, we have the unique opportunity to affect a reader's senses. Memories, feelings, people, and places can all be suggested through the sense of taste.

Here is a sentence with almost no appeal to the senses:

→ In the window was a fan.

In contrast, here is a description rich in sense impressions:

→ The blades of the rusty² window fan clattered³ and whirled⁴ as they blew out a stream of warm, soggy⁵ air.

1 maroon: dark brownish-red in color

2 rusty : covered with rust (metal decay)

3 clatter: to make continuous loud noises by hitting hard objects against each other, or to cause objects to do this

4 whirl: to spin around very quickly, or to make something do this

5 soggy: (of things which can absorb water, especially food) unpleasantly wet and soft

Sense impressions in the second sentence include sight (rusty window fan, whirled), hearing (clattered), and touch (warm, soggy air). The vividness and sharpness provided by the sensory details give us a clear picture of the fan and enable us to share the writer's experience.

The best way to learn to use sensory details in your writing is to practice "seeing" details around you. Most of us are blind to all but the most obvious details of our environment. It takes some practice to begin to look at things from a new perspective. Learn from the following exercises to put more details in your writing.

EXERCISE

1. Five Senses

Use specific details to reach each of the five senses in the following statements.

Sight: After we viewed the movie about nuclear destruction, we better understood the devastating effects of this type of warfare.

Sound: The music was very loud at the rock concert last night.

Smell: Through the use of aromas¹, many retail stores are trying to enhance their customers' moods to increase business.

Taste: The university sponsored a festival which featured Chinese foods.

Touch: The old man's arm is coarse.

2. Read the following passage and point out what different sensory words Parker has used to describe poverty.

What Is Poverty?²

Jo Goodwin Parker

1 Poverty is getting up every morning from a dirt- and illness-stained mattress. The sheets have long since been used for diapers. Poverty is living in a smell that never leaves. This is a smell of urine, sour milk, and spoiling food sometimes joined with the strong smell of long-cooked onions. Onions are cheap. If you have smelled this smell, you did not know how it came. It is the smell of the outdoor privy³. It is the smell of young children who cannot walk the long dark way in the night. It is the smell of the mattresses where years of "accidents" have happened. It is the smell of the milk which has gone sour because the refrigerator long has not worked, and it costs money to get it fixed. It is the smell of rotting garbage. I could bury it, but where is the shovel? Shovels cost money.

2 Poverty is dirt. You can say in your clean clothes coming from your clean house, "Anybody can be clean." Let me explain about housekeeping with no money. For breakfast I give my children grits⁴ with no oleo⁵ or cornbread without eggs and oleo. This does not use up many dishes. What dishes there are, I wash in cold water and with no

1 aroma: a strong nice smell

2 Adapted from Henderson (1971).

3 privy: an outside toilet, used in past times

4 grits: a type of ground corn that is eaten especially in the southern U.S.

5 oleo: short for *oleomargarine*, and margarine is a food that resembles butter and is made from vegetable oils

soap. Even the cheapest soap has to be saved for the baby's diapers. Look at my hands, so cracked and red. Once I saved for two months to buy a jar of Vaseline for my hands and the baby's diaper rash¹. When I had saved enough, I went to buy it and the price had gone up two cents. The baby and I suffered on. I have to decide every day if I can bear to put my cracked sore hands into the cold water and strong soap. But you ask, why not hot water? Fuel costs money. If you have a wood fire it costs money. If you burn electricity, it costs money. Hot water is a luxury. I do not have luxuries. I know you will be surprised when I tell you how young I am. I look so much older. My back has been bent over the wash tubs every day for so long, I cannot remember when I ever did anything else. Every night I wash every stitch² my school age child has on and just hope her clothes will be dry by morning.

3 Poverty is staying up all night on cold nights to watch the fire knowing one spark on the newspaper covering the walls means your sleeping child dies in flames. In summer poverty is watching gnats³ and flies devour your baby's tears when he cries. The screens are torn and you pay so little rent you know they will never be fixed. Poverty means insects in your food, in your nose, in your eyes, and crawling over you when you sleep. Poverty is hoping it never rains because diapers won't dry when it rains and soon you are using newspapers. Poverty is seeing your children forever with runny noses. Paper handkerchiefs cost money and all your rags you need for other things.

4 Poverty is an acid⁴ that drips on pride until all pride is worn away. Poverty is a chisel⁵ that chips⁶ on honor until honor is worn away. Some of you say that you would do something in my situation, and maybe you would, for the first week or the first month, but for year after year after year?

GROUP ACTIVITY

Sense Impressions

Here is a sentence appealing to only one of the five senses (the sense of sight):

"A rug covers the living-room floor."

Develop the sentence into a short descriptive paragraph using more than one sense impression.

1 diaper rash: (also called *nappy rash* in Britain) sore red spots that sometimes form on the area of a baby's skin that a diaper covers

2 stitch: the smallest item of clothing

3 gnat: a small flying insect that bites

4 acid: a chemical with a sour taste; very strong acids are able to burn holes in things

5 chisel: a metal tool with a sharp edge, used to cut wood or stone

6 chip: to break off (something) especially with a tool

■ Figurative Language

修辞语言

Figurative language produces images or pictures in readers' minds, while helping you to create a dominant impression. Here are some devices you can employ in your description to make it clear, lively, and memorable:

1. **Simile:** a comparison between two things using the words *like* or *as*.

- The very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy¹ and radiant fabric.
- Seeing exactly the video game he wanted, he moved as quickly as a starving teenager spotting pie in a refrigerator full of leftover vegetables.

2. **Metaphor:** an implied analogy² between two objects or ideas. Without using *like* or *as*, a metaphor is conveyed by the use of one word instead of another.

- All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances.
- I was a puppet with my father controlling all the financial strings.

3. **Personification:** the attribution of human characteristics and emotions to inanimate objects, animals, or abstract ideas.

- The sun shone brightly down on me as if she were shining for me alone.
- The old teddy bear sat in a corner, dozing serenely before the fireplace.

4. **Hyperbole:** a figure of speech in which statements are exaggerated. It may be used to evoke strong feelings or to create a strong impression but is not meant to be taken literally.

- The waves were mountains high.
- The cockroaches³ in my kitchen had now grown to the size of carry-on luggage.

5. **Synecdoche:** a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole or the whole represents a part.

- All hands (sailors) are on deck.
- Gray hair (old people) should be respected.
- The western wave (sea) was all aflame.

6. **Allusion:** a brief reference to real or fictitious people, places, events, or things to produce certain associations in the reader's mind.

- "I violated the Noah rule: Predicting rain doesn't count; building arks does." (In the Bible, Noah built a large wooden ship, an ark, in order to save his family and a male and female of every type of animal when the world was covered by a flood.)
- Maple proofread her essay again and again, searching for errors with the tenacity⁴ of Captain Ahab. (Ahab, the sea captain in the novel *Moby-Dick*, was obsessively devoted to hunting the white whale.)

1 gauzy: light and thin; made of or resembling gauze (a very thin cloth, so thin that you can see through it)

2 analogy: a comparison of two things based on their being alike in some way

3 cockroach: a black or brown insect that is sometimes found in people's homes

4 tenacious: very determined to do something

■ Describing a Person

人物描述

Describing someone with whom you have had an important relationship invites you to contemplate the complexity of personal relationships. Many of us have a tendency to oversimplify, to remember only the very best or the very worst. We may demonize¹ those who have mistreated or frustrated us and idealize those who have helped or inspired us. Describing another person in depth may help you avoid thinking of others in terms of such caricature² and stereotype. Searching your memory for descriptive details and short illustrative anecdotes³ encourages you to portray others as complex individuals with both strengths and weaknesses, although in one paper you want to create only one dominant impression of the person described. It can also lead you to acknowledge qualities you may have overlooked; see nuances⁴ you had not appreciated.

Generally speaking, the objective of describing a person is twofold: to portray the person vividly so that readers can imagine what he or she looks like, and to show how the person is significant in your life. Although your writing will reveal something about yourself and your relationship with the person, the focus should remain fixed on the person you are describing—physical appearance, typical behavior, way of speaking, specific anecdotes, etc. For example, suppose that you want to write a descriptive essay about your grandfather. You decide to write about his physical appearance and ways of living. To achieve this, you might describe his rough and gnarled⁵ hands, a result of his life-long labor, but you might also describe how he would hold your hands so gently with his rough hands when having a conversation or taking a walk with you.

EXERCISES

Read the following descriptive essay and answer these questions about it:

- (1) What sensory details has the writer used in the essay?
- (2) How does the writer organize the description of her mother in the photograph?
- (3) How does she relate to the photograph?

Mother's Portrait⁶

1 My mother, who is 70 years old, recently sent me a photograph of herself that I had never seen before. While cleaning out the attic of her Florida home, she came across a studio portrait she had had taken about a year before she married my father. This picture of my mother as a 20-year-old girl has fascinated me from the moment I began to consider it.

2 The young woman in the picture has a face that resembles my own in many ways. Her face is a bit more oval than mine, but the softly waving brown hair around it is identical.

1 demonize: to treat someone as if he or she were a demon (an evil spirit)

2 caricature: a very exaggerated account of (something)

3 anecdote: a short story about an interesting or funny event or occurrence

4 nuance: a very small difference in color, tone, meaning, etc

5 gnarled: gnarled hands or fingers are twisted, rough, and difficult to move, usually because they are old

6 Adapted from Langan (2004).

The small, straight nose is the same model I was born with. My mother's mouth is closed, yet there is just the slightest hint of a smile on her full lips. I know that if she had smiled, she would have shown the same wide grin and down-curving "smile lines" that appear in my own snapshots¹. The most haunting² feature in the photo, however, is my mother's eyes. They are an exact duplicate³ of my own large, dark-brown ones. Her brows are plucked⁴ into thin lines, which are like two pencil strokes added to highlight those fine, luminous⁵ eyes.

3 I've also carefully studied the clothing and jewelry in the photograph. Although the photo was taken 50 years ago, my mother is wearing a blouse and skirt that could easily be worn today. The blouse is made of heavy eggshell-colored satin⁶ and reflects the light in its folds and hollows. It has a turned-down cowl⁷ collar and smocking⁸ on the shoulders and below the collar. The smocking looks hand-done. The skirt, which covers my mother's calves⁹, is straight and made of light wool or flannel¹⁰. My mother is wearing silver drop earrings. They are about two inches long and roughly shield-shaped. On her left wrist is a matching bracelet, and on the third finger of her left hand is a ring with a large, square-cut stone.

4 When I study this picture, I react in many ways. I think about the trouble that my mother went to in order to impress the young man who was to be my father. I laugh when I look at the ring, which was probably worn to make my father jealous. Sometimes, I am filled with a mixture of pleasure and sadness when I look at this frozen long-ago moment. It is a moment of beauty, of love, and—in a way—of my own past.

*PAIR WORK

1. Describing a Suspect

Suppose the two of you were witnesses to a criminal act, and the police want to produce a likeness of the suspect based on your description. It is important for you to know that the more information you provide about the suspect, the greater the chance the suspect will be identified and/or apprehended¹¹.

Describe the suspect to the police with the help of the following word bank:

- *General Information*
gender, race, approximate age, approximate height, approximate weight
- *General Appearance*
neatly dressed, dirty, ragged¹²

1 snapshot: a photograph
 2 haunting: beautiful, but in a sad way and often in a way which cannot be forgotten
 3 duplicate: something that is an exact copy of something else
 4 pluck: to make your eyebrows the shape you want, by pulling out some of the hairs
 5 luminous: producing or reflecting bright light (especially in the dark)
 6 satin: a type of cloth, sometimes made of silk, which is smooth and shiny on one side but not on the other
 7 cowl: a very large hood that covers your head and shoulders
 8 smocking: decoration on a piece of clothing consisting of cloth which has been gathered into tight folds that are held in position with decorative stitching
 9 calf: the thick curved part at the back of the human leg between the knee and the foot
 10 flannel: a light cloth usually made from wool, used especially for making clothes
 11 apprehend: to catch a criminal or suspect
 12 ragged: (of a person) untidy, dirty and wearing old torn clothes

- *Build*
light, medium, heavy
- *Complexion*¹
fair, dark, round, oval, triangular, ruddy², pale, baby-soft, heart-shaped, dimples³, pink-cheeked, baby fat
- *Unique Facial Characteristics*
scars, protruding⁴ ears, pierced ears, sunken cheeks, flat or long nose, harelip, protruding or receding chin⁵, juttred-out chin/jaw, freckles, pimples⁶, tanned, crossed/bulging⁷ eyes, squinty⁸, pouting lips, pursed lips
- *Hair*
unkempt⁹, bushy, wiry (stiff like wire), receding hairline, permed, hair style (long, short, medium, parted in the middle, balding, straight, curly, wavy, afro¹⁰, braided, crew cut, pigtails, ponytail, bun, etc), hair color (red, brunette, blond, dark, gray, salt-and-pepper, dyed, bleached¹¹)
- *Facial Hair*
full beard, goatee¹², mustache, unshaven, sideburns, clean-shaven, five-o'clock shadow¹³, trimmed beard
- *Eyes*
brown, blue, bright, piercing, sad, sunken, lifeless, twinkling, dancing, blink
- *Teeth*
crooked¹⁴, gold, broken, gapped (a gap between the two front teeth), protruding, very white, decaying, stained, dentures¹⁵
- *Clothing*
glasses, hat, coat or jacket, shirt, pants, shoes, gloves, skirt, jeans, overalls, shorts, sweatshirt, polo shirt, pullover, slippers, sandals, trousers patched at the knees, jewelry, fabric (wool, cotton, tweed, polyester, leather)
- *Speech*
abusive¹⁶, soft, polite, apologetic, accent, stutter¹⁷, raspy¹⁸, high-pitched, effeminate¹⁹, educated/uneducated

1 complexion: the natural appearance and color of the skin

2 ruddy: having a healthy reddish color

3 dimple: a small hollow place on your cheek or chin, especially one that forms when you smile

4 protrude: to stick out from or through something

5 receding chin: a chin that slopes backward

6 pimple: a small, red, swollen spot on the skin

7 bulging: sticking out

8 squint: to have a medical condition that makes one's eyes unable to look in the same direction

9 unkempt: not neat or orderly; messy and untidy

10 afro: a way of arranging the hair so that it is very thick, curly and has a rounded shape

11 bleach: to make something clean or white by using a strong chemical

12 goatee: a small usually pointed beard grown only on the chin, not the cheeks

13 five-o'clock shadow: the beginning of a beard that you can see late in the afternoon on the face of a man who has not shaved since morning

14 crooked: not straight

15 dentures: false teeth fixed to a small piece of plastic or similar material, which fits inside the mouth of someone who does not have their own teeth

16 abusive: using rude and offensive language

17 stutter: to speak or say something, especially the first part of a word, with difficulty, for example pausing before it or repeating it several times

18 raspy: a raspy voice sounds unpleasantly rough

19 effeminate: describes a man who behaves or looks similar to a woman

2. A Person I Like/Dislike

Task 1: The two of you decide to assign these two topics to each other: Describe someone with whom you have (1) a close relationship or (2) a serious conflict. How would you present this person? What overall impression of this person would you like your readers to get from your description?

Task 2: Revise each other's description.

Task 3: Pick the better one for a presentation for the whole class.

While you prepare your description, include the following aspects:

- Vivid portrait including concrete details on physical features;
- Typical behavior (specific gestures, actions showing feelings, interesting habits);
- Speech (memorable expressions, tone of voice, manner of speech, etc);
- Clarification of the person's significance in your life.

■ Describing a Place

场景描述

In a description of a place, we use a spatial order to create a clear image of a place or scene by appealing to as many of the five senses as we can. The description can be arranged in space from top to bottom, bottom to top, right to left, left to right, near to far, far to near, inside to outside, or outside to inside. We may do it from either a fixed or a moving vantage point¹. A fixed observer remains in one place and reports only what can be perceived from there, while a moving observer views things from a number of positions, signaling changes in location with phrases such as “moving through the turnstile²” and “as I walked around the corner.”

In order to display your sensory details for a dominant impression, you need to organize those details. Spatial order transitional phrases are helpful to create a mental picture in your readers' mind of how your subject is arranged in space. Strong transitions establish coherence—a clear and easy-to-follow flow of ideas.

Transitional phrases used to signal spatial description

above	at the top	beyond	farther	middle	right
across	back	by	front	nearby	there
adjacent	behind	center	here	next to	under
around	below	close to	in	outside	underneath
at the bottom	beneath	down	inside	opposite	within
at the side	beside	far away	left		

¹ vantage point: a good position from which you can see something

² turnstile: a small gate that spins around and lets only one person at a time go through an entrance

EXERCISES

1. Read the following passage and analyze how the writer creates the dominant impression of a pet shop.

A Depressing Place¹

The pet shop is a depressing place. A display window attracts passers-by who stare at the prisoners penned² inside. In the right-hand side of the window, two puppies press their forepaws against the glass and attempt to lick the human hands that press from the outside. A cardboard barrier separates the dogs from several black-and-white kittens piled together in the opposite end of the window. Inside the shop, rows of wire cages line one wall from top to bottom. At first, it is hard to tell whether a bird, hamster³, cat, or dog is locked inside each cage. Only an occasional movement or clawing, shuffling⁴ sound tells visitors that living creatures are inside. Running down the center of the store is a line of large wooden perches⁵ that look like coat racks. When customers pass by, the parrots chained to these perches flutter their clipped⁶ wings in a useless attempt to escape. At the end of this center aisle is a large plastic tub of dirty, stagnant⁷-looking water containing a few motionless turtles. The shelves against the left-hand wall are packed with all kinds of pet-related items. The smell inside the entire shop is an unpleasant mixture of strong chemical deodorizers⁸, urine-soaked newspapers, and musty⁹ sawdust. Because so many animals are crammed¹⁰ together, the normally pleasant, slightly milky smell of the puppies and kittens is sour and strong. The droppings¹¹ inside the uncleaned birdcages give off a dry, stinging¹² odor. Visitors hurry out of the shop, anxious to feel fresh air and sunlight. The animals stay on.

Discussion Questions

- (1) What are the sensory details in the passage?

Sight: _____

Sound: _____

Smell: _____

Touch: _____

-
- 1 Adapted from Langan (2004).
 2 pen: to keep people or animals in a small area
 3 hamster: a small animal covered in fur with a short tail and large spaces in each side of its mouth which are used for storing food. It is often kept as a pet.
 4 shuffle: to walk by pulling your feet slowly along the ground rather than lifting them
 5 perch: a place where a bird sits, especially a thin rod in a cage
 6 clipped: cut short and tidy
 7 stagnant: (of water or air) not flowing or moving, and smelling unpleasant
 8 deodorizer: something to eliminate or prevent an offensive odor
 9 musty: smelling unpleasantly old and slightly wet
 10 cram: to force things or people into a small space
 11 droppings: solid waste produced by animals or birds
 12 sting: to feel or cause to feel a sharp tingling or burning pain or sensation

- (2) What is the dominant impression expressed by these details?
- (3) What is the spatial order of the description?

2. Read the following essay and analyze how the writer effectively describes the island. The writer has used several strategies in the description. Identify as many of them as you can.

South Padre Island¹

- 1 The sound of the waves crashing against the shore, the sight of the seagulls swooping² overhead and the smell of sunscreen³ create an engaging place called South Padre Island. Located where one can relax and experience good times on the beach, South Padre Island offers an island-getaway adventure not soon to be forgotten. The sun, sand, and endless ocean make South Padre unlike any place I have ever been to. When I am on the beach at South Padre Island, I know I am in paradise.
- 2 Perhaps the simplest delight of South Padre is the beach itself. This sparkling retreat⁴ embraces unbounded miles of sand. During the day the warmth of the sun beats down upon this sand, making beachgoers spring as their feet hit the blistering⁵ sand. However, closer to the Gulf of Mexico where the water moistens and cools the beach, children giggle as their sand castles are overtaken by a massive wave. Towels are no stranger to this sand. Sun worshippers spend hours lying upon them in an attempt to soak up even more blistering rays. The sand provides a soft cover as a teenager dives after the ball in the annual summer volleyball tournament⁶, and it cushions⁷ two old men who swap⁸ stories as they wait for the hungry game fish that swim the waters of South Padre Island. Looking across the beach, I see a rainbow of umbrellas and seashells of exquisite⁹ design and enchanting¹⁰ colors: a vision of paradise.
- 3 Another attraction of South Padre is the Gulf. The rushing waves both calm and provide amusement for many tourists. I could never truly understand complete tranquility¹¹ until I stood on the shoreline of South Padre Island at night. The feel of the breeze, the smell of the salt water, and the sight of the boat lights in the distance soothed¹² my senses in a way that nothing else could. During the hot days these waters are filled with busy tourists. They struggle to stay on top of each wave, some only to be swallowed in the swelling waters, rising with the taste of salt running down their throats. Still, they are mysteriously eager to try again.
- 4 South Padre Island attracts all types of people searching for the delight that this island offers. During spring break a group of friends water-ski, making the water

1 From http://eolit.hrw.com/hlla/writersmodel/pdf/W_S0906.pdf?WebLogicSession=Qhzx0UpELNmxostouuz8PtunTC7282b88xxi4HL8wyc3K7pzFgng.

2 swoop: to move very quickly and easily through the air, especially down from a height in order to attack

3 sunscreen: a substance which you put on your skin to prevent it from being burnt by the sun

4 retreat: a place that is quiet and private

5 blistering: extremely hot

6 tournament: a competition for teams or single players in which a series of games is played, and the winners of each game play against each other until only one winner is left

7 cushion; to make the effect or force of something softer

8 swap: to exchange

9 exquisite: very beautiful; delicate

10 enchanting: very pleasant

11 tranquility: a peaceful calm state, without noise, violence, worry, etc

12 soothe: to make someone feel calm or less worried

momentarily part as the skis rip¹ through it like a razor through a sheet. A young couple in love sits by the shore watching as the sun sets, feeling that time has somehow stopped and the world is revolving around them for that moment. On the other side of the beach, a pair of adoring grandparents closely watch their beloved grandchildren. These young ones, teased² with the water's mysteries, stare curiously at the waves hitting their feet and returning to the Gulf. While visiting South Padre, a watery paradise, guests create memories.

- 5 South Padre Island meets each of its visitors' individual needs. Its main function is to provide satisfaction for its many guests. The feeling that overwhelms³ me when my bare feet hit the sand of the shore for the first time is one of delight. I feel totally free of all cares and burdens. Whether it is fun I am seeking or a place to rest and rejuvenate⁴ myself, South Padre Island is the finest destination to accommodate⁵ my every wish—it's delightful!

*GROUP ACTIVITY

Write a description from the following perspectives.

- (1) Describe, as a fixed observer, in a paragraph your impressions of one of the following.
 - A dorm.
 - A room in the library.
 - A coffee shop.
 - The lobby of a public place (a hotel, museum, performing art center, theater, etc).
- (2) Now write as a moving observer: Describe in a paragraph or two your impressions as you do one of the following things. Signal your movements in your writing.
 - Stroll down Main Street in town.
 - Shop in a grocery store.
 - Walk a dog in a park.
 - Cross a long bridge.
 - Climb a mountain.
 - Go through a ticket line and enter a theater or a stadium.

1 rip: to pull apart; to tear or be torn violently and quickly

2 tease: to laugh at someone and make jokes in order to have fun by embarrassing them, either in a friendly way or in an unkind way

3 overwhelm: to cause someone to feel sudden strong emotion

4 rejuvenate: to make someone look or feel young and energetic again

5 accommodate: to give what is needed to someone

*DISCUSSION

Read the student essay below and answer the questions at the end of the description.

The Railroad Car

- 1 As the train started to move, I looked around in the car from my seat. Small bags dangled from the fully packed luggage racks, swinging from side to side along with the staggering of the over-loaded train. The lights were dim, for the bulbs had been coated with months of cigarette smoke. The smells of oils, sweat, tobacco, moldy cakes, stinky socks, and toilets permeated the car. The window curtains seemed to have been picked up from a garbage can. Black and yellow stains dotted them. From time to time, wet and greasy hands might have been rubbed on them. The wooden edge of the window by my seat had peeled, and was greasy like a butcher's counter. Brown and dry apple cores, bread crust, and melon seeds mixed with spilled beer were scattered on the small table in front of me, so was a crumpled newspaper soaked in chili sauce beside one used chopstick.
- 2 I looked down on the floor and saw nothing but legs, backs, and buttocks in black or blue. Five or six passengers sat on the floor, straddling¹ the aisle, and one small child even lay under a seat, sticking his feet out. Moving around in the car would become a disaster—there was almost no space to step on. Even the most splendid imitation of a ballerina on tiptoe might cause stumbling² and complaints. Most of those sitting on the floor were asleep, or half-asleep, for from time to time they opened their eyes, squinted at their luggage, and wriggled³ their bodies to keep their territory inviolate⁴.
- 3 There was also the noise. The rumbling⁵ of the wheels couldn't drown the laughter and wrangles⁶ of four young men, bickering⁷ with red necks over a score in their poker game. Two young women down the aisle tried to contain their laughs but only giggled more. Next to them, a dad smacked⁸ his two-year-old boy on the bottom, who shrieked and cried, but immediately choked and coughed. A young man at the other end of the car was plucking⁹ and torturing his guitar. Its banging was almost overwhelmed by the off-key songs he was singing.
- 4 The train went on rumbling and panting like an old horse, puffing steam from time to time. Suddenly the train screeched to a halt. People lurched forward; immediately the whole car was in turmoil. An apple flew away from a hanging bag, bounced off a woman's shoulder, and hit the head of a man sitting on the floor. Bottles smashed; water, beer, and sauce spilled on pants or shoes. Snoring choked and guitar banged on the floor, accompanied by an explosion of shouting, shrieking, cursing, and crying.

1 straddle: to sit or stand with your legs on either side of someone or something

2 stumble: to hit your foot on something when you are walking or running so that you fall or almost fall

3 wriggle: to twist from side to side with small quick movements

4 inviolate: something that is inviolate cannot be attacked, changed, or destroyed

5 rumble: to make a series of long low sounds

6 wrangle: a dispute that lasts for a long time

7 bicker: to argue in a way that is annoying about things that are not important

8 smack: to hit (someone) hard with your hand

9 pluck: to play (a guitar, banjo, etc) by pulling and releasing the strings with your fingers

- 5 At that time, a tender voice from the loudspeaker announced that the train would run an hour behind schedule. Then, I closed my eyes, covered my ears with hands, and began to realize I was going to miss the supper my mom had prepared for me at home.

Discussion Questions

- (1) How is the description structured in its spatial order?
- (2) What sensory details has the writer used to describe what was happening in the car? Give examples.
- (3) What is the dominant impression created by the description?