

Descriptive writing structure

1 Setting

Descriptive compositions need some kind of framework to give them a shape and logical progression to involve the reader. If you are describing a place, it is appropriate to set the general scene: location, surroundings, atmosphere, season, weather, time of day. Either time (a short period only) or distance can be used as the structure for a descriptive composition.

2 Positioning

The observer takes up a position with regard to the object or place being described, e.g. they are standing outside a room or walking towards a market. This arouses interest in what will be revealed on closer inspection, e.g. when the gate into the secret garden or the chest in the attic is opened. Visual and acoustic images are used in this section to draw the reader in. If time is the framework, then this must be established, e.g. daylight is beginning to fade at dusk or storm clouds are gathering.

3 Approaching

The observer moves towards the object or place being described, which gives the description logical progression. New details can be revealed because of the closer proximity, e.g. as the view of the beach becomes clearer. At this stage the sense of smell can be added to sight and sound. Alternatively, time has moved on, e.g. darkness is creeping into the sky and changing the landscape.

4 Arriving

The observer is now part of the scene, e.g. in the heart of the street market, paddling in the sea, or in contact with the object in the chest. Close-up details of sight and sound can be used here, as well as the sense of touch, and taste can also be implied, e.g. food smells, the salty water. Alternatively, time has moved on, e.g. it is now night and the new sky and atmosphere can be described, or the storm reaches its climax.

5 Leaving

The observer leaves the scene or the object, with or without a backward glance. The initial scene may be restored at the end of the description, or alternatively it may be going home time for the people on the beach or at the market, so that the final scene is the opposite of the opening one. Reference to either time or distance can be used as closure.