**Essay Format: Description**

A vivid description supports a dominant impression with specific details. The dominant impression of a description is its central and unifying theme; it is the feeling you are trying to convey condensed into a single word or phrase. In a paper of this nature, you should describe as vividly as you can the physical characteristics of a person or a place about which you have a strong feeling. If possible, accumulate details and impressions by observing your subject closely. If you cannot observe it firsthand, recreate your subject in your mind’s eye. As you observe or remember, jot down the feelings and impressions that you experience. Next, select from all the mass of impressions the dominant, or strongest, impression created by the place or person, and state it in one sentence. This sentence will be the thesis statement of your theme; it will appear on your outline and again in the introductory paragraph. If necessary, revise this sentence to make sure that it clearly states specifically the place or person you intend to describe and the impression you plan to convey to the reader.

The dominant impression of a place might be “Ben’s cafe, where I have eaten so many meals, is a dingy place.” Of a person, it might be “My friend has a delicate beauty.” After you have formed your dominant impression into a thesis, make a plan to organize the relevant supporting details into three basic parts. Each part will comprise one Roman numeral of your outline and one paragraph of the body of your paper. For the dingy cafe, you might use the walls, the booths, and the counter as the three parts in climactic order, that is, ascending from least to most important. You will not outline your introductory paragraph since the thesis sentence that appears in this first paragraph also appears on the outline page, nor will you outline your concluding paragraph since it summarizes or re-emphasizes the material that you have already discussed.

As you plan the organization of your details, omit any irrelevant details that might break the unity of the impression. For instance, if your dominant impression of a place is that it is dingy, you would not want to destroy that impression by mentioning that cheerful sunshine that sometimes enters to brighten the place. Also, make sure that each detail is placed in the appropriate part of your theme. For instance, you would want to describe the beauty of a girl’s eyes in a paragraph devoted to the way she dressed. In addition to unifying and organizing your details, you should strive to make them as specific and as concrete as possible. To be told that a girl always wears delicate, light-colored dresses is not nearly so convincing as to be told that she wears robin’s egg-blue dresses of silk.

Your finished essay will contain five paragraphs: an introduction of at least three sentences (one of which is the thesis sentence), three paragraphs of development corresponding to the three Roman numerals of your outline, and a concluding paragraph of at least three sentences. The length of the paper will be approximately 350-500 words.

Before submitting the paper, you should proofread carefully to see that you have observed all conventions of correct grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Suggested Topics

1. Based on a dominant impression, write a description of your latest family dinner or other family gathering.
2. Use "dingy," "peaceful," "secure," or another appropriate adjective to write a description of a place.
3. Using sensory details, write a description of a garden in spring or a football stadium in fall.
4. Observe the scene in a particular place such as a supermarket, hospital waiting room, Laundromat, or church, and reduce it to a single dominant impression. Then support the impression with details of sight, sound, smell, and motion.
5. Observe and describe a traffic jam.
6. Take a deliberately unconventional viewpoint, such as how funny people look when they are at the beach or when they are singing in the choir of a church, and describe it.
7. Describe the looks of your closest friend. Begin with a dominant impression and include only the characteristics that fit that impression.
8. Describe the looks of a relative to whom you feel particularly close.
9. Observe and describe a retarded child or a group of retarded children.
10. Describe the looks, actions, and activities of a pinball machine fanatic or of a disco dancer.
11. Write an essay describing in detail the most useful place you know.
12. Describe your most valued possession, beginning with a dominant impression and supplying details.
13. Develop a descriptive composition comparing your lover (real or imaginary) to a flower, animal or object. (Remember to develop the paper in descriptive terms.)
14. Write a composition in which you fully describe your favorite television personality.

Standard Format for a Description Paper

1. Introduction
   1. Present the thesis.
      1. A dominant impression or a central or unifying theme
      2. Physical characteristics
   2. Be sure the thesis statement states specifically what you intend to describe and the impression you plan to convey.
2. Body
   1. Accumulate details, preferably by firsthand observation.
   2. Organize relevant supporting details into three basic parts.
   3. Arrange the details into a logical order.
      1. Climactic order, ascending from the least to most important
      2. Spatial order, identifying items according to their positions
   4. Omit irrelevant details that might break the unity of the impression.
   5. Make sure each detail is placed in the appropriate part of the theme.
   6. Make details as specific and concrete as possible.
3. Conclusion
   1. Reemphasize the dominant impression.
   2. Summarize the material you have discussed.