

TUTORIAL

A descriptive paper is built on the close and careful observation of a subject or topic. Successful descriptive papers require the following:

· **Sensory Details:** The goal of a descriptive paper is to create an image or scene in the mind of the reader that helps him or her to clearly see the subject through the eyes of the writer. Descriptive papers rely on sensory details such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.



· **Vivid Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives:** To avoid writing a boring descriptive paper, writers use VIVID nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The difference between VIVID and regular nouns, verbs, and adjectives is the difference between showing and telling. The writer wants to *show* the subject to the reader, not just **tell** them about it. Think about the difference between Dalmatian and dog, or calico and spotted. One is specific, vivid, and intense in meaning and association, the other is vague, flat, and lifeless.

· **Selective Details:** Another way to avoid an uninteresting descriptive paper is to select only the *important* or *interesting* details to tell the reader. Yes, it is important to give a complete picture of the subject or topic, but not every detail is as important or interesting as the next. Too many details can overload the reader. Writers try to make each detail they include seem special or important; writers will often expand on details using:

o Similes: a comparison using the words “like” or “as.”

§ For example: My love is **as** deep and boundless **as** a grocery bag.

o Metaphor: a comparison that states something “is” something else—but doesn’t always need a “be” verb like is, am, are, was, were...

§ For example: “It took me an additional ten minutes to get to school with this turtle shell on my back.” Calling your overstuffed backpack a turtle shell because it slows you down is a metaphor.

· **A Point:** Make sure that there is a meaning beyond simply describing something. Make the description relevant to the reader by letting him or her know why the description is significant to you, the writer. Let the reader know why the description should matter to them.