

English 1301

Exercises in Descriptive Writing

Instructions

Report outside to a favorite location on campus or elsewhere. Find a single spot where you can sit comfortably, observe your surroundings, and write.

Select a frame of reference (you might imagine looking through a camera lens) that contains at least five distinctive objects or subjects.

The Descriptive Catalog

Like the example below, compose five descriptive catalogs of twenty descriptive phrases. Each phrase should be “image specific”; that is, each phrase should stimulate a visual, auditory, or other sense impression of what you are observing.

The Linear Paragraph

Select one object that lends itself to a linear description. Select five phrases from your list that fall along the imaginary line that is characteristic of the object (trees grow from bottom to top, so the line is from bottom to top; waterfalls flow from top to bottom, so the line is from top to bottom, etc.).

Compose a linear paragraph with six sentences. The first sentence states what the object is and where it is. Each of the following five sentences focuses on and includes the descriptive phrases that you have selected to develop (see the sample linear paragraph).

The Revision of the Linear Paragraph

Revise the linear paragraph you have composed, this time selecting one of the spatial or psychological patterns to redevelop and reorganize your description of the same object. Include a minimum of six sentences in this paragraph, as well.

The Emotional Paragraph

Compose a paragraph of five to seven sentences for the purpose of stimulating a specific feeling (emotion) in the reader. Do *NOT* name any emotion or feeling; rather, simply describe the features, that working together, stimulate the desired emotion.

General Stylistic Directions

- 1) Do not use the pronoun “I” in any of the three paragraphs.
- 2) Do not use the word “there” in any of the three paragraphs.
- 3) Do not use “is/are/was/were” or “has/have/had” as the main verb of any sentence.

A Sample Descriptive Catalog

Oak Tree

- 1) split branches
- 2) soft, dangling moss
- 3) exposed gnarled roots
- 4) nest of twigs and string
- 5) crisp green leaves
- 6) train of ants
- 7) brown beetles on the ground
- 8) rusting "No Fishing" sign
- 9) cracked dead limb
- 10) single-strand spider web between branches
- 11) poison ivy vine wrapped around the base of the trunk
- 12) twenty-five feet high
- 13) fresh green buds of leaves
- 14) patches of bark peeled away
- 15) two concrete benches, one to the left, the other to the right of the trunk
- 16) two squirrels chasing around the upper branches
- 17) dancing leaves in breeze
- 18) one foot in diameter
- 19) blue jay squawking in the upper leaves
- 20) gnats twirling above the weeds at the roots