

# Lesson 26: How to Write a Descriptive Essay

**Purpose of Lesson 26:** You will learn what a descriptive essay is all about.

**Skills:** Critical thinking, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing.

## Words to Learn:

**carousel** - merry-go-round: *Children are riding on the carousel.*

**characteristic** - a quality or feature that describes: *Hills are characteristic of the city of Yonkers.*

**descriptive essay** - describes a person, place, or thing with vivid details: *Write a descriptive essay about your favorite friend.*

**diabetes** - a disease where the pancreas does not produce enough insulin: *If you have diabetes, you must watch your sugar intake.*

**Lazy Susan** - a rotating tray for food: *The food was put on the Lazy Susan so everyone at the table could spin it to get their choice.*

**pronto** - at once; quickly: *The child came pronto to get his gift.*

**sensory words** - words that describe through the five senses: *Sight, smell, sound, taste and touch; "Itchy" and "rotten" are sensory words.*

**still life** - a painting of fruit, vegetables or flowers: *The still life included apples and pears.*

**verb** - a word expressing action: *Running is a verb.*

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**Directions:** Read the conversation below and do the exercises that follow.

1



What are you reading, Mom?

2

This is Nana's diary. I am looking for information for the reunion menu.



3



What kind of information?

4

To start, we need to know if there are any food allergies, of things like diabetes, so the menu can address everyone's eating needs. Family medical facts are important to all of us. I would also like to create a family cookbook using the information we find.



5



That's cool that you want to make a cookbook. Our family cookbook will really be something to treasure.

6

Right. It will include recipes, stories, old photos, and maybe some excerpts from this old diary! Dad must have some tales to tell.



7



How do you want me to write this information?

8

Write about food and our family, of course! We need to get started. This family cookbook is going to take time to do it right.



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I will get Ms. Shine to help me. This will be a work of art.

10



Ms. Shine, I need help writing for the family reunion. I'm writing about food and family dinners. I have a special journal to write in.

11

That's descriptive writing, Dora. It's more like showing instead of telling. You have to paint a picture for the reader with your words. I'll show you how.



12



Thanks. I hope it isn't too hard to do.

13

You already know how to write a narrative essay. The narrative essay and the descriptive essay are like "cousins," with many of the same characteristics.



## A descriptive essay:

- allows the reader to see an image of what you are describing
- describes a person, place, or thing using clear, vivid details, and strong, exact, sensory words
- captures the reader's attention just like an action movie; creates interest, suspense, and excitement throughout your writing
- makes the reader feel like he is actually there, experiencing the scene
- can be true or made up

**You can do it! You will be amazed at how easy it is.**

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I have to write about food and how it connects with my family. Where do I begin?

15

Well, you have many choices for topics. You can write about a family dinner you remember, or funny eating habits in your family, or helping your mother prepare a special dessert.



16



I have an idea of what I want to write about. One time we ate dinner at Nana's, and my brother and I hated spinach, so we sat by the window and threw it out when nobody was looking.

17

Excellent topic! Now try to recall that event in your mind. Close your eyes. Think of the dinner as if it were a movie with all the special effects and cameras focusing in on the table, the guests, and the room. You may even have a photo somewhere to jog your memory.



**Dora followed the writing process and decided to write about a food that she and her brother disliked:**

- **The story was set in the background of a family dinner at her grandparents' apartment.**
- **She used sensory words to show the reader how it felt to be present at the dinner table.**

**See if you like what she wrote.**

## Green, Mean, Flying Vegetable Machine

### Paragraph #1

Aromas of roast beef dancing with onions and potatoes tickled our nostrils as we floated up the stairs and into the depths of Nana's kitchen on Sunday afternoon. As the red metal door swung open, a long, narrow carpet led the path to the apple pies cooling on

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the window sill. They glistened in the sunlight later to be blanketed with homemade vanilla ice cream. Dinner at Nana's, from start to finish, generally lasted somewhere between four and six hours.

## Paragraph #2

Stomachs growled as Nana clicked and clacked stainless steel utensils and porcelain plates onto a creamy lace tablecloth that she had crocheted herself. The table burst into colors of burgundy, green, yellow and white with each addition of vegetable, starch, or protein to complete the still life my grandmother was creating for us to devour. The Kitty Kat clock with the eyeballs that glowed in the dark was wagging his tail back and forth at me and my brother, Omar, as if to say, "Get ready, get set, eat!" Olives, breads, and salads spun around on a Lazy Susan like a carousel as dozens of hands frantically plucked treats from its trays.

## Paragraph #3

Omar and I gasped when Nana uncovered the mystery vegetable dish Aunt Mary brought. It looked like seaweed, but it was really spinach, covered with garlic and burnt nuts, and it was threatening to invade our dishes. Too late! The slimy stuff was staring up at us, exhaling its foul breath directly up our noses. Even Nana's beagle, Dante, the canine garbage disposal, wanted no part of it. We had to get this veggie disaster to disappear from our dishes--pronto. Omar was a genius! He wrapped the green goops in our napkins and catapulted (threw) them two at a time through the open window. Rapid fire spinach bombs were descending from the third floor apartment window, directly onto Officer DiMase's police regulation shoes....

## Paragraph #4

Grateful that the policeman did not charge us with assault with a deadly vegetable, we were allowed to remain under "kitchen arrest" in Nana's custody. She stood guard as we served our sentence submerging blue and yellow rubber gloves into soapsuds, scrubbing, rinsing and drying every last cup and saucer she owned. It could have been much worse: at least she didn't force us to eat the spinach.