

2


www.mhhe.com/langan

When you describe someone or something, you give your readers a picture in words. To make the word picture as vivid and real as possible, you must observe and record specific details that appeal to your readers' senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch). More than any other type of essay, a descriptive paper needs sharp, colorful details.

Here is a sentence in which there is almost no appeal to the senses: "In the window was a fan." In contrast, here is a description rich in sense impressions: "The blades of the rusty window fan clattered and whirled as they blew out a stream of warm, soggy air." Sense impressions in this second example include sight (*rusty window fan, whirled*), hearing (*clattered*), and touch (*warm, soggy air*). The vividness and sharpness provided by the sensory details give us a clear picture of the fan and enable us to share the writer's experience.

In this chapter, you will be asked to describe a person, place, or thing sharply, by using words rich in sensory details. To prepare for this assignment, read the student essays and the professional essay that follow and work through the questions that accompany each piece of writing.

Student Essays to Consider

Family Portrait

My great-grandmother, who is ninety-five years old, recently sent me a photograph of herself that I had never seen before. While cleaning out the attic of her Florida home, she came across a studio portrait she had had taken about a year before she married my great-grandfather. This picture of my great-grandmother as a twenty-year-old girl and the story behind it have fascinated me from the moment I began to consider it. 1

The young woman in the picture has a face that resembles my own in many ways. Her face is a bit more oval than mine, but the softly waving brown hair around it is identical. The small, straight nose is the same model I was born with. My great-grandmother's mouth is closed, yet there is just the slightest hint of a smile on her full lips. I know that if she had smiled, she would have shown the same wide grin and down-curving "smile lines" that appear in my own snapshots. The most haunting feature in the photo, however, is my great-grandmother's eyes. They are an exact duplicate of my own large, dark brown ones. Her brows are plucked into thin lines, which are like two pencil strokes added to highlight those fine, luminous eyes. 2

I've also carefully studied the clothing and jewelry in the photograph. Although the photo was taken seventy-five years ago, my great-grandmother is wearing a blouse and skirt that could easily be worn today. The blouse is 3

(continued)

Teaching Tip
Bring to class examples of descriptive writing. These examples might be found in novels, magazines, and other published sources. If your classroom has access to the Internet, find examples from Web sites. Help your students make connections.

Teaching Tip
Read these essays aloud. Ask students to underline the topic sentence, specific examples, and transitions in each paragraph before answering the questions.

made of heavy eggshell-colored satin and reflects the light in its folds and hollows. It has a turned-down cowl collar and smocking on the shoulders and below the collar. The smocking (tiny rows of gathered material) looks hand-done. The skirt, which covers my great-grandmother's calves, is straight and made of light wool or flannel. My great-grandmother is wearing silver drop earrings. They are about two inches long and roughly shield-shaped. On her left wrist is a matching bracelet. My great-grandmother can't find this bracelet now, despite our having spent hours searching through the attic for it. On the third finger of her left hand is a ring with a large, square-cut stone. ④

The story behind the picture is as interesting to me as the young woman it captures. Great-Grandmother, who was earning twenty-five dollars a week as a file clerk, decided to give her boyfriend (my great-grandfather) a picture of herself. She spent almost two weeks' salary on the skirt and blouse, which she bought at a fancy department store downtown. She borrowed the earrings and bracelet from her older sister, Dorothy. The ring she wore was a present from another young man she was dating at the time. Great-Grandmother spent another chunk of her salary to pay the portrait photographer for the hand-tinted print in old-fashioned tones of brown and tan. Just before giving the picture to my great-grandfather, she scrawled at the lower left, "Sincerely, Beatrice." 4

When I study this picture, I react in many ways. I think about the trouble that my great-grandmother went to in order to impress the young man who was to be my great-grandfather. I laugh when I look at the ring, which was probably worn to make him jealous. I smile at the serious, formal inscription my great-grandmother used at this stage of the budding relationship. Sometimes, I am filled with a mixture of pleasure and sadness when I look at this frozen long-ago moment. It is a moment of beauty, of love, and—in a way—of my own past. 5

The Diner at Midnight

I've been in lots of diners, and they've always seemed to be warm, busy, friendly, happy places. That's why, on a recent Monday night, I stopped in a diner for a cup of coffee. I was returning home after an all-day car trip and needed something to help me get through the last forty-five miles. I'd been visiting my cousins, whom I try to get together with at least twice a year. A diner at midnight, however, was not the place I had expected—it was different, and lonely. 1

(continued)

Even the outside of the diner was uninviting. My Focus pulled to a halt in front of the dreary gray aluminum building, which looked like an old railroad car. A half-lit neon sign, sputtering the message “Fresh baked goods daily,” reflected on the surface of the rain-slick parking lot. Only half a dozen cars and a battered pickup were scattered around the lot. An empty paper coffee cup made a hollow scraping sound as it rolled in small circles on one cement step close to the entrance. I pulled hard at the balky glass door, and it banged shut behind me.

The diner was quiet when I entered. As there was no hostess on duty, only the faint odor of stale grease and the dull hum of an empty refrigerated pastry case greeted me. The outside walls were lined with vacant booths that squatted back to back in their black vinyl upholstery. On each black-and-white checkerboard-patterned table were the usual accessories—glass salt and pepper shakers, ketchup bottle, sugar packets—silently waiting for the next morning’s breakfast crowd. I glanced through the round windows on the two swinging metal doors leading to the kitchen. I could see only part of the large, apparently deserted cooking area, with a shiny stainless-steel range and blackened pans of various sizes and shapes hanging along a ledge.

I slid onto one of the cracked vinyl seats at the Formica counter. Two men in rumpled work shirts also sat at the counter, on stools several feet apart, smoking cigarettes and staring wearily into cups of coffee. Their faces sprouted what looked like a day-old stubble of beard. I figured they were probably shift workers who, for some reason, didn’t want to go home. Three stools down from the workers, I spotted a thin young man with a mop of curly black hair. He was dressed in new-looking jeans and a black polo shirt, unbuttoned at the neck. He wore a blank expression as he picked at a plate of limp french fries. I wondered if he had just returned from a disappointing date. At the one occupied booth sat a middle-aged couple. They hadn’t gotten any food yet. He was staring off into space, idly tapping his spoon against the table, while she drew aimless parallel lines on her paper napkin with a bent dinner fork. Neither said a word to the other. The people in the diner seemed as lonely as the place itself.

Finally, a tired-looking waitress approached me with her thick order pad. I ordered the coffee, but I wanted to drink it fast and get out of there. My car, and the solitary miles ahead of me, would be lonely. But they wouldn’t be as lonely as that diner at midnight.

About Unity

1. In which supporting paragraph of “The Diner at Midnight” does the topic sentence appear at the paragraph’s end, rather than the beginning?
 - a. paragraph 2
 - b. paragraph 3
 - c. paragraph 4

Questions

1

Teaching Tip
After students complete the questions, review their answers with the class.

2. Which sentence in paragraph 1 of “The Diner at Midnight” should be eliminated and why should it be eliminated? (*Write your answer here.*)

“I’d been visiting my cousins. . . .” The writer’s cousins have nothing to do with the diner.

3. Which sentence in paragraph 3 of “Family Portrait” should be eliminated and why? (*Write your answer here.*)

“My great-grandmother can’t find. . . .” The fact that her great-grandmother can’t find the bracelet doesn’t relate to the picture.

About Support

4. In paragraph 3 of “Family Portrait,” the writer goes beyond the mere mention of clothing and jewelry. Focus on ^{an} ~~one~~ item and summarize the details she includes to make the object clearer to the reader. (*Write your answer here.*)

“. . . blouse is made of heavy eggshell-colored satin and reflects the light in its folds and hollows. It has a turned-down collar and smocking on the shoulders and below the collar.”

5. Label as sight, touch, hearing, or smell all the sensory details in the following sentences taken from the two essays. The first one is done for you as an example.

- a. “As there was no hostess on duty, only the faint odor of stale grease and the dull hum of an empty refrigerated pastry case greeted me.”
sight *smell*
hearing *sight*
- b. “He was staring off into space, idly tapping his spoon against the table, while she drew aimless parallel lines on her paper napkin with a bent dinner fork.”
sight *hearing*
sight
- c. “The blouse is made of heavy eggshell-colored satin and reflects the light in its folds and hollows.”
touch *sight* *sight*
sight
- d. Her brows are plucked into thin lines, which are like two pencil strokes added to highlight those fine, luminous eyes.
touch *sight* *sight*
sight

6. Could the author have added more details to her description of her great-grandmother? Provide two or three you would add. (*Write your answer here.*)

Answers will vary.

About Coherence

7. Which method of organization does paragraph 2 of “Family Portrait” use?
- Time order
 - Emphatic order
8. What sentence in paragraph 3 of “Family Portrait” serves as a transition?
(Write the first words.)

“I’ve also carefully studied. . .”

9. Find at least four transitions and connecting words in paragraph 4 of “The Diner at Midnight.” Remember that repeated words, pronouns, and synonyms can act as connectors.

Their faces/they/Three stools down from the workers/He/at one

occupied booth/They/He/Neither/The People

About the Introduction and Conclusion

10. What method discussed in Chapter 4 is used in the introduction to “The Diner at Midnight?”

Starts with an idea opposite to the one that is then developed.

Developing a Descriptive Essay

Considering Purpose and Audience

The main purpose of a descriptive essay is to make readers see—or hear, taste, smell, or feel—what you are writing about. Vivid details are the key to descriptive essays, enabling your audience to picture and, in a way, experience what you describe.

As you start to think about your own descriptive essay, choose a topic that appeals strongly to at least one of your senses. It’s possible to write a descriptive essay, maybe even a good one, about a boiled potato. But it would be easier (not to mention more fun) to describe a bowl of potato salad, with its contrasting textures of soft potato, crisp celery, and spongy hard-boiled egg: the crunch of the diced onion, the biting taste of the bits of pickle, the salad’s creamy dressing and its tangy seasonings. The more senses you involve, the more likely your audience is to enjoy your paper.

Also, when selecting your topic, consider how much your audience already knows about it. If your topic is a familiar one—for instance, potato salad—you can assume your audience already understands the general idea. However, if you are presenting something new or unfamiliar to your readers—perhaps a description of one of your relatives or a place where you’ve lived—you must provide background information.

ESL Tip
Nonnative students may need to consult a dictionary to find colorful and vivid vocabulary.

*The more
the sensory
the better
more interesting
yr essay will
be*

*Avoid mentioning the senses themselves.
Let the words speak for the senses.
“The sense of touch is evoked when . . .”*

Once you have selected your topic, focus on the goal or purpose of your essay. What message do you hope to convey to your audience? For instance, if you chose as your topic a playground you used to visit as a child, decide what dominant impression you want to communicate. Is your goal to make readers see the park as a pleasant play area, or do you want them to see it as a dangerous place? If you choose the second option, focus on conveying that sense of danger to your audience. Then jot down any details that support that idea. You might describe broken beer bottles on the asphalt, graffiti sprayed on the metal jungle gym, or a pack of loud teenagers gathered on a nearby street corner. In this case, the details support your overall purpose, creating a threatening picture that your audience can see and understand.

Visualizing the Subject

Physical description relies solely on sense impressions. Of course, all five senses can be used when describing. However, perhaps the most important sense is sight, and many of us can be classified as visual learners. Therefore, one advantage that description has over other methods of development is that it allows the writer to visualize his or her subject before describing it in words.

If you like to draw or paint, make an image of your subject before you start writing about him, her, or it. If possible, use different colors to reveal the complexity of your subject, apply perspective to give your picture depth and contrast, or add small details like a tiny mole, a button on a shirt, or a stain on a tie.

When you are done, use the picture as inspiration as you gather information during prewriting.

Including People and Events in the Description of a Place

Discussing the type of people who are in a place can sometimes give clues to its character and help describe it. The same can be said for what happens there. For example, a bar where middle-aged men quietly drink beer and watch a hockey game on TV is one thing; a bar where young people dance to loud music is quite another. The author of “The Diner at Midnight” describes the restaurant’s patrons in paragraph 3 in order to reinforce the lonely atmosphere of the place. We learn about two men sitting at the counter several feet apart as if “they didn’t want to go home.” A little further down, we spot a young man with “a blank expression.” Finally, at a booth sit a middle-aged couple, neither of whom is speaking to the other.

You might even describe animals and their actions to enliven your description of a place. Say you’re writing about a zoo. It might be worth discussing the antics of chimpanzees or the majestic pacing of a tiger as it struts within its habitat.

Finally, consider including dialogue. You will learn more about creating dialogue in Chapter 9, “Narration.” For now just remember that dialogue can sometimes reveal a great deal about a person or a place. For example, our first clue that

the owner of the café in “Lou’s Place” (an essay appearing later in this chapter) is rather feisty is his response to a woman who wants to know if he’s open: “I’m here, aren’t I?” Later, when another customer asks for breakfast, Lou says, “I’m reading the paper. . . . Eggs are in the refrigerator.”

Development through Prewriting

When Cindy, the author of “Family Portrait,” sat down to think about a topic for her essay, she looked around her apartment for inspiration. First she thought about describing her own bedroom. But she had moved into the apartment only recently and hadn’t done much in the way of decorating, so the room struck her as too bare and sterile. Then she looked out her window, thinking of describing the view. That seemed much more promising: she noticed the sights and sounds of children playing on the sidewalks and a group of older men playing cards, as well as smells—neighbors’ cooking and exhaust from passing traffic. She was jotting down some details for such an essay when she glanced up at the framed portrait of her great-grandmother on her desk. “I stopped and stared at it, as I often do, wondering again about this twenty-year-old girl who became my great-grandmother,” she said. “While I sat there studying it, I realized that the best topic of all was right under my nose.”

As she looked at the photograph, Cindy began to freewrite. This is what she wrote:

Great-Grandma is twenty in the picture. She’s wearing a beautiful skirt and blouse and jewelry she borrowed from Dorothy. Looks a lot like me—nose, eyes, mouth. She’s shorter than I am but you really can’t tell in picture. Looks a lot like old photos I’ve seen of Grandma too—all the Diaz women resemble each other. Earrings and bracelet are of silver and they match. Ring might be amber or topaz? We’ve laughed about the “other man” who gave it to her. Her brown hair is down loose on her shoulders. She’s smiling a little. That doesn’t really look like her—her usual smile is bigger and opens her mouth. Looking at the photo makes me a little sad even though I really like it. Makes me realize how much older she’s getting and I wonder how long she’ll be with us. It’s funny to see a picture of your great-grandmother at a younger age than you are now—stirs up all kinds of weird feelings. Picture was taken at a studio in Houston to give to Great-Grandpa. Signed “Sincerely, Beatrice.” So serious! Hard to imagine them being so formal with each other.

Cindy looked over her notes and thought about how she might organize her essay. First she thought only of describing how the photograph *looked*. With that in mind, she thought her main points might be (1) what her great-grandmother’s face

Teaching Tip
You may want to provide a supplemental activity. Have students describe a popular spot on campus, such as the cafeteria or library. Encourage them to visit their chosen location, which will help them make a list of details.



Teaching Tip
Next, ask them to write their first draft.

looked like and (2) what her great-grandmother was wearing. But she was stuck for a third main point.

Studying her notes again, Cindy noticed two other possible main points. One was her own emotional reaction to the photo—how it made her feel. The other was the story of the photo—how and why it was taken. Not sure which of those two she would use as her third main point, she began to write. Her first draft follows.

First Draft

Family Portrait

I have a photograph of my great-grandmother that was taken seventy-five years ago, when she was only twenty. She sent it to me only recently, and I find it very interesting.

In the photo, I see a girl who looks a good deal like I do now at twenty-two. Like most of the women in her family, including me, the girl in the picture has the Diaz family nose, waving brown hair, and large brown eyes. Her mouth is closed and she is smiling slightly. That isn't my great-grandmother's usual big grin that shows her teeth and her "smile lines."

In the photo, Great-Grandmother is wearing a very pretty skirt and blouse. They look like something that would be fashionable today. The blouse is made of heavy satin. The satin falls in lines and hollows that reflect the light. It has a turned-down cowl collar and smocking on the shoulders and under the collar. Her skirt is below her knees and looks like it is made of light wool. She is wearing jewelry. Her silver earrings and bracelet match. She had borrowed them from her sister. Dorothy eventually gave them both to her, but the bracelet has disappeared. On her left hand is a ring with a big yellow stone.

When I look at this photo, I feel conflicting emotions. It gives me pleasure to see my great-grandmother as a pretty young woman. It makes me sad, too, to think how quickly time passes and realize how old she is getting. It amuses me to read the inscription to my great-grandfather, her boyfriend at the time. She wrote, "Sincerely, Beatrice." It's hard for me to imagine them ever being so formal with each other.

My great-grandmother had the photograph taken at a studio near where she worked in Houston. She spent nearly two weeks' salary on the outfit she wore for it. She must have really wanted to impress my great-grandfather to go to all that trouble and expense.

Development through Revising

Cindy showed this first draft to her classmate Elena, who read it and returned it with these notes jotted in the margin:

Reader's Comments

Was this the first time you'd seen it? Where's it been? And "very interesting" doesn't really say anything. Be more specific about why it interests you.

The "Diaz family nose" isn't helpful for someone who doesn't know the Diaz family—describe it!

Nice beginning, but I still can't quite picture her. Can you add more specific detail? Does anything about her face really stand out?

Color?

This is nice—I can picture the material.

What is smocking?

How—what are they like?

Family Portrait

I have a photograph of my great-grandmother that was taken seventy-five years ago, when she was only twenty. She sent it to me only recently, and I find it very interesting.

In the photo, I see a girl who looks a good deal like I do now at twenty-two. Like most of the women in her family, including me, the girl in the picture has the Diaz family nose, wavy brown hair, and large brown eyes. Her mouth is closed and she is smiling slightly. That isn't my great-grandmother's usual big grin that shows her teeth and her "smile lines."

In the photo, Great-Grandmother is wearing a very pretty skirt and blouse. They took like something that would be fashionable today. The blouse is made of heavy satin. The satin falls in lines and hollows that reflect the light. It has a turned-down cowl collar and smocking on the shoulders and under the collar. Her skirt is below her knees and looks like it is made of light wool. She is wearing jewelry. Her silver earrings and bracelet match. She had borrowed them from her sister. Dorothy eventually gave them both to her, but the bracelet has disappeared. On her left hand is a ring with a big yellow stone.

(continued)

Teaching Tip
Ask students to read their drafts to a partner and discuss how their draft might be revised.

It'd make more sense for the main points of the essay to be about your great-grandma and the photo. How about making this—your reaction—the conclusion of the essay?

This is interesting stuff—she really did go to a lot of trouble to have the photo taken. I think the story of the photograph deserves to be a main point.

When I look at this photo, I feel conflicting emotions. It gives me pleasure to see my great-grandmother as a pretty young woman. It makes me sad, too, to think how quickly time passes and realize how old she is now. It amuses me to read the inscription to my great-grandfather, her boyfriend at the time. She wrote, "Sincerely, Beatrice." It's hard for me to imagine them ever being so formal with each other.

My great-grandmother had the photograph taken at a studio near where she worked in Houston. She spent nearly two weeks' salary on the outfit she wore for it. She must have really wanted to impress my great-grandfather to go to all that trouble and expense.

Making use of Elena's comments and her own reactions upon rereading her essay, Cindy wrote the final draft that appears on pages 185–186.

A Professional Essay to Consider

Read the following professional essay. Then answer the questions and read the comments that follow.

Lou's Place

by Beth Johnson

Imagine a restaurant where your every whim is catered to, your every want satisfied, your every request granted without hesitation. The people on the staff live to please you. They hover anxiously as you sample your selection, waiting for your judgment. Your pleasure is their delight, your dissatisfaction their dismay.

Lou's isn't that kind of place.

2

4. We are told that customers enjoy the unusual atmosphere of Lou's coffee shop. What detail in paragraph 25 supports this idea?

Ben cooks his breakfast "side by side" with Lou.

5. Find a paragraph that appeals to three senses and identify those senses.

Paragraph 8: sight, hearing, smell

About Coherence

6. Which sentence in paragraph 31 contains a change-of-direction signal?

"I get up at the crack of dawn..."

7. Which sentence in paragraph 23 begins with a time signal? (Write the opening words of that sentence.)

After a moment...

8. The sentence that makes up paragraph 38 includes which of the following types of transition?

- a. time
- b. addition
- c. change of direction
- d. conclusion

About the Introduction and Conclusion

9. Johnson begins with a situation that is the opposite of the one that will be developed. Rewrite paragraph 1 using another method for introducing essays explained in Chapter 4: a broad statement that gets narrowed, a question, or a brief story.

Answers will vary.

10. "Lou's Place" ends with a comment by Lou that characterizes the mood of his shop. Rewrite this conclusion by using another method for concluding essays as explained in Chapter 4, summarizing the description of the shop or predicting something about the future of the shop or its owner.

Answers will vary.

ESL Tip

To improve coherence and grammatical accuracy when describing a place, nonnative speakers should review adverbs of place or prepositional expressions that indicate spatial organization.

Writing

Assignment

Writing a Descriptive Essay

1

Write an essay about a particular place that you can observe carefully or already know well. Choose one of the following or another place you think of.

Pet shop

Playroom in a day-care center

Laundromat

Bar or nightclub on Saturday night (or Sunday morning)

Video arcade

Electronics store

Athletic locker room after a major loss or win

Waiting room in a train or bus station or airport

Classroom you have revisited in your old high school

House of horrors or similar attraction at an amusement park

Library study area

Your bedroom or the bedroom of someone you know

Antique shop or some other small shop



© James Leynse/Corbis

Teaching Tip

You may want to model the writing process for your students by doing this assignment along with them. Go through all the stages, including prewriting and revising, and seek feedback from them. They will appreciate your efforts to create a writing community.

Prewriting

- a. Like all essays, a descriptive essay must have a thesis. It should state your dominant impression about your subject. Write a short sentence that names the place you are describing and your dominant impression of it. Don't worry if your thesis doesn't feel just right—you can always revise it later. For now, just express a workable topic. Here are some examples.

The pet shop was noisy.

The restaurant was crowded.

The bus terminal was frightening.

The locker room was in an uproar.

The day-care's playroom was a joyous mess.

The beach was lonely.

- b. Once you have written your sentence, make a list of as many details as you can to support that general impression. For example, this is the list made by the writer of “The Diner at Midnight”:

Tired workers at counter
Rainy parking lot
Vacant booths
Quiet
Few cars in lot
Dreary gray building
Lonely young man
Silent middle-aged couple
Out-of-order neon sign
No hostess
Couldn't see anyone in kitchen
Tired-looking waitress

- c. Organize your paper according to one or a combination of the following:
- Physical order*—move from left to right or from far to near, or follow some other consistent order.
 - Size*—Begin with large features or objects and work down to smaller ones.
 - A special order*—Use an order that is appropriate to your subject.
- For example, the writer of “The Diner at Midnight” builds his essay around the dominant impression of loneliness. The paper is organized in terms of physical order (from the parking lot to the entrance to the interior); a secondary method of organization is size (large parking lot to smaller diner to still smaller people).
- d. Use as many senses as possible in describing a scene. Chiefly you will use sight, but to some extent you may be able to use touch, hearing, smell, and perhaps even taste. Remember that it is through the richness of your sense impressions that the reader will gain a picture of the scene.
- e. Proceed to write the first draft of your essay.

Revising

After you have completed the first draft of the paper, set it aside for a while—if possible, until the next day. When you review the draft, try to do so as critically as you would if it were not your own work. Ask yourself these questions:

FOUR BASES Checklist for Description

About *Unity*

- Does my essay have a clearly stated thesis, including a dominant impression?
- Is there any irrelevant material that should be eliminated or rewritten?

About *Support*

- Have I provided rich, specific details that appeal to a variety of senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch)?

About *Coherence*

- Have I organized my essay in some consistent manner—physical order, size, time progression, or another way that is appropriate to my subject?
- Have I used transition words to help readers follow my train of thought?
- Do I have a concluding paragraph that provides a summary, a final thought, or both?

About *Sentence Skills*

- Have I used a consistent point of view throughout my essay?
- Have I used specific rather than general words?
- Have I avoided wordiness and used concise wording?
- Are my sentences varied?
- Have I proofread my essay for spelling and other sentence skills, as listed on the inside back cover of the book?

As you revise your essay through one or more additional drafts, continue to refer to this checklist until you can answer yes to each question.

Shopping mall during the holidays
Forest in the fall or winter
Site of an outdoor wedding
Baseball, football, or soccer stadium
Outdoor amusement park
Campground
Harbour
Beach, lakefront, or other natural setting during a particular season

Writing Assignment

4

Writing for a Specific Purpose and Audience

Option A

In this descriptive essay, you will write with a specific purpose and for a specific audience. Imagine that you have subscribed to an online dating service. Clients of the service are asked to create a detailed profile and submit photographs. Write a paper in which you describe yourself. Your goal is to give interested members of the dating service a good sense of what you are like.

Prewriting

- a. Decide how you will organize your profile. What aspects of yourself will you describe? Remember, your profile will include photos, so viewers of the site will see for themselves what you look like. Therefore, it won't be necessary to describe your appearance.

You might organize your profile in terms of describing your attitudes and beliefs, your interests, and your personal habits. Other ideas you might use as main points could be your hopes for the future, how you spend a typical day, or your imaginary perfect date.

- b. Focus on each of the main points you've decided to write on, and ask yourself questions to generate details to support each one. For example, if you were going to write about your perfect date, you would ask questions like these:

Where would I go?

What would I do?

What time of day would the date occur?

Why would I enjoy this date so much?

How would I travel to my destination?

Continue questioning until you have a number of rich, specific, sensory details to support each of your main points.

- c. Plan a brief introductory paragraph that will indicate how you'll organize your profile. For instance, one student might write, "I'm Terry Jefferson. I'm going to tell you something about what I believe, what I enjoy doing, and what I hope to accomplish in the future."
- d. Write the first draft of your profile.

Revising

Once you have the first draft of your paper completed, read it to a partner who will give you honest feedback. You and your partner should consider these questions:

FOUR BASES Checklist for Description

About *Unity*

- Does my introduction indicate a clear plan of development?

About *Support*

- Have I filled each of my supporting paragraphs with rich, descriptive details that help potential dates vividly imagine me?

About *Coherence*

- Is my profile clearly organized according to three main points?
- Have I rounded off my profile with an appropriate concluding paragraph?

About *Sentence Skills*

- Have I used a consistent point of view throughout?
- Have I used specific rather than general words?
- Have I avoided wordiness and used concise wording?
- Are my sentences varied?
- Have I proofread my profile, referring to the list of sentence skills on the inside back cover?



Option B

Imagine that you are working for a travel agency and have been asked to write a letter to prospective clients advertising a wonderful vacation destination you have already visited yourself. It might be a large city, a seaside town, an archeological site, a theme park that caters to families, a resort for honeymooners, a dude ranch, a lake, or a mountain hideaway. Then again, you might want to advertise a cruise or even a vacation that involves public service, like the kinds sponsored by Habitat for Humanity. Your purpose is, of course, to get your clients to sign up for the vacation you are advertising. Focus on a particular type of audience: college students, young professionals, families, singles, or senior citizens, for example.

Prewriting

- a. First, gather details about the physical appearance, sounds, smells, and even tastes of the setting your clients will visit. Talk about how it feels to swim in a crystal-clear lagoon or describe the taste of a crab sandwich you bought at a straw-covered beach shack. Describe the natural setting, as well the kind of weather your clients can expect.

Discuss what the living and dining accommodations are like as well. By the way, if you are advertising a public-service vacation, you might have to tell them about the tents they'll be sleeping in or the outdoor toilets they'll use. In any case, use as many senses as possible.

- b. Keeping the type of audience you have chosen in mind, tell your readers about the kinds of people they are likely to meet, both the tourists and permanent residents.

Are the tourists mostly single, young married couples, families?

Are most of the people young, middle-aged, older? Or is there a mix of ages?

Are these people friendly, helpful, interesting?

Where do they come from?

What do they talk about?

Are they fun-loving and active or more private and sedate?

What about the people who work or live at the place? Are they friendly, helpful, etc.?

- c. Finally, provide details about the activities your clients might pursue during the vacation. Does the place offer hang gliding, scuba diving, tours of famous landmarks? Again, if this is a public-service vacation, will your readers be digging wells, framing houses, or constructing schoolhouses?

- d. After reading the notes you have gathered, write a rough outline that might look like this:
- A. The place
 - 1. Location
 - 2. Accommodations
 - 3. Food
 - B. The people
 - 1. Other tourists
 - 2. Staff
 - 3. Locals
 - C. Activities
 - 1. Water sports
 - 2. Guided tours
 - 3. Tennis/golf
- e. Now, plan your introductory and concluding sections. In your introduction, state a thesis that is intended to persuade your readers. In addition, prepare them for the points you are going to cover and the order in which you will cover them. For example, you might write:

The setting and accommodations, the people, and the activities make a week at Crystal Bay Resort the ideal family beach vacation.

Your conclusion might summarize or remind your readers of the best reasons to book the vacation. Naturally, you will have to mention the cost of accommodations and travel as well.

Drafting

Write your rough draft by following your outline closely, but don't be a slave to it. If new ideas or details pop into your mind, put them down. You can fix any inconsistencies or repetitions when it comes time to revise. Just be as detailed as you can at this point.

Revising

Read your first draft to a classmate who is willing to listen carefully and work hard at providing valuable feedback. **FOUR BASES Checklist for Description on page 202** for a more detailed list of things to look for when revising.