

Descriptive Writing



Levels 7-11

Introduction

What is descriptive writing? Let's start with what it does. It describes—explains, pictures, illustrates, or vividly portrays—something to the reader. Descriptive writing uses words as an artist uses paint. He has a picture in his head and wants the other person to “see” it, too.

Yes, but what *is* it? What kinds of words characterize this genre? What are the common word tools that writers use when crafting a piece of descriptive writing?

- * Vivid, concrete, and specific nouns: descriptive writing demands precision in choosing the very best nouns to name persons, places, things, or ideas
- * Sharp, clear verbs: either action words that clearly portray the action of the piece, or words that most clearly convey various states of being
- * Carefully chosen adjectives that modify the nouns and add to the word picture
- * Adverbs that add depth and meaning to the picture
- * “Sensory” words: words associated with seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- * Often, but not always, descriptive writing is expressed using the first person (the “I” voice).

To illustrate how to approach a descriptive writing assignment, we will use two sample topics:

1. My first roller coaster ride
2. Describe Pharaoh's court

Note the following about our sample topics:

- * Topic 1 involves a first-person narrative that will include lots of sensory words.
- * Topic 2 involves a “big picture,” which requires the writer to paint a scene with words beyond the description of “how my senses react.” This is the more complex and challenging assignment. One needs to imagine the scene and also use words to depict the array of sights, sounds, and activities.

Prewriting

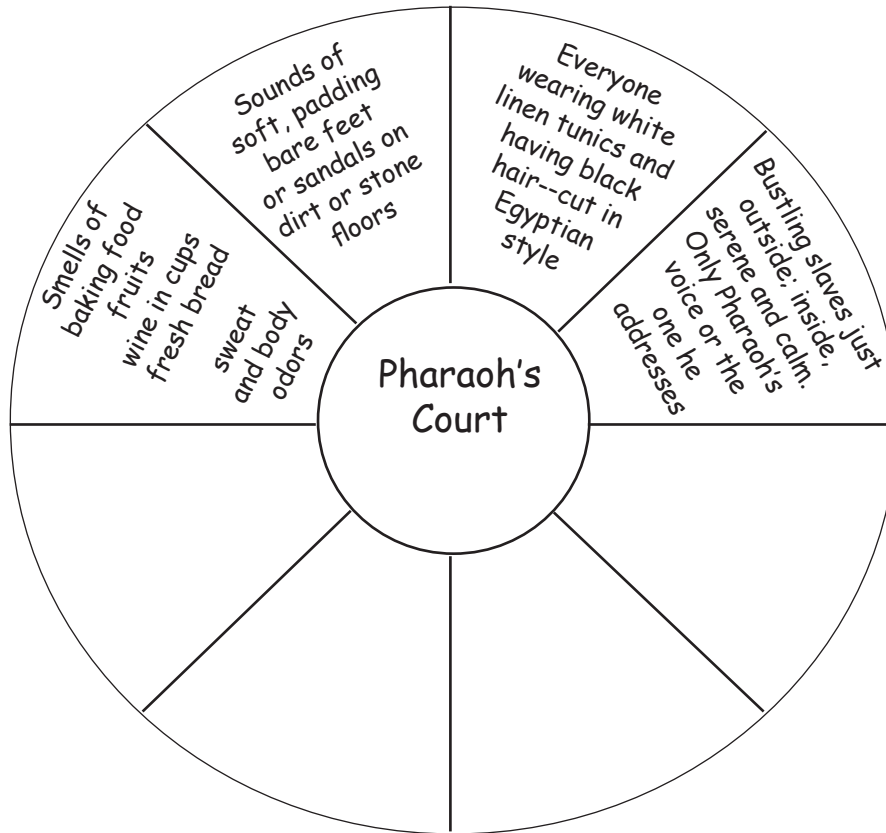
For our two examples, we will use a Sensory Chart for Topic 1 and a Describing Wheel for Topic 2. Below are filled-in examples of each.

Topic 1: My first roller coaster ride

See	Hear	Taste	Touch	Smell
cars whizzing around the track	other kids screaming as we got close	I just finished my cotton candy	smooth seat	smells of the carnival--fried dough, hot dogs
view from the top	quiet and excited talking	taste of fear??	smooth crash bar	fresh air at the top
plunging down	me screaming		cool breeze at the top	
closed eyes tight!	Joe screamed, too!		rushing air as we plunged down	



Topic 2: Describe Pharaoh's court



Much of the real work of descriptive writing is done in the prewriting process. If there is a story component to the assignment (as there could be in Topic 2), you will benefit from making a brief outline or plot line as well.

Drafting

Now that you have your prewriting skeleton, get your ideas down on paper in a first draft. Start to flesh out your description with vivid nouns and verbs, sensory words, and carefully chosen adjectives.

Editing

Once your first draft is done, carefully proof your word choices. Read slowly, correcting errors but also choosing exact, specific words for your descriptions

Polishing

Have your teacher go through your self-edited draft, making suggestions for better word choices and exciting reading. Then you can finish it up and create your final draft.