



Tikrit University

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Descriptive Paragraphs

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Descriptive writing appeals to the senses, so it tells how something looks, feels, smells, tastes, and/or sounds. A good description is a word picture; the reader can imagine the object, place, or person in his or her mind. A description usually follows a pattern of organization that we call spatial order. Spatial order is the arrangement of things in space. As you read the model paragraph, notice how the description moves from the bottom of the stairway to the top. Also notice how the description of the woman moves from far away to near.

Spatial Order

Just as an artist plans where to place each object in a painting, a writer plans where to put each object in a word picture.

In a **description**, writers often use spatial order to organize their ideas.

Spatial order: is the arrangement of items in order by space. For example, when describing your favorite room at home, you could first describe things on the left side of the doorway and then move clockwise around to the right side. You could also start on the right and move counterclockwise around to the left. The model paragraph "The Stairway" uses spatial organization. In describing the stairway, the writer shows that as a little boy, his first view was from the bottom looking up at the mannequin. Then he climbs up the stairway. The spatial organization is from bottom to top. When he describes the mannequin, he first gives an overall impression (the way she was leaning against the wall and what her dress looked like). Then he focuses on her face and finally on her unblinking eyes. The spatial organization is from far to near. It does not usually matter whether the spatial organization is left to right, right to left,

near too far, far to near, outside to inside, inside to outside, top to bottom, or bottom to top. It is only helpful to use some kind of spatial order when you write a description.

Spatial Order Signals

Just as there are words and phrases to show time order, there are words and phrases to show spatial organization. They are often prepositional phrases of location or position. Notice the kinds of expressions used to show time order.

at the top of

next to

in the center

between

on the left

behind

in front of

in back of

in the front of

in the back of

inside

across

Topic Sentences for Descriptive Paragraphs

The topic sentence of a descriptive paragraph should name the topic. The controlling idea should give the overall impression of the place you are describing. In the model paragraph, the topic is the house that the writer lived in as a child. The controlling idea is that it had a strange atmosphere. Each of the following sentences also states a topic and a controlling idea.

My bedroom at home is my refuge from the outside world.

The campus of our school is like a small city.

The cafeteria at lunchtime is the school's social center.

Supporting - Sentences for Descriptive Paragraphs

Supporting sentences are the "meat" of a paragraph. They not only provide the details that prove the truth of your topic sentence, but they also make your writing rich and interesting. In a descriptive paragraph, the more details you include, the more clearly your reader will imagine what you are describing. Your details should appeal to the five senses. They should tell your reader how something looks, smells, sounds, feels, and tastes. Write about colors, sizes, shapes, odors, noises, and textures.

My Banana Garden

Behind my childhood home, there is a large piece of land that is surrounded by banana trees growing in wild disorder. Crowds of banana trees grow freely everywhere. Their green leaves are so thick that sunlight cannot pass through. Underneath the trees, the ground is so moist that wild mushrooms and plants grow there all year around. In the center is a wild field where the children of my village often fly kites. Every evening, just before sunset, some birds arrive to look for a place to rest their tired wings. They want to land in the dark banana garden, but the banana leaves are too wide to be made into nests. The birds cry out and then fly away, seeking a better place to nest.

During the rainy season, it rains for days and days, and the banana leaves become glossy and slick. The rain also makes the banana garden produce a very strange melody. On rainy days, I used to sit near my window and listen to this wonderful song. Now, whenever I hear the plop-plop-plop of raindrops on the roof of my small, tidy apartment in the city, I remember the beautiful, wild banana garden of my childhood.

Questions on the Model

1. Find the topic sentence of this paragraph. What is the topic? The controlling idea?
2. Does the paragraph have a concluding sentence?
3. Circle any spatial order expressions you can find. Add them to the Spatial Order Signals. Is there a spatial order pattern or no pattern?
4. What adjective is repeated four times in the paragraph (in sentences 1, 4, 5, and 1 2)?

Paragraph Unit

An important element of a good paragraph is unity. When a paragraph has unity, all the supporting sentences discuss only one idea. From beginning to end, each sentence is directly related to the topic. In some languages, it is acceptable to wander away from the topic-to make little side trips to ideas that are somewhat, but not directly, related to the main topic. In English, doing so is not acceptable because it breaks the unity of the paragraph.