

## 2. Description

**NOTE:** The following is general information about the rhetorical mode. It is not meant to take the place of any specific instructions given by your instructor for this assignment. If your instructor wants you to write your paper in a different manner, then by all means do it the way your instructor requires you to do it.

### *Details of Description*

*Here are some specific ideas and procedures about the technique of description.*

#### **1. What is description?**

Description is a very important, effective, and widely used technique in writing which allows the writer to “paint a picture with words” for his reader. Instead of simply telling the reader how something looked, the writer shows the reader by using the various types of description techniques explained below.

#### **2. What types of things can be described?**

- a. Things/objects – Tell their size, shape, color, material, weight, and so on.
- b. People – Describe their physical characteristics and their personalities and attitudes.
- c. Places – Describe the physical attributes of the location and the emotional responses that it evokes in you.
- d. Emotions – Try to let the audience in on your innermost feelings at a time when you experienced one emotion very strongly.

#### **3. What are the main techniques used in description?**

##### **a. Use specific details.**

There’s no such thing as a good “general” description. By its very nature, description must use lots of specific details. Try to answer the questions of *who, what, when, where, why, and how* as you write your paper. Also, use exact numbers rather than generalities.

For example, instead of writing, *A bunch of my friends went out for some fun*, make it much more specific like this:

*Five of my friends and I went to Carbondale last Friday night to play some pool.*

**b. Use adjectives.**

Adjectives are words that are intended to be used to describe nouns. Examples of adjectives include all colors, numbers, and many others. Each time you use a noun, consider using at least one adjective along with it. For example, instead of *A car was parked at the curb*, consider writing:

*A large foreign car was parked at the front curb.*

**c. Use adverbs.**

Adverbs have the purpose of telling how the action of a verb is done. For example, a performer can sing beautifully or a person can write neatly or walk quickly.

**d. Use strong verbs.**

Sometimes a verb that shows a strong action or movement can act as a describing tool.

Not: The young woman went quickly out of the room.

But: The young woman *rushed* from the room.

*dashed*

*darted*

*exploded*

*zoomed*

**e. Use a simile.**

A simile is a comparison between two unlike things which uses the words *like* or *as*. The formula is “X is like Y.”

*Joe is like a tiger on the tennis court.*

A simile can be shortened -- like this:

*Joe showed his tiger-like movements on the tennis court.*

**f. Use a metaphor.**

A metaphor is like a simile, except that it does not use *like* or *as*.

*Joe is a tiger on the tennis court.*

Sometimes a metaphor can be abbreviated.

*The tiger took his place on the tennis court.*

Description is a very important part of good, effective writing. Use it well and often.