

## Lecture 4 (Part 1)

### DESCRIBING a place or an object

Descriptions are “word pictures.” You tell how something looks, feels, smells, tastes, and sounds. In this lecture, you will learn to write a good description. When you write a description, you tell what something—a person, an object, or a place—looks like.

There are two keys to writing good descriptions:

1. Use space order to organize your description.
2. Use lots of descriptive details.

#### SPACE ORDER

Imagine that you are standing in the doorway of your classroom. How would you describe the room to someone who has never seen it? Here are some possibilities:

- You might start at the left side of the doorway and work your way around the room in a clockwise direction to the right side, ending at the doorway again.
- You might start at the front of the room and go from front to back, first describing the chalkboard, the teacher’s desk, and the area around the teacher’s desk. Then you might describe the students’ desks in the center of the room, and finally the walls and/or windows at the back and sides of the room.

This kind of organization is called space order. Here are other kinds of space order that you can use to write a description:

top to bottom      bottom to top

right to left      left to right

far to near      near to far

outside to inside      inside to outside



Model Text 1                      *The Shared Refrigerator*

<sup>1</sup>*My roommate and I share a refrigerator. My roommate's half of our refrigerator is very neat. On the top shelf is a carton of milk, a pitcher of orange juice, and a bottle of mineral water. These are arranged in a straight line on the shelf. On the next shelf are cans of soda. These are carefully lined up in rows. Orange soda is in the first row, cola in the second, and lemon lime in the third. On the third shelf, he keeps dairy foods, such as butter, cheese, eggs, and yogurt. On the bottom shelf sit plastic containers of leftovers. These are neatly arranged by size. The large ones are in the back, and the small ones are in the front. There are two drawers in the bottom of the refrigerator. In his drawer, my roommate keeps vegetables and fruit. Each item is in a separate plastic bag in the drawer. In conclusion, my roommate is an organized person, and his half of our refrigerator really reflects his personality.*

Which space order did the writer use?

(top to bottom    bottom to top    right to left    left to right  
far to near    near to far    outside to inside    inside to outside)

## TOPIC AND CONCLUDING SENTENCES FOR DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS

The topic part of a topic sentence for a paragraph of description usually names the person, place, or thing to be described. The controlling idea part usually gives a general impression (*beautiful, neat, messy, interesting, unusual, crowded, busy, noisy, and so on*). Here are some examples of topic sentences for paragraphs of description.

TOPIC + CONTROLLING IDEA

The old house looked ready to fall down

The cave was a dangerous place to enter.

The concluding sentence of a description may repeat the idea stated in the topic sentence. It may also give the writer's opinion or feeling about the topic. Here are other examples of concluding sentences for paragraphs of description.

- *In short, I doubt the old house will survive one more winter.*
- *My friend and I were very happy when we got out of the cave.*
- *To sum up, music, dancing, and flashing lights make clubs exciting and fun.*

Model text 2

### *My Tall Nephew*

*The first thing you notice about my nephew is that he is extremely tall — six feet, six inches tall, to be exact. His head sticks up almost a foot above everyone else's. His hair is short, light brown, and curly, and his eyes are blue. His nose is straight, and his mouth curls into a smile easily and often. His casual clothes are typical of young people everywhere: a T-shirt and jeans. On the front of his shirt, you can read the name of his school in red and blue letters. As your eyes move down his long legs, you notice that his jeans are a little too short. Perhaps he can't buy pants to fit his long legs and narrow waist, or perhaps he doesn't care much about clothes. On his feet, he wears sneakers. Maybe his sneakers were white*

*when they were new, but now they are gray with age and wear. Despite his casual clothes, my nephew is not a casual person. He stands as tall and straight as a redwood tree, and you think to yourself, “This is a strong and confident young man.”*

- 1) Analyze the topic sentence: the topic? the controlling idea?
- 2) What is the nephew’s most noticeable physical feature?
- 3) Which sentence is the concluding sentence? What word in the topic sentence is repeated in the concluding sentence?
- 4) What kind of space order does the writer of this paragraph use?

(top to bottom    bottom to top    right to left    left to right

far to near    near to far    outside to inside    inside to outside)

## SPECIFIC DETAILS

The second key to writing a good description is to use specific details. When you describe something, you paint a picture with words. Your goal is to make your reader “see” what you have described. The way to do this is to use a lot of specific details. Specific means exact or precise. The opposite of specific is too general, or vague. The more specific you can be, the better your reader can see what you are describing.

Here are some examples:

<b>general</b>	<b>specific</b>
A lot of money	\$500,000
A large house	a six-bedroom, four-bathroom house
Jogs a lot	jogs three miles in the park every day
A pretty face	warm brown eyes, shining black hair, and sparkling white teeth

## PLANNING A SPACE-ORDER PARAGRAPH

You plan a space-order paragraph the same way you plan a time-order paragraph.

First, decide which space order to use — right to left, left to right, front to back, and so on. Then list your details in that order. Finally, make an outline by adding a topic sentence, capital letters to each detail, and a concluding sentence.

## GRAMMAR

In this lecture, you will learn how to use adjectives to make a description vivid and interesting.

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. Adjectives tell what things (or people) look like, what kind they are, or how many of them there are. Adjectives answer the questions: *What kind? Which one? and How many?*

e.g.

what kind? - *the old car with the broken window*

which one? - *the fourth chapter of the book, his car*

how many? - *twelve students, a few students*

Here are some things to know about adjectives.

1. Adjectives always come in front of nouns, not after them:

*twelve talented young musicians*

2. Adjectives can also follow linking verbs

be	<i>The children are happy.</i>
seem	<i>You seem sad.</i>
look	<i>Brides always look beautiful.</i>
smell	<i>The cookies smell delicious.</i>
taste	<i>Candy tastes sweet.</i>
feel	<i>Silk feels smooth. I feel good.</i>

3. English has a kind of adjective called a compound adjective. A compound adjective is two or more words that function together as one word. A compound adjective often has a hyphen or hyphens between its parts.

*ten-week semester*

*part-time job*

*two-year-old child*

4. Adjectives are always singular. Never add -s to an adjective, and never use a plural word as an adjective.

Be especially careful when a compound adjective containing a number comes before a noun.

*a six-foot wall (not a six-feet wall)*  
*a five-dollar bill (not a five-dollars bill)*  
*a two-year-old child (not a two-years-old child)*

5. Nouns can be adjectives.

*the English book*  
*the Japanese students*  
*a shoe store*  
*some tennis balls*

6. Proper adjectives (adjectives referring to nationalities, languages, geographic places, and so on) are capitalized.

*Egyptian custom*  
*Cuban government*  
*Spanish class*  
*Asian languages*

7. *-ing* and *-ed* words can be adjectives.

*swimming pool*  
*cooking class*  
*sleeping baby*  
*boring class*  
*stolen money*  
*used car*  
*broken heart*