Descriptive Journal Writing

Do you remember the day your brother or sister was born? Or how about the time your family took a special trip? What do you remember most about your favorite birthday party? Moments like these provide great opportunities for descriptive writing. Capturing an event through descriptive writing involves paying close attention to the details by using all of your five senses. In this document, you will learn writing tips and guidelines that will help you use your powers of observation to write your own descriptive journal.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you are writing:

2. Write simply. Say exactly what you see, feel, hear, and so on. Be specific when you write. For example, instead of tree, say what kind of tree.
3. Good descriptive writing depends heavily on observing and recollecting vivid moments. As you try to reinvent a moment in time in your mind, jot down everything that you might have observed. Push yourself to develop as many details as you can. It may help to close your eyes and bring yourself back in time to imagine yourself as that character in that moment.
4. Remember, you are the writer who observes — you see the people and the scenes. You have the power of the word and can shape the images that you present. Draw upon your knowledge of facts, your character's memories, and your imagination.

Write Your Own Description

As you write your character’s journal entry, you will practice sharpening your powers of observation. Good writers try to clearly see and describe the world around them. They also try to understand themselves through their writing. Focusing on details is the key to descriptive journal writing.

Here are some challenges that should help you as you begin to write your character’s journal.

1. **Who are you?**
   Make a list of all the qualities that describe who you are. For example: Are you a student? a musician? an athlete? Are you friendly? outgoing? serious? happy?
   **Come up with a list of five to ten qualities.**
   Understanding who your character is will make it easier for you to describe him/her in the journal entries.

2. **Observe and describe your character's world.**
   **Think and write about one event. Zoom-in on one moment in time.** As the event unfolds, concentrate on what happens not only to you as the character, but what is going on around you. Record the memories and the details of what was experienced.

Adapted from: Descriptive Writing with Virginia Hamilton
< http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/diary/index.htm >
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Here are some questions to think about (sensory information):

✓ What do you see?
✓ What can you hear — voices? music?
✓ What can you smell?
✓ What do you taste?
✓ How does the place feel — temperature, textures, etc.?
✓ How do you feel — excited? scared? happy? sad?
✓ What are you thinking?

3. Describing the characters around you:
Fiction sometimes plays a role in descriptive writing. As you describe an event, you may observe someone who is unfamiliar but whom you want to write about. In order to describe this person, you will need to use your imagination. For example, if you see someone with paint on her shirt, you may decide that she is an artist. You can then build a whole story — or journal entry — starting from this single detail. Observe a person you don't know but who seems interesting to you. Pick one detail about that person that you find interesting. Then write a short description of this person based on that detail. Be as creative as you can.

4. Revise your writing.
Revise your descriptive writing
Have you written a first draft of your descriptive piece? If so, then you are ready to revise. Read your writing to yourself or to a friend. Did you include enough detail? Were you specific in your descriptions? Do you like what you've written? Is there something you think could be better?
Here are some guidelines when revising your work:

✓ Be sure that each word or phrase you use is exactly the way you want to say it. Everything you write is important so be sure that it's the best it can be.
✓ Vary the way you begin your sentences so that they don't all sound exactly the same. For example, don't start every sentence with "Then" or "So." Avoid sentences like this: "Then I did my homework. Then I ate dinner. Then I went to bed." Start sentences with transition words like "After," "Next," and "Finally" to make sentences more direct and more interesting. For example, "I did my homework. After that I ate my dinner. Finally, I went to bed."
✓ Be specific. If you see a tree swaying in the wind, describe exactly what you observe so that the reader can see what you see. Say what kind of tree is swaying. Adverbs and adjectives can also help bring your writing to life. For example, with just a few details the simple sentence "That tree is swaying in the wind," can become "That enormous evergreen is swaying wildly in the powerful wind." Or, "That pine tree is bending back in the strong wind.
✓ Use a thesaurus to find new and specific words. For example, instead of the word house, a thesaurus may suggest more specific ideas such as home, cabin, mansion, cottage, etc.
✓ Short paragraphs are more telling. They help you gather your thoughts into tighter sequences or progressions of words.

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