

## **DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH**

- 1. Make sure to choose a meaningful person, place, or thing.** Before you begin your paragraph, you have to be sure to pick something that is worth describing. If you want to describe a character, make sure the person is interesting in some way. If you want to describe an object, make sure it has some deeper meaning beyond itself so you have enough to write about.
- 2. Introduce the person, place, or thing you are describing.** If you want to get the reader's attention, then you should let him or her know what you're describing as soon as possible instead of leaving them guessing. Here is an example of some opening lines in a descriptive paragraph:
- 3. Engage your reader's sense of sight.** You can start with what the reader can see and appeal to his or her sense of sight to help introduce the object. Since sight is the most helpful sense, any good descriptive paragraph must first discuss what the writer wants the reader to visualize. Using strong adjectives to illustrate your scene, moment, experience or item to the reader will help provide a visual picture in your reader's mind. Keep in mind that, while adjectives can help convey a sense of the subject, overusing them can lead to boring, overwrought writing.
- 4. Describe smells and tastes if you can.** Think about how you can describe the topic, scene, or moment to the reader in terms of how it smells and tastes. The best descriptive paragraphs make the reader feel as if he or she were actually experiencing the thing he or she was reading about, not just reading about it. Include a sentence or two about how your topic smells and use a few poignant adjectives to relay the smell of it to the reader. "It tastes good" is not going to provide a specific experience for your reader. However, "It tastes like Grandma's apple pie when it's fresh and still bubbling around the edges - crunchy, flavorful and sweet" helps describe the distinct flavor of your item. Of course, not everything you describe will have a relevant taste or smell; if it does, though, it can help to include it.
- 5. Describe how the moment or item feels.** As you continue writing your paragraph, write a sentence or two about how the experience feels. What does it remind you of as you imagine yourself running your hand along its surface, or the tingling feeling you feel run down your back? How are you reacting to the moment? Again, use descriptive adjectives to describe how the moment feels. Avoid using general statements like "it feels nice", which isn't descriptive at all. Opt for specific, definitive examples that relay the feeling of something to the

reader. If you're describing how the object or item feels for a certain character, this can also give readers a sense of what it was like.

6. **Include some figurative language.** Using other effective writing techniques to top off your paragraph will make it all that more appealing and evocative. If you include all these elements in your paragraph, your reader will be able to fully experience and appreciate your writing. You can describe a person, place, or thing while using both literal language and speaking on the level of metaphor or simile to fully give a person a sense of the thing that is being described.

## **SAMPLE 1**

### **THE BLOND GUITAR**

*by Jeremy Burden*

*My most valuable possession is an old, slightly warped blond guitar—the first instrument I taught myself how to play. It's nothing fancy, just a Madeira folk guitar, all scuffed and scratched and fingerprinted. At the top is a bramble of copper-wound strings, each one hooked through the eye of a silver tuning key. The strings are stretched down a long, slim neck, its frets tarnished, the wood worn by years of fingers pressing chords and picking notes. The body of the Madeira is shaped like an enormous yellow pear, one that was slightly damaged in shipping. The blond wood has been chipped and gouged to gray, particularly where the pick guard fell off years ago. No, it's not a beautiful instrument, but it still lets me make music, and for that I will always treasure it.*

### **INSIDE DISTRICT SCHOOL #7, NIAGARA COUNTY, NEW YORK**

*by Joyce Carol Oates*

*Inside, the school smelled smartly of varnish and wood smoke from the potbellied stove. On gloomy days, not unknown in upstate New York in this region south of Lake Ontario and east of Lake Erie, the windows emitted a vague, gauzy light, not much reinforced by ceiling lights. We squinted at the blackboard, that seemed far away since it was on a small platform, where Mrs. Dietz's desk was also positioned, at the front, left of the room. We sat in rows of seats, smallest at the front, largest at the rear, attached at their bases by metal runners, like a toboggan; the wood of these desks seemed beautiful to me, smooth and of the red-burnished hue of horse chestnuts. The floor was bare wooden planks. An American flag hung limply at the far left of the blackboard and above the blackboard, running across the front of the room, designed to draw our eyes to it avidly, worshipfully, were paper squares showing that beautifully shaped script known as Parker Penmanship.*