

Grades 10, 11 & 12

# BGCSE Language Arts Tutorials

Writing to describe



**Aim: To identify effective techniques for descriptive writing**

Descriptive writing should engage the reader through effective use of language.

It is important to remember and use the key features of descriptive writing.

## Key features

- Use of adjectives
- Use of verbs
- Use of adverbs
- Use of figurative language
- Use of senses
- Variety of sentence structures
- Focus on *detail*
- Show, don't tell

# Use of adjectives

**Adjectives** describe nouns and tell us **what they look like**:

In the corner there was a couple holding hands.

In the corner there was an elderly couple holding hands.

How did that change your mental picture and your response to it?

Always consider adjective choice carefully to create the effect you want.

# All kinds of Adjectives

## Appearance

- o adorable
- o attractive
- o alluring
- o confident
- o disheveled
- o elegant
- o fair
- o filthy
- o glamorous
- o glowing
- o handsome
- o homely
- o lovely
- o magnificent
- o pleasant
- o perfect
- o scruffy
- o shiny
- o slender
- o sparkling
- o splendid
- o vivacious
- o wild

## Personality

- o aggressive
- o ambitious
- o brave
- o bright
- o clumsy
- o cruel
- o cooperative
- o diligent
- o determined
- o fearless
- o generous
- o helpful
- o honest
- o jealous
- o knowledgeable
- o mysterious
- o successful
- o sincere
- o selfish
- o talented
- o witty
- o wise
- o zany

## Feelings {Positive}

- o agreeable
- o amused
- o brave
- o calm
- o comfortable
- o delightful
- o eager
- o energetic
- o excited
- o grateful
- o jolly
- o jovial
- o lively
- o proud
- o peaceful
- o relieved
- o silly
- o thankful
- o thrilled
- o victorious
- o witty

## Feelings {Negative}

- o anxious
- o bewildered
- o clumsy
- o confused
- o defeated
- o depressed
- o disappointed
- o disturbed
- o embarrassed
- o envious
- o fierce
- o grumpy
- o helpless
- o jealous
- o nervous
- o somber
- o sorrowful
- o troubled
- o vengeful
- o weary
- o wicked

## Use of verbs

Verb choice is crucial for descriptive writing. It is important to select verbs that create a picture for the reader, rather than straightforward or verbs that are not descriptive. Can you change the verbs below to make the sentence more descriptive?

The mothers **take** a child each and **escort** them out of the gate into the street, one **holding** her child's arm behind her, and another **asking** what her little boy had spent the day doing.

## Use of verbs

The mothers **grab** a child each and **frogmarch** them out of the gate into the street, one **yanking** her child's arm behind her, and another **demanding** to know what her little boy had spent the day doing.

## Use of verbs

Common examples of verbs that add nothing to description are the verbs 'to say' and 'to walk'.

Look at the next slides, which offer lots of ways to use more interesting verbs!!

accuses	discusses	proceeds	chides	intones	replies reports
acknowledges	echoes	prods	cites	jeers	reprimands
acquires	elaborates	profanes	claims	jests	requests
adds	emphasizes	professes	coaxes	jokes	resolves
admonishes	entreats	prophecies	commands	laughs	resumes
affirms	enumerates	propounds	comments	lectures	retorts
agrees	exaggerates	promises	complains	lies	reveals
alleges	explains	prompts	concedes	makes known	scoffs
allows	exhorts	proposes	concludes	magnifies	scorns
alludes	expostulates	protests	concurr	maintains	sermonizes
announces	extols	pursues	confesses	manifests	sneers
answers	fears	puts in	confirms	marvels	specifies
apologizes	fumes	queries	consents	mimics	spells out
appeases	gloats	questions	contends	mocks	speaks
approves	goads	quips	contests	mourns	starts
argues	guesses	quotes	continues	muses	states
articulates	hastens -to say-	rates	contributes	Notes	stresses
asks	hesitates	rails	counters	objects	submits
assents	hints	runs on	criticizes	observes	suggests
asserts	imitates	rants	cross-examines	offers	taunts
assures	implies	raves	debates	orders	testifies
begins	implores	recalls	decides	perceives	thinks
begs	informs	recites	declaims	persists	threatens
believes	inquires	recounts	declares	pleads	tells
berates	insinuates	regrets	defends	points out	Urges
beseeches	insists	reiterates	demands	ponders	vaunts
boasts	interjects	rejoins	denies	praises	ventures
brags	interposes	remarks	describes	preaches	voices
cajoles	interprets	remembers	determines	predicts	volunteers
calls	interrupts	reminds	dictates	prevaricates	
cautions	interrogates	remonstrates			
challenges	intimates	renounces			
charges	intimidates	repeats			

accompanies  
advances  
ambles  
ambulates  
ankles  
approaches  
barges  
boots  
bounces  
brushes  
bursts  
careens  
canters  
clumps  
crawls  
creeps  
dances  
darts  
dashes  
dawdles  
escorts  
exercises  
falters  
files

legs  
limps  
locomotes  
loiters  
lumbers  
lurches  
marches  
meanders  
minces  
mopes  
moseys  
moves  
navigates  
paces  
pads  
paddles  
parades  
patrols  
perambulates  
pitter-patters  
potters  
plods  
prances  
proceeds

shuffles  
skips  
slinks  
slithers  
slogs  
soars  
sprints  
sneaks  
stalks  
steps  
side-steps  
stomps  
storms  
strides  
strolls  
struts  
stumbles  
stalks  
staggers  
stumps  
swaggers  
tiptoes  
toddles  
totters

flounces  
flounders  
foots it  
gimps  
glides  
goes  
goose-steps  
hastens  
hikes  
hobbles  
hops  
hoofs it  
hurries  
jogs  
knocks about  
leads

processes  
promenades  
prowls  
races  
rambles  
reels  
roams  
roves  
runs  
rushes  
sashays  
saunters  
scrambles  
scuffs  
scurries  
shambles

tours  
tramps  
traverses  
treads  
treks  
troops  
trods  
trots  
trudges  
wades  
wanders  
waddles  
zips

## Use of verbs

*Try changing the underlined word for a more interesting verb....*

1. Close to the gate, one woman holds a newborn baby in her arms.
2. A gaggle of mothers talk about the nursery teacher's forthcoming marriage.
3. Echoing from every speaker is an over-excited orchestra playing hysterical themes for each ride.
4. Cheerful sounds, the musical equivalent of candyfloss, play through hidden speakers in the wall.
5. The girls drinks her Coke, then coughs as the bubbles go up her nose. Her companion – a boy her age – laughs and hits her on the back.

# Use of adverbs

**Adverbs** are words that **describe verbs** and tell us **how an action is performed**.

For example, you could say that someone 'walked' across a room, but if you add the adverb, 'casually', you will give a more precise image of someone walking in an unhurried way.

The adverb 'briskly' would change this image completely and show a sense of urgency.

An adverb is a part of speech that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs usually answer such questions as "How?" "Where?" "When?" or "To what degree?"

# How Adverbs

easily

happily

anxiously

bravely

courageously

smoothly

lazily

roughly

boldly

stealthily

carefully

sharply

crossly

accidentally

painfully

calmly

frantically

boastfully

shyly

cruelly

elegantly

greedily

shakily

reluctantly

greedily

obnoxiously

angrily

quickly

merrily

awkwardly

busily

seriously



## When Adverbs

after

before

early

now

promptly

soon

afterwards

today

yesterday

punctually

now

since



# How Often Adverbs



daily

hourly

often

annually

sometimes

regularly

always

yearly

seldom

every day

daily

monthly

## How Much Adverbs

equally

exactly

half-heartedly

completely

hardly

totally

almost

barely

totally

just

fully

too



## Where Adverbs

away

inside

nowhere

here

inwardly

outwardly

there

outside

indoors

everywhere

forwards

southward

near

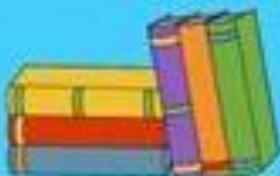
outside

home

aboard



**BOOK  
UNITS  
TEACHER**



## Use of figurative language

You will already be familiar with figurative language such as simile and metaphor.

The next few slides recap each area of figurative language with an example.

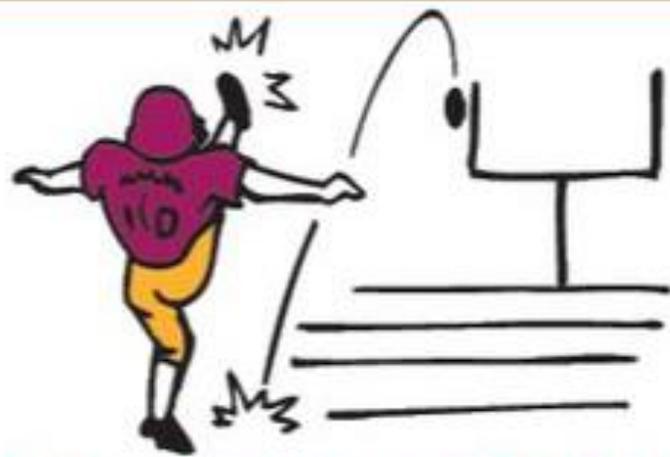
# Alliteration

is the repetition of a **sound** in a sentence or series of sentences.



**S**amantha  
**s**oared  
**d**own the  
**s**treet  
**o**n her **s**leek  
**s**kateboard.

**Hyperbole**  
is exaggeration.



**The extra-point kick  
missed by a mile!**

**Simile** uses  
"like" or "as" to  
make a comparison.



The ball  
streaked  
across the  
field like  
a meteor.

A **metaphor**  
suggests that two  
different things  
are the same thing.

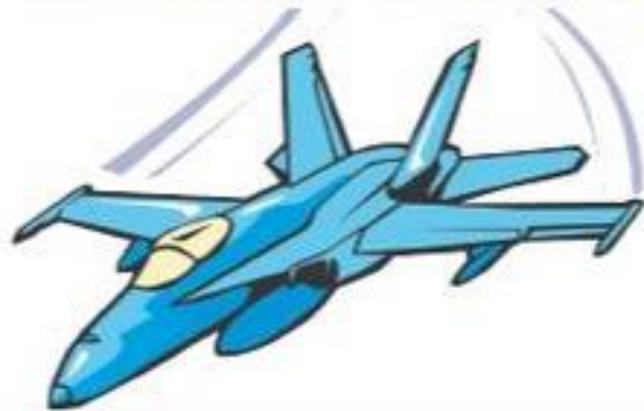


Life is a  
**curly slide,**  
**full of**  
**twists and**  
**turns.**

# Onomatopoeia

is a word that **sounds like** the noise or action it is describing.

The jet **zoomed** across the sky.



# Personification

makes a non-human  
thing seem human.



The tree  
invited us  
to come  
and play.



# THE FIVE SENSES

The five senses?

*Sight*

*Sound*

*Smell*

*Touch*

*Taste*

When writing descriptively, use the senses to help the reader better understand what you are writing about.



# Variety of sentences

Three main types: **SIMPLE, COMPOUND** and **COMPLEX**

A simple sentence has one main idea: *I was terrified.*

A compound sentence joins two simple sentences together: *I was terrified but I still went inside.*

A complex sentence will have a main idea and a subordinate clause, which adds details but does not stand as a sentence on its own: *I was terrified, with my legs trembling with every step, but still I went inside.*



# Variety of sentences

When writing to describe, it is important to vary your sentence structures and provide a mixture of simple, compound and complex sentences.

Simple sentences can often be used for effect, particularly when revealing something shocking or building tension.

Complex sentences allow you to add detail.



# Focus on detail

In descriptive writing you focus on a place or person.

When you write about a place, you naturally write about the people in a description of the scene.

When you write about a person you naturally write about a place or places associated with the person.

FOCUS is the key word. Imagine you are a fixed or moving camera observing the scene and write in DETAIL about what you see.



# Show, don't tell

It is important when writing descriptively to show, not tell.

This means avoiding sentences such as: “*Sarah was sad*” in favour of showing this, such as:

*“As Sarah stared in disbelief, a large tear appeared from her red, puffy eyes and tricked slowly down her cheek.”*



# Exemplar

On the next two slides is an exemplar written by a student of your age.

Try to identify effective use of language before reading the examiner's comments.



# The fairground

Dazzling those around, the bright lights flash, almost blinding any who dare to look their way. The cacophony of sounds, each clashing horribly with the next, is almost deafening. The acrid taste of diesel fumes burns the back of the throat of anyone who gets too close to the rickety Teacup ride.

A group of excitable toddlers are being herded along by over protective mothers - bobbing along like brightly shining Chinese lanterns. One lags behind, gazing wistfully at the waltzers, while his mother tries to persuade him to go on the Teacups.

Teenagers are huddled on a corner, one clutching his can of lager like a newborn son. Another crushes his can beneath his foot and lobs it over the heads of the unsuspecting crowd. He is oblivious to his girlfriend, whose face is tearstained, as she shouts at him. "I can't believe you," she cries, hurls her last insult, and storms away, quickly followed by a small group of girls. They spend the rest of the evening throwing dirty looks at the boys, none of whom seem to care.

Spinning faster and faster, the waltzer's occupants scream hysterically. "The louder you scream, the faster we go," an impersonal voice claims on the intercom. As the ride explodes with noise, the operator yawns and throws a lever. Outside his soundproof hut the ride accelerates, then, climax over, it slows and stops. The controller stumbles out of the box and lets the flushed people off of the ride. Some go straight to the back of the queue, others teeter off, stumbling over their own feet.



# The fairground

Gritting his teeth, a man in the car park presses the accelerator to the floor, but to no avail. The grass is unrecognisable under all of the mud that has been churned up by the cars that have been coming and going all day. His face reddens as the wheels spin, spraying mud on to a shiny red Ferrari that someone was unsuspecting enough to bring. People are pointing and laughing and the owner of the Ferrari is shouting. Finally, someone is helpful enough to push him on his way and he leaves at top speed, without even bothering to say thank you.

On the rollercoaster, a young girl screams, while her older brother looks almost ready to fall asleep. Her best friend in the seat behind is looking slightly green and is very much ready to go home. The little girl whoops even louder at the top of a precipice and tries to get her brother to do the same. He is not going to comply, however, as he has resolved to never take his sister to a funfair again as she is embarrassing him.

Tantalising wafts of delicious scents pour from the hotdog stalls and burger vans, enticing the weak willed civilians to sample their goods. Mothers turn out their pockets for enough to buy the over-priced food for their screaming toddlers. Teenagers squabble over who owes who money, and the girl who split up with her boyfriend is treated to a hotdog by her friends.



## Examiner's comments

This description is accurate, has good details and is written in the third person which is probably the best way to attempt it. The student takes a non-narrative approach using impressive vocabulary which is not overdone. Towards the end it becomes a little fragmented but the last few lines tie up with the opening, referring to the toddlers and teenager, though these references could be more explicit. There is a good range of well-chosen vocabulary and the description has some life and energy. The spelling, punctuation and grammar element is strong and suggests a secure grasp of the mechanics. This is good quality work and deserves a high mark.



# Practice

Now create the opening paragraph for a piece titled

## 'The Dentist's Waiting Room'

Think about what you could see, hear and smell – also, consider your own experiences.

What tone do you want to set for your piece of writing?

Zoom in on the tiniest details and show, don't tell

How are you going to use verbs, adverbs and adjectives effectively?

Do you need to add in a snippet of dialogue, for effect?



## Task

It's now time to write your own descriptive piece. Choose from one of the titles below and employ all the techniques we've discussed in this lesson. Aim to write a minimum of 500 words.

- **The scene in a busy supermarket;**
- **The scene in a railway or bus station;**
- **The scene at a funfair;**
- **The scene on a beach in the summer;**
- **The scene in a school playground at the beginning of the morning.**



For more help  
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