



CAMBRIDGE

International Education

Descriptive writing

Lesson plan

Learning objectives:	To understand the key features of descriptive writing. To practise using sensory detail, figurative language, and effective structure.	
Lesson objectives:	To develop a descriptive response to a visual and written prompt.	
Vocabulary:	sensory / figurative / simile / metaphor / personification / onomatopoeia / sentence / Atmosphere / zoom	
Previous learning:	None	
Plan		
Activities		Resources
Beginning (5–10 mins)	Sensory snapshots: objective here is to activate learners’ creative thinking skills. Display a striking image (e.g., a stormy coastline, a bustling market, an abandoned/creepy house, a mountain view). Ask learners to write one sentence for each sense (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste) based on the image. Share a few examples aloud and identify verbally any use of figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, personification).	Power Point presentation. Learners could write on mini whiteboards to lower the stakes and encourage editing.
Middle (50 mins)	Explicit teaching of descriptive toolkit (15 mins) Discuss the purpose of descriptive writing: to evoke an atmosphere, not tell a story. Review key techniques using presentation slides with mini activities: • Sensory imagery • Show, not tell • Figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification)	Power Point presentation.

Lesson plan

- Zooming in/out (focusing on specific details before shifting perspective)
- Varied sentence structure for creating atmosphere

Model a strong descriptive paragraph based on a setting (e.g., 'The busy station'). This can be written live.

Guided practice (10 minutes)

Give learners a descriptive prompt (e.g., *Describe a place that you know well.* or *Describe a sunset on a beach.*).

In pairs, learners plan a paragraph:

- What setting details will they use?
- What atmosphere do they want to create?
- What imaginative details will they include?
- What can they zoom in to?
- Will they zoom out?

Using learner ideas create a quick imaginative “language bank” on the board as a class (e.g., adjectives, metaphors, sensory verbs).

Independent writing (20 minutes)

Learners individually write the opening paragraph (could do more here if time permits) of a descriptive piece based on the selected prompt – introduce it as an exam style question (Paper 2).

Remind them: no plot, no dialogue, just immersive description.

Circulate to give on-the-spot feedback and check for figurative language, sensory detail, show not tell, sentence variation, zoom.

End (5-10 mins)

Review and reflect

Encourage reflection, editing skills and celebration.

Learners swap their writing with a partner

Partners use a short checklist and four colours to give feedback:

Coloured pencils.

Lesson plan

- Can you identify strong sensory or figurative detail? Underline.
- Can you find a zoom? Underline.
- Have they deliberately used sentence lengths for impact? Underline.

Learners highlight one successful phrase in their partner's work and write one suggestion for improvement.

Other options:

Learners have three minutes to look at the suggested improvement and make some edits.

Learners could all read their favourite sentence as their exit card.

Additional Information

Differentiation

Complete the full descriptive piece.
Edit one paragraph to improve sensory detail and vocabulary choices for atmosphere after you check-in.
Try writing a contrasting description of the same setting in a different mood (e.g., peaceful vs eerie).

Assessment

Starter reveals ability to use senses and you gauge prior learning.
Monitor for effective practice during writing. Instant feedback for editing can be provided.
Peer feedback consolidates awareness of descriptive techniques.

Reflection and evaluation

Reflection:

Were the lesson objectives realistic?

What did the learners learn today?

What was the learning atmosphere like? Did my planned differentiation work well? Did I stick to timings?

What changes did I make from my plan and why?

Lesson plan

Summary evaluation

What two things went really well? (Consider both teaching and learning.)

- 1.
- 2.

What two things would have improved the lesson? (Consider both teaching and learning.)

- 1.
- 2.

What have I learned from this lesson about the class or individuals that will inform my next lesson?

We are committed to making the WCAG 2.1 Standard. We are always looking to improve the accessibility of our documents. If you find any problems or you think we are not meeting accessibility requirements, contact us at info@cambridgeinternational.org with the subject heading: Digital accessibility. If you need this document in a different format, contact us and supply your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.