

## CHAPTER 5

# *Picturing a Place*

### *Building Description*

Dominant Impression  
Specific Language  
Concrete Language  
Sensory Language  
Topic Sentences  
Concluding Sentences  
Linking Sentences

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## ■ WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE AND WHY?

### Setting the Stage

Take a moment to look closely at the picture that begins this chapter. What do you notice about it? A family is celebrating Kwanza, smiling happily, standing and sitting close together as they focus their attention on the young girl, who has perhaps just performed for them. What feeling comes to you as you observe the family? If you had to find one or two words to sum up this picture, what do suppose they would be? If you said something like happiness or comfort or family togetherness, you have just identified a **dominant impression** and gotten to the heart of this chapter on description.

Describing is the process of relating details to help another person see what we have seen. It is the act of painting a picture with words. But more than just allowing a reader to *see* a scene, we can use the other senses (hearing, touch, taste, and smell) to involve the audience more completely. When we tell about and listen to subjective descriptions, we enrich our lives, communicating personal experiences and extending the boundaries of what we can know through our senses alone.

In this chapter we will learn about describing in general and of describing a place in particular.

### Linking to Previous Experience

What kinds of describing have you done in the past—how about vacations? Maybe you have gone skiing. What did the mountains look like? How much snow fell while you were there; was there a deep base? What were the temperatures? How crowded were the lift lines? If you have not been on a vacation for awhile, when was the last time you tried to describe a scene or character closer to home? Talking to a friend,

perhaps you have found yourself detailing another person's clothing or have described your child for a casual acquaintance who also has a child in your preschool. Perhaps you have tried to create a favorable image of that "blind date" you were trying to set a friend up with? We describe things daily, and being able to do it well is a useful skill.

### Determining the Value

Aside from helping us get through our daily lives more easily, the ability to describe has other benefits. The act of carefully selecting words to create images will make us better readers and improve our writing on the job, at home, and in school. But perhaps the most value in learning to describe well is that it will encourage you to observe more closely. By the time you have worked through the activities in this chapter, analyzed the student model paragraphs, taken notes for your own description, and finally workshopped your own and other students' drafts, you will find yourself noticing more of the world around you—and seeing it more clearly.

#### JOURNAL ENTRY 5-1

List at least one example of describing that you have done recently, either orally or in writing, from school, work, and home and recreate one description for your instructor. What value do you see in being able to describe well?

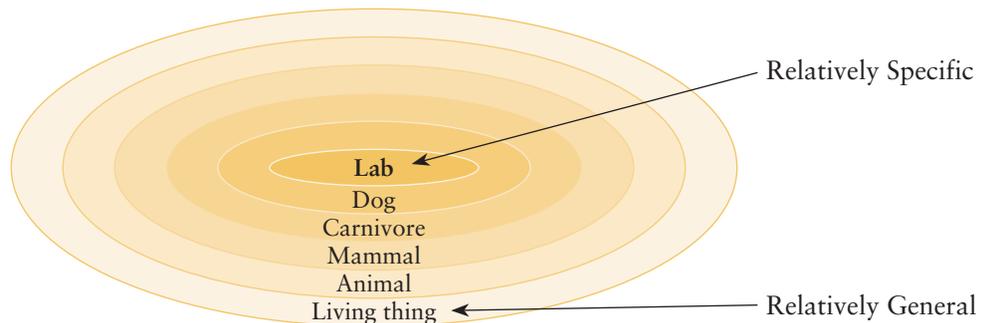
### DEVELOPING SKILLS, EXPLORING IDEAS IN DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS

As we work together through the following eleven activities, we will practice and come to understand the important composition concepts discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, ultimately using the skills we learn in our own place descriptions.

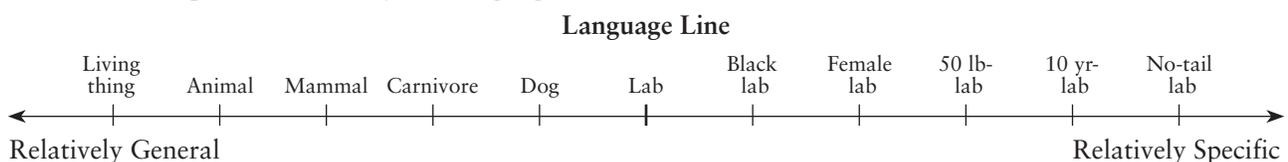
#### Groundwork for Activity 5-1: Narrowing the Category

One of the most important ideas in creating memorable description is the concept of **general versus specific language** (for more on this, see p. 40). If the writer wants to make a general statement (as in topic sentences and the lead-in material for important examples), she should do so, but when she wants to support a point or create a vivid picture, the author will choose the most specific words she can get her hands on. The larger the group that contains a word, the more general the word is. And, conversely, the smaller the group, the more specific the word is—not unlike the nested ovals below:

Be on target by using **specific words** to build images.



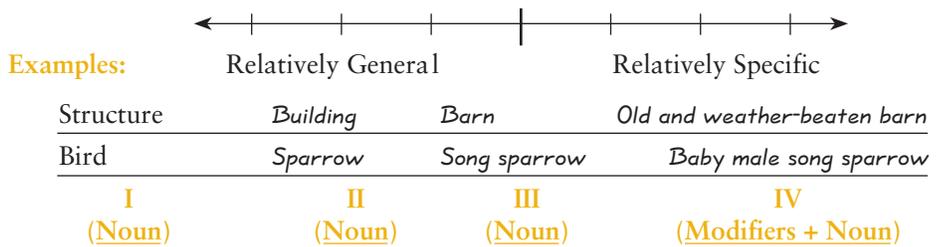
The same concept is illustrated by the Language Line below:



You will probably notice that as we move along the Language Line, choosing more specific nouns, the group the word belongs to shrinks, in the process creating an image. To make the image even sharper, we begin to add details (adjectives), and the result is a fairly clear picture of an old female black lab that is not too big and that lost a tail at some point. This is a dog that we might be able to pick out of a group of other dogs running in a park, and she is a far cry from the opposite end of the spectrum called merely a “living thing.” We can easily apply this process of **narrowing the category** to our own descriptions.

**Activity 5-1: Narrowing the Category**

For each of the five words in column I below, select a word for columns II and III that becomes increasingly specific, and then add two modifiers to the words in column IV.



1. Machine			
2. Human being			
3. Reptile			
4. Scenery			
5. Business			

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**Groundwork for Activity 5-2: Abstract versus Concrete Language**

Abstract words are those that refer to qualities, processes, or ideas (goodness, photosynthesis, freedom) and emotions (love, fear, pity). Concrete words represent things that we can experience with our senses (chair, car, hamburger—cement or concrete is also “concrete”!). Like relatively general words, abstract words have a necessary place in writing; they allow us to talk about large ideas and states of being. For instance, when we discuss “democracy,” most of us understand that it means self-rule through elected officials within a society that guarantees certain freedoms. However, as soon as people become unclear about a term or when they disagree with basic assumptions about it, the abstraction needs to be clarified with specific examples, which are often illustrated with concrete terms. In our descriptive papers we will select fairly specific and concrete places to show a reader, but we will also make clear a relatively abstract feeling or overall **dominant impression** by favoring specific and concrete words.

**Activity 5-2: Abstract versus Concrete Language**

Look at the abstract words in column I, and then try to write a more concrete word or phrase in column II. Remember that concrete words are often a specific example used to show what a person *might* mean by the more abstract term.

I. <b>Abstract</b> (idea, quality, emotion)	II. <b>Concrete</b> (knowable through senses: has weight, color, smell, texture, etc.)
Example: Happiness _____	<i>a smile</i>
Example: Love _____	<i>a kiss</i>
Example: Football defense _____	<i>a sacked quarterback</i>
1. Comfort _____	
2. Activity _____	
3. Tranquility _____	
4. Death penalty _____	
5. Transportation _____	

### Groundwork for Activity 5-3: Using the Five Senses

All description benefits from using our senses. Because people come to know their environment best through their senses, it stands to reason that we would want to come as close as possible in our writing to duplicating what we saw, heard, felt, smelled, and tasted in a setting. With this in mind, consider the following two paragraph excerpts, and decide which one makes you feel more a part of the scene:

1. I am back at the pond again tonight, relaxing and noticing the stars. As I listen, I can hear the sounds of the woods around me. Animal noises tell me that I have truly made it back to my favorite spot. I can see that the fire is about ready, so I get out the food I brought and settle down for some late night snacks.
2. As the brilliant, yellow moon shines down reflecting off the pond, little waves ripple across the surface. While gazing at the sky, I can see millions of sparkling stars and, from time to time, even view one falling. The blazing embers leave a smoke trail rising upward from the fire. Through the darkness of the night, I can see the shadows of the trees, silhouettes of the horses, and swooping bats. The sounds of the night surround me: the murmur of voices in the distance, leaves rustling, and branches brushing against each other. From the nearby pond and surrounding trees, I can hear the unique chorus of the tree and bullfrogs. As the train whistles by, the cries of howling coyotes drift on the wind. From time to time I can even hear the lonesome hooting of an owl. As the popping and crackling of the fire dies down, the embers are ready for cooking.

The second paragraph benefits from two senses primarily, sight and sound, as you can see by the shaded sight and boxed sound details. Although the author has not called on taste, smell, and touch, she has still created a memorable scene that many of us would probably like to join in.



Activity 5-3: Using the Five Senses

With group members locate all the sensory details you can find in the following paragraph excerpt, and then list them under the appropriate columns on the sensory chart. Specific words are *sight* details, colors included (see Activity 5-1). Sound and touch details are represented but few smell or taste details. If you removed all the sensory details, would this description be less interesting to you?

Jumping feet first off the gently rolling boat, the salty taste of seawater in my mouth, I feel the warm Caribbean waters close over my head. Sinking slowly in a swirl of frothy silver bubbles, I look back up to the surface to see the dark hull of the dive boat steadily receding. Beneath me broken shafts of sunlight filter past the tips of my black fins as I kick back and forth, keeping the descent under control. At thirty feet I begin to kick harder and inflate my BC, the sudden sound of compressed air rushing past my ear. Another ten, twenty, thirty feet, and there I hover, weightless, over the plateau. Spread out to a hundred feet in all directions, green and purple sea fans bend gently in the mild surge as rainbow-colored parrotfish graze on the reef, the sound of their teeth grinding chunks of coral audible even under sixty feet of water.

Sensory Chart

Sight	Sound	Touch	Smell	Taste

**Note:** The point of using sensory details is not to cram as many into a paper as possible, or even to represent all the senses, but rather to use these details selectively wherever they can enhance an image.

Can there be too much of a good thing?

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Activity 5-4: Using the Five Senses

Get together in groups of four or five and brainstorm sensory details for one of the following places. Be particularly alert to any details that might help illustrate a central focus or dominant impression/feeling. Also don't be surprised if you come up with more under sight and sound than any other.

1. **Cafeteria** at lunch hour (dominant impression = activity/fast pace, maybe even confusion or chaos!)
2. **Church wedding** (dominant impression = excitement/happiness, maybe even communal spirit of love)
3. **Zoo** (dominant impression = *either* depression/confinement, maybe even animals in misery *or* relaxation, maybe even contentment, animals happy to have a life so easy—try for one of these, remembering that, as always in focused description, you *choose* the details that you want your reader to see)
4. **Summer camp** (dominant impression = happy confusion/expectation/fun)

The dominant impression is the **main point** or statement part of a topic sentence in description.

The writer must control the dominant impression, choosing details to make a point.

**Thoughts** and **feelings** can add to the dominant impression.

### Groundwork for Activity 5-5: Establishing the Dominant Impression

The elements of effective describing that we have discussed so far—general/specific, abstract/concrete, and sensory details—can all work together to establish a **dominant impression** for your description. The dominant impression might also be thought of as an overall feeling you have about what you are describing—a person, an object, an animal, or (for this assignment) a place.

For instance, if you were to describe a zoo as a depressing place (an option from Activity 5-4), you might focus on images like the coyote pacing endlessly beside the bars of his small cage and wearing a deep trail into the grass around the perimeter. Or you might note that the big cats—the tigers, lions, leopards—are confined to a space the size of a garage. Images abound in even the most progressive open zoos of overcrowded and understimulated animals. But this is only one impression a person might take away from a zoo. There are clearly many happy moments in zoos and worthwhile reasons for keeping animals there.

So your task is to decide what you want to say about a place, keeping in mind that your impression might not be the same as another person's and even that your feeling about the place may change from one time to another. Also, remember that telling your feelings or thoughts can help a reader understand your dominant impression.



Collaborative

### Activity 5-5: Establishing the Dominant Impression

With group members read each of the paragraphs below, discuss what seems to be the dominant impression, and then write it out. Next, underline the words that help convey this central point.

**Example:** In the huddle I heard the quarterback calling the play, but I couldn't connect the words to a meaning. My ears were ringing, and my head throbbed from the last tackle. I looked down at the chewed up turf beneath my cleats and saw a blur of legs and shoes and dirt and torn grass. I leaned harder than I should have needed to on John and Scott and felt my knees giving out. "Oh, no," I thought, "I'm losing it in the middle of the game!"

Dominant impression: losing consciousness

1. People show up to the ball game excited, with no age in their eyes, just pure enjoyment for a game they love. I notice the parents most, teaching and telling their children about the "greats" of the game and their fond memories of when they were young. The cheer from the crowd explodes with sheer excitement when the baseball cracks off the bat for the first time. During the seventh inning stretch I can sense the excitement in the air as the colorful lights dance off of the high water fountains, and the fans and players move about in an almost rhythmic motion. For nine innings fans of all ages act like they did when they were kids, wearing gloves and trying to catch foul balls and home runs.

Dominant impression: \_\_\_\_\_

2. I had never met the man who worked in this garage, but I felt like I already knew something about him. First off, how many people do you know who carpet their garage floor—cement at that! And the damn carpet was clean, like it had just been vacuumed that morning. All the bigger equipment—extension and stepladders, wheelbarrow, snow blower, lawnmower, weed eater, leaf blower, etc.—was neatly stacked around the whitewashed walls. There were no spider webs in the windows or corners, not in this place. The shelves on the west wall, where most of the garage junk was kept, put me in mind of a hardware store, a neat one, like the True Value down the way. This guy must have been saving Gerber baby food jars from half a dozen kids to collect enough for all the little loose nuts, bolts, screws, washers, nails, tacks, brads, staples, and you name it that he had lined up in precise, evenly spaced and *labeled* rows. It was enough to make a slob like me a little sick to my stomach.

Dominant impression: \_\_\_\_\_

### Groundwork for Activity 5-6: Strengthening the Dominant Impression

Not all the description we write is well focused from the beginning. In fact, it is common, especially in first and second drafts, to include examples, details, or commentary that, while perhaps interesting, is nevertheless distracting. When we work to develop a single idea or feeling within a paragraph, we do not have enough room for many words and phrases that are not directly connected to the dominant impression.

### Activity 5-6: Strengthening the Dominant Impression

Read the example paragraph below and notice the underlined words that distract the reader from the stated dominant impression. Next, read “The Late Night Place to Be,” *write out* what the author seems to want to be the dominant impression, and then *underline* any word or phrase that you think detracts from the main point.

**Example:** Dominant impression for “Ground Zero”: messiness

#### Ground Zero

My bedroom is a mess. I have never been much of a neat freak, so it’s hard for me to do all the routine “house chores.” In fact, if you look around you will see what I mean. I can’t seem to hang a picture straight on the walls, and my poster of The Dave Matthew’s Band has come untaped at the upper right corner so that it sags a little. The wallpaper behind the poster is a weird flower pattern, roses, I think. Along the wall opposite the doorway, I have my stereo and new CD player (the old one died last week). The queen-sized bed is a disaster; it looks more like an animal’s nest than a place for human rest. There are three pillows up against the oak headboard and two lying on the carpet. The elastic has worn out around the pale blue bottom sheet so it has curled

Avoid details that distract from the dominant impression.

up at the corners, leaving the ancient mattress staring back. I like to snack in bed, so you'll find the remains of old meals: there's an old pizza crust with the red sauce . . . well, kind of *dark* red sauce now, a Big Mac box, an old French fry or two (they may still be good; I'll try them in a minute), and some kind of crumbs—no, I think it's sand. A red and green quilt is lying in a pile by the end chest where it slipped off a month ago, in May, when the weather got too warm for me to need it anymore, and I'm afraid to look under the bed for what I might find there. My desk is littered with papers and old Kleenexes (some used some not, but, hey, at least I'm ready for the next blow), and you'll usually find an open can of Coke on it, sticky at the bottom (someday I'll learn how to drink without spilling). I'll get around to taking out the wastebasket someday, but in the meantime I can still cram a little more trash into it.

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Write out the dominant impression for “The Late Night Place to Be”:

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Underline details that distract from the dominant impression.

### **The Late Night Place to Be**

I enjoy spending time at the gym because of all the different activity going on there. The bright lights of the place shine through plate glass windows, illuminating the parking lot as I arrive at 1:00 a.m. After checking in, I head to the mezzanine on the left side of the gym where the cardiovascular area is located. As I walk upstairs, I start to identify the different sounds of the room. I can hear the heavy breathing of the sweaty runners as their feet pound strongly against the treadmills, which are lined up against the back wall. The room is carpeted in dark pink and is full of cardiovascular equipment such as NordicTracks, stair steppers, and stationary bicycles, and most of the machines are, surprisingly, in use. The carpet feels good on my feet after a hard night working in the restaurant, and I wonder if the other people here appreciate it too. Management has kept up the physical surroundings: the walls are freshly painted, the mirrors clean, and all the resistance machines look practically brand new. This all improves my attitude and makes it somehow easier for me to work out harder. Although there are plenty of people, the place doesn't look too crowded, but it is noisy. The beeping sound from various machines marks people getting on and off and setting different resistance levels. Looking down to the main area of the gym, across from the reception desk, I can see two girls talking and hear part of their conversation as they work out. Near the back wall, about sixty feet away from the reception

desk, there are three men working with the free weights. I can hear the clink and clank of the metal weights as they lay them down. Although it might seem strange to some that all this activity is going on so late at night, to me, and maybe the rest of the people in the gym, this is the best way to relax at the end of a long day.

### Groundwork for Activity 5-7: Topic Sentences

As we learned in Chapter 3, most body paragraphs in essays and single-paragraph papers should begin with a topic sentence. In this descriptive paper we will want to include these two parts in our topic sentence: the **place** and the **dominant impression**.

Beyond this, the topic sentence can be made more interesting by adding a **sensory detail**, an **action**, and **specific words**. Take a look at the following basic topic sentence:

Place + Dominant impression (statement)

- **Rough** topic sentence: The bar & grill is noisy.

This is a perfectly acceptable working topic sentence, but as you begin to polish your draft, you might want to make the sentence a bit more interesting:

Action/Sound specific word                      Specific word

- **Revised** topic sentence: If I fired a .44 magnum in the Longbranch Saloon on a Friday night, there is so much noise that no one would notice.

### Activity 5-7: Topic Sentences

Read the following sentences and circle the number of each one that you think would make a good *rough* topic sentence for a place description:

1. My kitchen has a linoleum floor.
2. My house has a relaxing place to spend time in.
3. My home office measures twelve by eighteen feet.
4. For a memorable place to vacation, skiing is the best.
5. Farm ponds are pretty busy places.

Now take any one of the rough topic sentences that you chose and try to make it more interesting by adding a sensory detail (color, sound, touch), an action, or specific word.

Your choice of rough topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your revised topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Strong concluding sentences expand the thought.

### Groundwork for Activity 5-8: Concluding Sentences

Just as topic sentences are vital to introduce many paragraphs, so too are concluding sentences essential to wrap up the main point. In an essay, of course, you will have room to expand a concluding thought into a full paragraph, but with single-paragraph papers we should try to limit ourselves to one (or two) forceful, final sentence with these parts: a *connector*, mention of the *place*, and link to the *dominant impression*.

As we learned in Chapter 3, we can make the final sentence even more effective by adding **details**, **specific words**, and an **expanded thought** linked to the dominant impression. Here is a rough concluding sentence followed by a more polished version:

- Connector                      Dominant impression

• **Rough** concluding sentence: After last call the volume begins to drop, and everyone heads out from the Longbranch for home.

Place
- Connector                      Sound detail                      Dominant impression

• **Revised** concluding sentence: After last call the shouted conversations and the banging together of beer mugs begin to die down, and everyone heads out from the bar into the night, alone again till the next time they come back to their home away from home.

Sound detail                      Action                      Action

Place                      Expanded thought

### Activity 5-8: Concluding Sentences

The following groups of paired sentences contain rough topic sentences that *could* work to begin a paragraph of place description and rough concluding sentences that *might* work to end a paragraph. Choose a sentence that could work to conclude a paragraph that describes a place.

- My kitchen is an easy place to work in. (Rough topic sentence)  
With all this equipment to work with, my kitchen is efficient. (Rough final sentence)
- My house has a relaxing place to spend time in. (Rough topic sentence)  
If I plastered and repainted, all the rooms would look better. (Rough final sentence)
- My home office is well organized. (Rough topic sentence)  
I really don't use my home office very much. (Rough final sentence)
- For a memorable place to vacation, skiing is the best. (Rough topic sentence)  
Snow skiing in the mountains is great fun. (Rough final sentence)

Now take the rough concluding sentence you chose and create a more complete (and interesting) ending, being sure to include these three parts: a connector, the place, and the dominant impression.

To create an even stronger concluding sentence, include an **expanded thought**, **specific words**, **sensory details**, or an **action**.

#### Example:

Farm ponds are pretty busy places. (Rough topic sentence)

With so much going on, farm ponds are fun to spend time at. (Rough final sentence)

Connector Dominant impression Place

- **Revised concluding sentence:** *With all the frantic animal action at my uncle's pond, you might think no one could rest there, but, for me, it's one of the most relaxing places I can spend time on a late spring afternoon.*

Your choice of rough concluding sentence from the list of four: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your revised concluding sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Groundwork for Activity 5-9: Organizing Descriptions

All writing that is easy to read follows some sort of organizational strategy. In writing description, an author will often choose “spatial arrangement,” which simply means to organize details from one point in space to another so the reader can more easily visualize the scene. In describing a person or an animal, you might progress from the head to the feet; for an object like a car, you could proceed from the outside to the inside; for a place like a room, you might begin at the ceiling and work your way down to the floor or perhaps begin at the entrance to the place and then move inward.

There is seldom only one right way to approach spatial description. As in so much of what we write, an author needs to choose a direction that seems sensible and then remain as consistent as possible.

### Activity 5-9: Organizing Descriptions

The following place lists have descriptive details that are not arranged in any logical order. Take a moment to read through the lists, and then number the details to show a simple, one-step-at-a-time progression, beginning with 1 as the first detail in a descriptive paragraph and progressing to 6. (It might help to visualize the places being described as if you were operating a video camera, or shooting a movie!)

**Example:** Topic sentence: My attic is the dirtiest place in the house. (Arrange details from bottom to top.)

\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ The floorboards are covered with dust.

\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ Two small windows are streaked and smeared.

\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ The rafters have cobwebs hanging from them.

\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ I can feel grit beneath my feet on the stairs going up.

\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ Old furniture has the dust of ages accumulating on it.

\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ Boxes of ancient books are piled high.

1. Topic sentence: First Watch on a busy Sunday morning is a study in efficiency. (Arrange details from front to back.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Outside the restaurant there is a host taking names for seating.

\_\_\_\_\_ At the far end of the line, I can see the cooks efficiently cranking out the food.

- \_\_\_\_\_ In the lobby coffee and tea are set up to help with the wait.
- \_\_\_\_\_ At the front desk a manager greets people while checks are being orderly processed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Busboys clear, wipe, and reset tables quickly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Behind the food line I can hear the dishwashers hard at work.
2. Topic sentence: The poolroom grew quiet, and time seemed to slow as everyone around the table concentrated on the last shot of the game. (Arrange details from bottom to top.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ The TV sets on the walls seemed to blur out, and the sound became just so much white noise.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Overhead, the blades of the ceiling fans were frozen in place.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People stopped shuffling their feet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lucky Ed was draped over his cue—the stick, cue ball, and eight ball his whole universe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ As Ed’s right hand drew the cue back, the crowd leaned forward in anticipation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bottles of Budweiser were dangling at their sides—no one dared to move before the shot.
3. Topic sentence: Monastery Beach on a hot July afternoon is full of activity. (Arrange details from distant to closer as you stand in the parking lot at the edge of the beach.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Scuba divers are putting their fins on at the edge of the surf.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the middle of the beach, a handful of giggling kids tries to get a kite up into the air.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the distance a fishing boat loaded with tourists chugs along.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Forty yards out from shore a sea otter floats on his back in the kelp, banging away at an abalone he has wrenched from the ocean floor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Waves pick up height ten yards from the beach as they curl and break over the few brave swimmers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Where the beach meets the parking lot, seagulls cluster around trash cans, squabbling among themselves for scraps.

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### Groundwork for Activity 5-10: Locating the Reader in Space and Time

As we know from Chapter 3, linking sentences within and between paragraphs is essential if the reader is to follow a flow of ideas smoothly. In description, because we are building a scene, which consists of people, objects, and sometimes animals, it is important to help the reader see where these elements fit in relation to one another. The act of locating a reader within a scene contributes to well-organized writing.

To link sentences, we use repeat words, synonyms, pronouns, references to main ideas, and transitional words. **Time** and **space** transitions are particularly useful in description.

For Locating or Moving in Space			
above	by	in the back of	over
against	east (west . . .)	into	there
alongside	far off (away)	near	to the right/left
around	in	next to	under
at	in the back	on	upper
For Moving in Time			
after	first (second, etc.)	next	suddenly
afterward	immediately	now	then
at last	in the meantime	often	time passed
awhile	in the past	once	until

- All references to calendar time and calendar events: last week, a few months ago
- All references to clock time

(For a more complete list of transitions, turn to pp. 53–54.)

### Activity 5-10: Locating the Reader in Space and Time

In the following descriptive paragraph, “Ground Zero,” underline all the **space connectors** once and any **time connectors** twice (there are only a few time connectors). Use the lists provided to locate many of the linking words and phrases, but use your own common sense and experience to find any not already given.

#### Ground Zero

My bedroom is a mess. I can't seem to hang a picture straight on the walls, and my poster of The Dave Matthews Band has come untaped at the upper right corner so that it sags a little. The queen-sized bed is a disaster; it looks more like an animal's nest than a place for human rest. There are three pillows up against the oak headboard and two lying on the carpet. The elastic has worn out around the pale-blue bottom sheet, so it has curled up at the corners. I like to snack in bed, so you'll find the remains of old meals: there's an old pizza crust with the red sauce . . . well, kind of *dark* red sauce now, a Big Mac box, an old French fry or two (they may still be good; I'll try them in a minute), and some kind of crumbs—no, I think it's sand. A red-and-green quilt is lying in a pile by the end chest where it slipped off a month ago, and I'm afraid to look under the bed for what I might find there. My desk is littered with papers and old Kleenexes (some used some not, but, hey, at least I'm ready for the next blow), and you'll usually find an open can of Coke on it, sticky at the bottom. I'll get around to taking out the wastebasket someday, but in the meantime I can still cram a little more trash into it.

## Activity 5-11: Locating the Reader in Space

Using the space locators on p. 89, fill in the blanks with a word or words that make sense.

1. After walking into the movie theater, you have to go \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ to get to the film you came to see.
2. Driving \_\_\_\_\_ the garage, I could see my work cut out for me.
3. The weight room is located \_\_\_\_\_ of the club.
4. In most houses you can find a mirror \_\_\_\_\_ the vanity.
5. The boathouse is \_\_\_\_\_ the dock.

### DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS: LOOKING CLOSELY AT STUDENT MODELS

The following models show how you might approach both outside and inside description: how to develop and arrange material, and how to polish sentences to make a paragraph readable. As you focus on each model, take a few extra minutes to read through the Prereading and Postreading commentary and then to carefully answer the questions for analysis. All of this material will help you better understand why the writing is successful, the goal being to help *you* write stronger descriptive paragraphs.

#### Prereading Exploration for "Untitled"

The following descriptive paragraph was written in response to the assignment instructions for picturing a place. The author's purpose is to communicate a special feeling she has about an activity and a place to her classmates so that they might get to know her a bit better. Before you jump into the reading, think for a moment about the elements of effective descriptive writing that we have discussed. Next, answer these questions:

1. How should the author try to focus the paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What kinds of details do you suppose the author will use to develop the paragraph?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the difference between a relatively general and a relatively specific word, and which tends to create the most vivid image? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Before you continue with the rest of the paragraph, carefully read the first and final sentences, and then look for descriptive detail and explanation that reinforce the **dominant impression**.

**Untitled**

The most peaceful activity I know of on a clear, dry night is relaxing around an open campfire. There is an ideal spot just north of the pond on my grandparents' land. As the brilliant yellow moon shines down, reflecting off the pond, little waves ripple across the surface. Gazing at the sky, I can see millions of sparkling stars and, from time to time, even view a falling star. The blazing embers leave a smoke trail rising upward from the fire. Through the darkness, I can see the shadows of the trees, silhouettes of the horses, and swooping bats. The sounds of the night surround me: the murmur of voices in the distance, leaves rustling, and branches brushing against each other. From the nearby pond and surrounding trees, I can hear the unique chorus of the tree frogs and bullfrogs. As the train whistles by, the cries of howling coyotes drift on the wind. From time to time, I can even hear the lonesome hooting of an owl. When the popping and crackling of the fire dies down, the embers are ready for cooking. The hotdogs sizzle as they begin to cook and drip their juices off the end of the stick. Refreshing aromas of trimmings from the apple and pear trees add sweetness to the oak branches as they burn. Nearby, the smell of the horses is carried in the breeze. While fire heats the hotdogs, I can smell the meat cooking. The hot, white melting marshmallows fresh from the fire stick to my fingers. After eating and being contentedly full from the hotdogs and sticky chocolate/nut smores, I have time for solitude. While the chilly breeze blows, the radiating warmth of the fire draws me in. This is my favorite time around the campfire—a truly peaceful time in which I feel a sense of oneness with nature as she embraces me.

Andrea Turner

**Postreading Analysis**

This paragraph is easy to follow, from the opening sentence, which clearly states the dominant impression, to the final sentence, which reinforces the main point and then adds a thought for brief reflection. Turner does a good job of orienting the reader in the beginning of the paragraph (“just north of the pond on my grandparents’ land”) and continues to use plenty of place connectors (“across the surface”/“in the distance”) to locate us in space. To help us see the scene around the pond and fire, the author favors many relatively specific words (owl vs. bird/marshmallows vs. dessert) and selects many strong sensory details without overloading her work. You might also notice how effectively Turner conveys action through active verbs (“waves ripple”/“train whistles by”) and “-ings.”

Description often includes action.

**■ Prereading Exploration for “Waking Up the Right Way”**

So far we have practiced important elements of description like specific word choices, sensory detail, and clear focus (dominant impression). But we have not much discussed how the narrator (meaning you) can contribute to the overall impression of the place by simply revealing her thoughts/feelings in relation to the description. Take thirty seconds to skim the upcoming paragraph, noting the topic and concluding sentences; then look closely at the highlighted passages, which reveal the author’s thoughts and feelings.

How would you describe these thoughts/emotions?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How do they link to the stated dominant impression of tranquility?

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

After you have read the paragraph more carefully, respond to these questions: How accurate was your judgment of “Waking Up the Right Way,” based only on the quick skim? What value do you see in skimming as a prereading technique?

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Waking Up the Right Way

With my morning cup of coffee in hand, I head toward the most tranquil part of my house, my front porch. Sometimes I feel that nothing comes alive until I walk out—little do I know. The sun has already started its astonishing daily routine of creating sunshine. Everywhere I look I see all the different foliage around stretching upward, hoping to grasp everything that the incredible fireball in the sky has to offer. Families of blue jays and cardinals live together peacefully in the walnut trees to the west. They seem to be chatting away with each other’s family, like most neighbors do. Could they possibly be discussing the upcoming events of the day? The family of squirrels in the next tree starts conversing as well. By the way their mouths and bellies are rapidly filling, I can sense they are pleased with the cashews I left for them last night. As I glance down at the windowsill, I often think about the many dead insects lying there; one can only assume that the bugs want their last moments alive to be on my porch. These small bodies make quite a feast for the two barn spiders that share my porch with me. The webs are always filled with one delicacy or another. One spider in particular has woven quite a spectacular web against the old, paint-chipped corner. While I am inhaling my first cup of morning fuel, a magnificent gust of wind blows through. The sweet smell of my neighbor’s freshly cut grass fills the air so fragrantly that I barely notice the thick humidity building for the day ahead. As I am taking in the fresh aroma of the morning dew, my attention is drawn to a group of young children who are eagerly on their way to the first day of school. My next-door neighbor waves to me and hollers, “Morning to ya!” and then starts his trek to work. As he pulls his pickup from our shared driveway, the gray dust from the gravel leaves a chalky taste in the morning air. Like clockwork (at 7:20 A.M.), Rex, the German shepherd who lives in the backyard behind me, starts his morning barking routine. So, along with most experiences in life, my morning relaxing time has come to a temporary halt. Heading back inside to get dressed, I know that I’m ready for the challenges awaiting me in my day. I’m ready to face each one confidently because I started in my favorite place—my porch.

Stacey Becker

### Postreading Analysis

In this descriptive paragraph the author does a fine job with sensory details, in several places playing one off the other to enrich an image (“sweet smell of cut grass . . . thick humidity”/“inhaling . . .fuel . . . wind blows”). Both first and last sentences clearly telegraph the central point of the paper, and the author is especially careful with time connectors (“morning cup of coffee,” “until I walk,” “As he pulls his pickup”). Because Becker is writing a *description* of a place, you might think that she wouldn’t pay much attention to action, but she does. Notice how so much of the movement in the paragraph—the animals interacting, the children, the next-door neighbor—contributes to the overall impression the author is trying to convey.

#### Questions to Help You Analyze and Write Effective Descriptive Paragraphs

1. What is the dominant impression of the paragraph?
2. What two important points do we learn from the topic sentence?
3. How does the concluding sentence link to the topic sentence?
4. Name at least one instance of action within the paragraph that helps reinforce the dominant impression, and then explain how the action does this.
5. Name at least five instances of specific word choices (a word that belongs to a smaller group or category of words).
6. Locate and list as many sensory details from the paragraph as you can find: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste.
7. After looking at your list from number 6 above, which sensory details seem easier to show and which more difficult?
8. List at least three time and three space connectors (see p. 53).
9. Name three active verbs and three “-ings” words the author uses to convey motion (note how the “-ings” can enhance a sensory detail). (Active verbs show the most specific kind of action, i.e., the horse *gallops* vs. moves; the cardinal *sings* vs. makes a song.) (For more on active verbs, see p. 451.)
10. What is your favorite image in this paragraph? Why do you like it?
11. Can you name three additional sensory details or specific words that would add to the dominant impression?
12. In the seventh sentence of “Waking Up the Right Way,” the author uses a question. Is there any value in asking the reader an occasional question? Why do you suppose Becker does it? (For more on question sentences, see p. 433.)
13. Can you suggest a title for Andrea Turner’s paragraph? Why do you think your title would make a good one? (For more on titles, see pp. 57–58.)

## ■ EXPLAINING THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

### ■ SUMMARIZING THE ASSIGNMENT

In this writing assignment we will paint a verbal portrait of a place. This place can be indoors and more or less surrounded by four walls (a room in a house, a store in a shopping mall, a library, etc.), or outside (a park, a favorite fishing hole, a basketball court, etc.). Our goal is to focus a single paragraph of description, roughly 250 to 300 words, through some general feeling or overall impression we want our reader to have about the place. This **dominant impression** will help shape and develop the paragraph.

## ■ ESTABLISHING AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

You may select any person or group that you think might be interested in the location that you want to describe. For instance, if you chose a favorite fishing pond, say on a friend's farm in southern Miami County, KS, you could gear your description specifically toward your friend, knowing that you would both share memories of the place, or you could choose a larger audience, say the readership of a conservation magazine like *Kansas Wildlife & Parks*, in which case you would expect the audience to share some common interests and to know the general lay of the land but not actually to have visited your spot. (Note: Your composition instructor is always at least a secondary audience, so write to show him or her that you are learning descriptive strategies.)

Your overall purpose is to convey information and a feeling about a place, to help a reader see it through your eyes.

## ■ WORKING THROUGH THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

### Discovering Ideas

Assuming that your instructor is not simply assigning you a particular place to write about (i.e., “Let’s all describe our bathrooms”), your choice of topics is virtually limitless. The good news is that you can select a place that you know well and have a real interest in. The bad news is that lots of freedom can be paralyzing. It is all too easy when faced with almost every possibility “out there” to feel overwhelmed and either put off choosing a place till too late or settle on the first choice that comes to mind, whether you have a real interest in it or not. Because you will be working on this project for several weeks, why not take the time to select a topic that you care about enough to invest some energy in? (Learning to become involved in a writing project is a trick of the writer’s trade that will help you have a lot more fun with your writing and will usually produce better work.)

The following topic lists may help get you off to a good start:

Writer’s Tip: Try to get involved with your project.

Choose several possible places before you fix on one.

### Topic Lists

#### Places to Describe Inside

- |                           |                        |                      |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Any room in your house | 15. Riverboat          | 29. Bus depot        |
| 2. Attic                  | 16. Dance studio       | 30. Airport          |
| 3. Tool shed              | 17. Church/synagogue   | 31. Subway station   |
| 4. Restaurant             | 18. Pet store          | 32. Train station    |
| 5. Tavern                 | 19. Pawn shop          | 33. Boxing arena     |
| 6. Department store       | 20. Music store        | 34. Doctor’s office  |
| 7. Museum                 | 21. Hospital           | 35. Police station   |
| 8. Gym                    | 22. Movie theater      | 36. Grocery store    |
| 9. Bowling alley          | 23. Art gallery        | 37. Florist’s        |
| 10. Arcade                | 24. Recording studio   | 38. Furniture store  |
| 11. Library               | 25. Beauty salon       | 39. Tire warehouse   |
| 12. Cafeteria             | 26. School (any level) | 40. Recycling center |
| 13. Office                | 27. Day care           | 41. Funeral home     |
| 14. Hardware store        | 28. Foundry            | 42. Cemetery         |

- |                       |                   |                          |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 43. Toy store         | 49. Dive boat     | 55. Art gallery          |
| 44. Veterinary clinic | 50. Fishing boat  | 56. Hotel room           |
| 45. Kennel            | 51. Cruise ship   | 57. Casino               |
| 46. Auto repair shop  | 52. Barn          | 58. Stable               |
| 47. Ski resort        | 53. Trade show    | 59. Tattoo/piercing shop |
| 48. Cable car         | 54. Nature center | 60. Greenhouse           |

### Places to Describe Outside

- |                                   |                                     |                                        |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1. Your property                  | 17. Woods                           | 33. Historic site                      |
| 2. Beach                          | 18. Summer camp                     | 34. Cemetery                           |
| 3. Park                           | 19. River                           | 35. Rodeo                              |
| 4. Mountains                      | 20. Rock quarry                     | 36. Outdoor concert                    |
| 5. Pond                           | 21. Strip mine                      | 37. Hot air balloon                    |
| 6. Stadium                        | 22. Construction site               | 38. Amusement park                     |
| 7. Lake                           | 23. Wharf                           | 39. Orchard                            |
| 8. Zoo                            | 24. Race track (car,<br>horse, dog) | 40. Nursery (for plants)               |
| 9. Field                          | 25. Tree house                      | 41. Field (corn, wheat,<br>milo, etc.) |
| 10. Interstate (at rush<br>hour)  | 26. Basketball court                | 42. Jogging path                       |
| 11. Parking lot                   | 27. Football field                  | 43. National park                      |
| 12. Car wash                      | 28. Tennis court                    | 44. Airport                            |
| 13. Fountain                      | 29. Outdoor racquetball<br>court    | 45. City market                        |
| 14. Trailer court                 | 30. Swimming pool                   | 46. Outdoor art fair                   |
| 15. Municipal landfill            | 31. Wildlife sanctuary              | 47. Plaza or town square               |
| 16. Pig or cattle pen<br>(corral) | 32. Rose garden                     | 48. Hot tub                            |

Aside from these lists think of the places where you regularly go—home, work, school. Also consider some of your interests. What kinds of hobbies do you enjoy? Do you target shoot, play in a band, collect rare books, prepare gourmet meals? How about sports—team and individual? We all lead varied lives that carry us through a world of possible places to choose for topics.

Limit your location.

**Caution:** Whatever place you select, be sure to limit how much of it you try to describe. For instance, a college campus is too much to handle in this brief paragraph assignment, but the school cafeteria could be just right. The Lake of the Ozarks is, again, too large, so settle for a particular arm, cove, or dock that you know well.

Visit your place and take notes!

After you have decided on a possible topic, try to go there, sit down, and take a few notes. While you might be able to draw all the necessary detail for this assignment from memory, your description will probably be stronger if you actually go to your place. Even professional storytellers, who are paid to create scenes from their imagination, often visit a place and take notes. Assuming that you can visit your place, here are several suggestions to help generate material:

### Prewriting Suggestions

Looking for a dominant impression

**Listing** is one of several useful prewriting methods.

1. Go to the place and sit quietly for a few minutes. Look around, listen carefully, and open your senses—all five—to the surroundings. Remember that you are looking for a single point of focus (dominant impression). Is the place obviously busy and loud, slow and quiet, full of angry people, full of pleasant people? Are you outside in the middle of one of nature's spectacles—sunset/sunrise, snowstorm, fog, electrical storm, animal migration. . . ? If a dominant impression does not suggest itself to you at that moment, think about coming back at another time.
2. Whether or not a single focus is clear yet, you still need to take notes. One way to gather valuable details is to create a list of sensory impressions, including *sight*, *sound*, *touch*, *smell*, and *taste*.  
You will probably find that sight and sound are the easiest sense impression to record, but you may be able to find several in the other categories, especially touch.
3. Jot some brief notes to yourself on the people present and how they interact. Pay attention to their actions. Are they friendly, cooperative, competitive, angry, isolated, quiet, busy, rowdy . . . ?
4. Jot down physical dimensions of the area, and be prepared to tell your reader where one object is in relation to another.
5. Include **colors** under the sight column on your sensory list.
6. Try to create a comparison while you watch your place, perhaps as a metaphor or simile (i.e., “the waiter was as busy as a squirrel burying acorns in autumn”). (For more on metaphor/simile, see pp. 473–474.)
7. Try to catch a few lines of dialogue as close to word-for-word as possible.

Working with others can save you work.

If a dominant impression is not yet clear, it is probably time to get someone else involved. Of course you will meet with group members and spend time discussing your notes in class, but you can often talk to a family member, friend, writing center staff member, or your instructor to help focus the description before class.

### JOURNAL ENTRY 5-2

How can you describe the overall feeling of your place in a sentence or two? Does there seem to be a lot of activity, are people in a good mood, does the action seem chaotic? Perhaps your place is restful or has a soothing quality? Maybe you have selected an outdoor area that impresses you as rugged and wild? Review your prewriting notes, and then write out in one sentence the overall feeling you think you can communicate to your audience about the place. (Remember, a place can feel different to another person, and there are often several similar words useful for describing the overall impression.)

### Organizing Ideas

Keep details that show the dominant impression—delete distracting details.

After gathering sensory details, listing the names of specific things in your place, and recording actions, now is the time to select and arrange the material most related to the overall feeling you want to give about your place. You will probably find a few unneeded details in your lists and some that even contradict the dominant impression, so this is a good time to weed out the junk. But as you begin to draft, other useful details will come to you, so don't limit yourself to your prewriting notes. Good ideas come to writers throughout the process of drafting and revising.

Below you will see a prewriting list for Jo Lucas’s place paragraph, “Our Family Outing” (pp. 101–102), with several details crossed out that distract from the overall impression she wanted to show of activity and family fun:

Sight	Sound	Touch	Smell	Taste
40 lanes: kids having fun, black bumper pads, computer scoring, Cosmic Bowl (dark with black lights), smoke	Noisy games		Lane oil smell	All the food
Bowling balls: blue, pink, orange, green, yellow				
Wall: red, blue, green, yellow	Laughing children	Hot cheese	Hamburgers,	
Arcade games: blue print carpet	People talking		French fries	
Main service desk	Game tokens clatter		Popcorn	
Snack bar	Sizzling hamburgers		Chili, cheese	
Backstop restaurant: TVs, pool tables, batting cages, birthday parties		<del>AC too cold</del>		<del>Taste of spearmint gum</del>
<del>Lazy food servers, husband and wife arguing, dad yelling at his son</del>				

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The details that you keep you will arrange in a roughly spatial order, as we practiced in Activity 5-9. Jo Lucas chose to organize her description as she progressed into and through the family fun center. However you arrange your material, top to bottom, front to back, and so forth, remain reasonably consistent in the ordering of details.

After organizing your material, write at least a rough **topic sentence** that names the place and states the dominant impression, as in the following topic sentences from the chapter student models. The place is underlined once and the dominant impression word twice:

1. The most peaceful activity I know of on a clear, dry night is relaxing around an open campfire.
2. With my morning cup of coffee in hand, I head toward the most tranquil part of my house, my front porch.

Move straight from the topic sentence into the description, and be sure to locate your reader within the scene by using plenty of space and time transitions (words like *above*, *near*, *next to*, *first*, *after*, *finally*). (For more transitions, see pp. 53–54).

Move from the topic sentence directly into description.

**JOURNAL ENTRY 5-3**

How will you organize the details of your place description: from top to bottom, from outside to inside, from one side to another, from far to near? Can you picture yourself in a fixed spot inside a room, or do you see yourself walking through the place? After you have reviewed your notes, write a paragraph explaining how you will organize and why this method makes sense to you.

**Drafting**

With the preliminary work done, you are almost ready to write your first draft. But before you plunge in, take a moment to review the Drafting suggestions in Chapter 1, pp. 12–13, and to think about the following points:

1. Describe a place; do not tell a story. A story, which we will write in Chapter 7, is a series of actions connected by time, leading to a high point and resolution of the action. Your description may have plenty of action in it, as all our chapter student models do, but the actions will only be to illustrate the dominant impression.
2. Do feel free to include action description along with dialogue.
3. Occasionally tell the reader what to think about your details and how you feel about them (for more on this, see the chapter student models).
4. Add more, not less. Specific words and sensory details are essential. Even if you overdescribe in the first draft, you can always cut unneeded material later.

**JOURNAL ENTRY 5-4**

After you have completed the first rough draft, take a moment to reflect on your work, and then write two brief paragraphs of four or five sentences each. In the first paragraph tell what you like most about the draft and why; in the second, tell what you like least and why. Be as specific as possible. This self-assessment can help you decide where to begin revising.

**Revising Drafts**

To review the detailed lists for revising first, second, and final drafts, turn to Chapter 4.

**ANNOTATED STUDENT MODEL**

Let's look closely at how another student successfully completed the assignment, working through the writing process: gathering ideas, drafting, revising, and finally editing to create an interesting, well-focused, vivid description of a family fun center. To see a prewriting list for this paragraph, turn to p. 97.

Keep in mind that revision seldom occurs in tidy, well-defined packages. You will sometimes edit early in the revision process and change content in a later draft. The following draft stages, however, will help *focus* your revision efforts.

### First-Stage Draft

These first four sentences deleted to tighten topic sentence

*It's Friday night, and the whole family is wondering what to do. We could go catch a movie or save some money and just rent a video. They just built a new Blockbuster down the street, so it's easy to pick one up. After a little debate, we finally decide on bowling. We all pile in the car and my husband drives and soon we are there—Incred-a-Bowl. And it is pretty incredible, there's so much there for a family to do. As you walk in the place you can see all kinds of activity. People are laughing and talking, employees are busy checking out bowling shoes, and you can see the balls rolling down the alleys into the pins. There is a huge arcade with brightly lit and noisy arcade games. You can also see people helping customers. Further along is the snack bar. You can smell the aroma of freshly popped popcorn and hamburgers on the grill. If you keep looking, you will see the Backstop restaurant with televisions mounted around the room, near the ceiling. Each television is on a different sports channel, so you don't miss a play of any sport. They have put the bumper pads in the gutters for the small kids so they can knock over a few pins. Tonight is the Cosmic Bowl. This is where they turn the regular lights off and turn the black lights on. They turn the smoke machines on and it gives the effect of outer space. The bowling balls glow as they are rolling down the lanes. Everyone is laughing and enjoying themselves.*

### Second-Stage Draft

Sensory details added: colors, smells, sounds

*It's Friday night, and we are at the Incred-A-Bowl, which is the largest and busiest family fun center in Johnson County. As we walk through the main entrance of the fun center, you can immediately detect the scent of the lane oil. The wall above the pins, of the forty shiny synthetic lanes, is painted in fluorescent red, blue, yellow, and green colors. Off to the left is the huge arcade, with its blue print carpet, and brightly lit and noisy arcade games. There are children everywhere laughing and screaming, as they play there games and collect their tickets. You can hear the clatter of tokens, as parents get change for their bills in the token machine. To the right of the entrance, where we came in, is the control desk. Here, people are talking, laughing, and helping customers. Further down the crowded concourse is the snack bar. You can smell the aroma of freshly popped popcorn, and hamburgers sizzling on the charbroil grill. To the left of the snack bar, is the Backstop restaurant. It is decorated with all kinds of sports memorabilia. There are thirteen inch televisions mounted around the room, near the white ceiling. Each television is on a different sports channel, so you don't miss a play of any sport. Upstairs in the restaurant are pool tables and batting cages. Back downstairs there are some birthday parties going on. They have put the bumper pads in the gutters for the small kids. They are now jumping, clapping, and screaming as their pink, blue, yellow, green, and orange balls hit the pins. Tonight they are having a Cosmic Bowl. This is where they turn*

Topic sentence revised

Action through "-ings"

Specific words added

Another location added

Locator phrases added

Action through "-ings"

the regular lights off and turn the black lights on above the lanes. They turn the smoke machines on and it gives the effect of outer space. **The blue, pink, orange, green, and yellow** bowling balls glow as they are rolling down the lanes. Everyone is laughing and enjoying themselves. *This is a great place to keep family ties close.*

Closing sentence added

Expanded thought in conclusion

### Special Points to Check in Revising from First to Second Drafts

1. Added sensory details are shaded.
2. Added specific words are boxed.
3. Added locator phrases are underlined.

As you work through your own first draft, watch for these problem areas:

- Unfocused dominant impression
- Too many sentences leading into the description
- Weak concluding sentence
- Too few specific words and sensory details

Moving into a third-stage draft, Lucas polished her work for word choices and sentence variety.

### Third-Stage Draft

#### Our Family Outing

Title added

It's Friday night, and we are at the Incred-A-Bowl, which is the largest and busiest family fun center in Johnson County. As we walk through the main entrance ~~of the fun center~~, you can immediately detect the scent of the lane oil. The wall above the pins, of the forty shiny synthetic lanes, is painted in fluorescent red, blue, yellow, and green colors. Off to the left is the huge arcade, with its blue print carpet, and brightly lit and noisy arcade games. There are children everywhere laughing and screaming, as they play there games and collect their tickets. You can hear the clatter of tokens, as parents get change for their bills in the token machine. To the right of the entrance, where we came in, is the control desk. Here, **seven** people are talking, laughing, and helping customers. **[Further down the crowded concourse is the snack bar where you can smell the aroma of freshly popped popcorn, and hamburgers sizzling on the charbroil grill.]** Someone has just purchased an order of **chili cheese fries**. It looks so sinful, with its **homemade chili** and **hot nacho cheese**. **[To the left of the snack bar is the Backstop restaurant, which is decorated with all kinds of sports memorabilia.]** There are thirteen-inch televisions mounted around the room, near the white ceiling. Each **tv** is on a different ~~sports~~ channel, so you don't miss a play of any sport. Upstairs in the restaurant are pool tables and batting cages. This is where many **parents** take their **sons** and **daughters** to practice batting the upcoming

Material added

Material added

Material added

**baseball season**. Back downstairs there are some birthday parties going on. [They have put the **black** bumper pads in the gutters for the small kids, who are now jumping, clapping, and screaming as their pink, blue, yellow, green, and orange balls hit the pins.] The **computerized scoring** is a nice feature, because it allows the parents to participate in the fun instead of having to keep score. [Tonight they are having a Cosmic Bowl, which is where they turn the regular lights off and turn the black lights on above the lanes.] They turn the smoke machines on, and it gives the effect of outer space. The ~~blue, pink, orange, green, and yellow~~ **multicolored** bowling balls glow as they roll down the lanes. Everyone is laughing and enjoying themselves. This is a great place to keep family ties close.

### Special Points to Check in Revising from Second to Third Drafts

1. **Added sensory details are shaded.**
2. **Added specific words are boxed.**
3. [Combined sentences are in brackets.]
4. **Synonyms for repeated words are in bold.**
5. ~~Unneeded words are lined through.~~

Here is the last draft of “Our Family Outing,” the one where Jo Lucas will work closely on editing. This is the time to slow down, focusing on each word and applying the grammar and punctuation rules we have learned so far, especially for commas.

### Final-Editing Draft

#### Our Family Outing

It’s Friday night, and we are at the Incred-A-Bowl, which is the largest and busiest family fun center in Johnson County. As we walk through the main entrance, <sup>9a</sup> **you** <sup>4</sup> I (or we) can immediately detect the scent of the lane oil. The wall above the pins, of the forty shiny synthetic lanes, is painted in **fluorescent** <sup>1</sup> fluorescent red, blue, yellow, and green colors. Off to the left is the huge arcade, with its blue print carpet, and brightly lit and noisy arcade games. There are children everywhere laughing and screaming, as they play **there** <sup>2</sup> their games and collect their tickets. **You** <sup>4</sup> I (or we) can hear the clatter of tokens, as parents get change for their bills in the token machine. To the right of the entrance, where we came in, is the control desk. Here, seven people are talking, laughing, and helping customers, <sup>6</sup>. Further down the crowded concourse is the snack bar. **You** <sup>4</sup> I (or we) can smell the aroma of freshly popped popcorn and hamburgers sizzling on the charcoal grill. Someone has just purchased an order of chili cheese fries. It looks so sinful, <sup>6</sup> with its homemade chili and hot nacho cheese. To the left of the snack bar is the Backstop restaurant, which

is decorated with all kinds of sports memorabilia. There are thirteen-inch televisions mounted around the room, near the white ceiling. Each **tv**<sup>7</sup> TV is on a different sports channel, so you **don't**<sup>8</sup> don't miss a play of any sport. Upstairs in the restaurant are pool tables and batting cages<sup>3</sup>. This is where many parents take their sons and daughters to practice batting<sup>3</sup> for the upcoming baseball season. Back downstairs there are some birthday parties going on. They have put the black bumper pads in the gutters for the small kids<sup>9b</sup>, who are now jumping, clapping, and screaming as their pink, blue, yellow, green, and orange balls hit the pins. The computerized scoring is a nice feature because it allows the parents to participate in the fun instead of having to keep score. Tonight they are having a Cosmic Bowl<sup>9b</sup>, which is where they turn the regular lights off and turn the black lights on above the lanes. They turn the smoke machines on<sup>9c</sup> and it gives the effect of outer space. The multicolored bowling balls glow as they are rolling down the lanes. **Everyone is**<sup>4</sup> All the people are laughing and enjoying themselves. This is a great place to keep family ties close.

Jo Lucas

#### Special Points to Check in Editing Final Drafts

- |                      |                          |                            |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Spelling          | 5. Sentence fragments    | 9. Common comma categories |
| 2. Sound-alike words | 6. Comma splices/run-ons | a. Introduce               |
| 3. Missing words     | 7. Capitalizations       | b. Enclose/end             |
| 4. Wrong words       | 8. Apostrophes           | c. Divide                  |
|                      |                          | 10. Unneeded commas        |

#### Final-Draft Checklist

Before you turn your final draft in for a grade, take a few minutes to review this checklist. You may find that, as careful as you think you have been, you still have missed a point or two—or three. (For more on any of these points, see Chapter 4.)

- 1. Are you really describing a place and not slipping into a narrative (story)?
- 2. Does your description have an overall point (dominant impression)?
- 3. Are you occasionally telling your reader what to think about the details?
- 4. Are you occasionally letting your reader know how you feel about the place?
- 5. Are you using enough specific language?
- 6. How well are you using sensory details?
- 7. How effective is your topic sentence?
- 8. How effective is your concluding sentence?

- 9. How well connected are all the sentences within the paragraph?
- 10. Are you choosing the most “active” verbs and “-ings” to describe action?
- 11. Are your sentences varied in length and beginnings?
- 12. Have you repeated a word or phrase so often that it becomes noticeable?
- 13. Have you included words that serve no purpose?
- 14. Have you written a title for the paper? (Check capitalizations)
- 15. Have you prepared your paper according to the format expected by your instructor? (Check to see if you need a title page, be sure to double-space, leave at least 1-inch margins, use a 12-point font, and be sure to type or word process.)
- 16. Have you edited your work as closely as you know how to (including having at least one other person—classmate, friend, family member—proofread closely)? Have you checked your **Improvement Chart** for your pattern errors so that you can look for them specifically?
- 17. Have you looked specifically for the following errors: spelling, sound-alike words, missing words, wrong words, sentence fragments, comma splices/run-ons, capitalizations, apostrophes, and the Big Three comma categories?

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

1. Describing is the process of relating details to build vivid images.
2. Descriptive writing relies on specific words and sensory details.
3. Words can be relatively general or relatively specific—the more specific a word, the clearer the image.
4. Description is often found in narrative, expository, and persuasive writing.
5. Writers often focus their description through a dominant impression.
6. A topic sentence in a paragraph of description usually includes the place and dominant impression.
7. Descriptions are often organized spatially.
8. Descriptions are strengthened by transitional words that locate readers in time and space.
9. Subjective descriptions can be strengthened by the writer revealing his or her thoughts and emotions.
10. Action is often part of description, including people moving and speaking.
11. Writing is never complete until it has gone through several revisions and careful editing.

**ALTERNATE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

While the focus of this chapter has been on illustrating a place, there are many other uses for description. As you consider the following assignment options, keep these points in mind:

- Decide on a dominant impression.
- State the dominant impression in your topic sentence.
- Rely on specific words and sensory details to develop your dominant impression.
- Conclude with a sentence that links to the topic sentence and expands the thought.
- Connect your sentences with time and place words.

1. **Describe a person:** Find someone you know reasonably well or someone you come in contact with regularly enough to observe her appearance (physical look and clothing) and actions (how she walks, stands, and sits; body language; mannerisms). Listen closely to the person and try to record some characteristic dialogue. Your goal is to create a verbal portrait of this person so that someone who has not met your person would recognize her from your description. Focus your description with an overall dominant impression, such as sloppy, well groomed, athletic, lazy, talkative, shy, funny, angry, and so on.

2. **Describe an object:** Select an object that you can observe closely and take notes on. This object could range from the small and ordinary (salt shaker, toaster oven, wrench) to the large and more unusual (construction crane, new Corvette, office building). Your goal is to capture the dominant impression of the object through description. For instance, your salt shaker might be exceptionally functional. You could describe its look as well as how well the shaker performs its job, dispensing salt. The construction crane might suggest power. You could describe the large metal parts and then show the machine in action.

3. **Describe an animal:** You could focus on the domestic scene, selecting a household pet (dog, cat, hamster, iguana); the rural, choosing, say, a farm animal (cow, horse, pig, chicken); or the outdoors in your neighborhood, noting some of the typical wildlife (squirrel, rabbit, bird, garter snake). Again the trick is to focus the description through a dominant impression, some defining trait of the animal. It might be easy and obvious to choose a trait like sloppiness for a pig. But it could be more challenging to try to show the intelligence or loveable qualities of the pig.

4. **Describe an event:** Rather than create a story with organized action leading up to a high point, you would try to capture the overall feeling of an event. Perhaps you have been to a concert that impressed you as chaotic, or as full of human warmth, or as a disaster (complete with bad performances, a rotten sound system, and a violent crowd). Maybe you were in the delivery room when your wife gave birth and noticed how casual the attending physicians seemed—everything under control, just business as usual.

5. **Describe a product:** There are a zillion possibilities for products to describe, but you could limit the field by sticking to one you use regularly. For instance, you might describe your favorite breakfast cereal. Why do you find it appealing? You could focus your description on characteristics like taste, texture, and length of time it stays crunchy.