

## "Still Life" Description Essay

For this, our first piece of word art, our first description essay, we will describe a favorite meal. In 750 words, we will describe the image of food, offering three points of observation and a thesis. But here, we are going to use our five senses to paint the most wonderful specific details in words: sight, smell, taste, touch, and maybe even hearing. To make our words as vivid as possible, use strong verbs and colorful nouns—words that appeal to the reader's senses. Keep away from the "to be" verbs (be, is, are, was, were, been, being).

Here is a "passive" example of description with almost no appeal to the senses:

The sandwich is being eaten by the man.

Here is an "active" example rich in description:

Carl gobbles a hoagie.

Since we are dynamic college students, we should consider references to cite. If we're describing ice cream, we may need to look up something about this ice cream. Dig deeper: research will amplify your authority.

Here are some essential rules for this essay:

Consider one or two works cited.  
 Your essay must be typed in proper MLA format.  
 The checklists and outline in this packet must be filled out and handed in.  
 You will hand in two early rough drafts with your essay.  
 You will read, or have another student read, your opening paragraph to the class (if time allows).

\*Please see the "Checklist for Required Work."



## The Essence of an Academic Essay



### Title

short and sweet: grab the reader's attention  
create a portrait of what's to come

### Introduction

1. Attention getting opener: spurs interest
  - anecdote
  - quotation
  - relevance or cool statistic
  - broad statement that leads into your argument
  - contrast statement that leads into your argument
2. Plan of development (main points with which you will support your argument)
3. Thesis
  - two parts: the subject and your slant on the subject.

### Body Paragraphs:

*With your body paragraphs, you will go from the least important points to most important points, or weakest to strongest support.*

1. topic sentences
  - illustrates main idea of the paragraph
2. Major details (main points)
3. specific details (breaking the main points down. Offering research.)
4. address counter-arguments: either in your major details or after specific details are given.

### Conclusion

*We go full circle back to your thesis here*

1. reemphasis your thesis using other words
2. review your main points
3. prediction or recommendation or a last question

**Essay Review: What is expected in the basic essay.****Introductory Paragraph**

Introduction Plan of development: points 1.2.3 Thesis Statement
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The *introduction* must attract the reader.

The *plan of development* is a list of points that support the thesis. The points are offered in the order they are given.

*Thesis*: the main idea in two parts: topic and your opinion.

**First Supporting Paragraph**

Topic sentence (point 1) Specific evidence
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The topic sentence is the first supporting point for your thesis, and the specific evidence delves into you topic sentence

**Second Supporting Paragraph**

Topic sentence (point 2) Specific evidence
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The topic sentence advances the second supporting point for your thesis, and the specific evidence develops that point.

**Third Supporting Paragraph**

Topic sentence (point 3) Specific evidence
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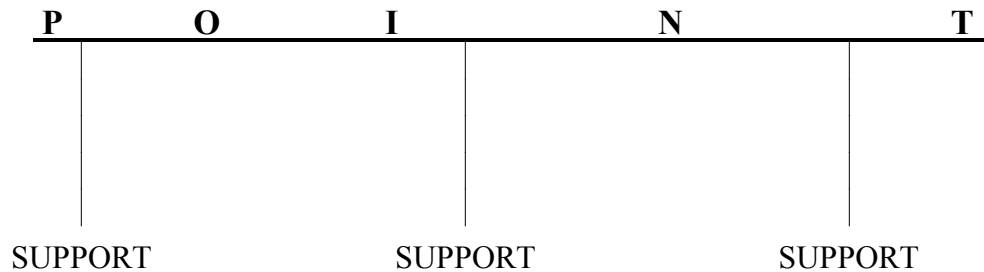
The topic sentence advances the third supporting point for your thesis, and the specific evidence develops that point.

**Concluding Paragraph**

Summary, conclusion or both
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A summary is a broad restatement of the thesis and its main points. A Conclusion is a final thought or tow stemming from the subject of the paper.

## Paragraphs



**Besides transitioning from the paragraph above, every paragraph should begin with a point or topic sentence. These are one of the three points found in your plan of development in your first paragraph. Let's look at an example plan of development:**

*Because it gets us into nature, keeps us healthy, and is an individual sport, surfing may be one of the best sports to consider.*

*The plan of development or your points:*

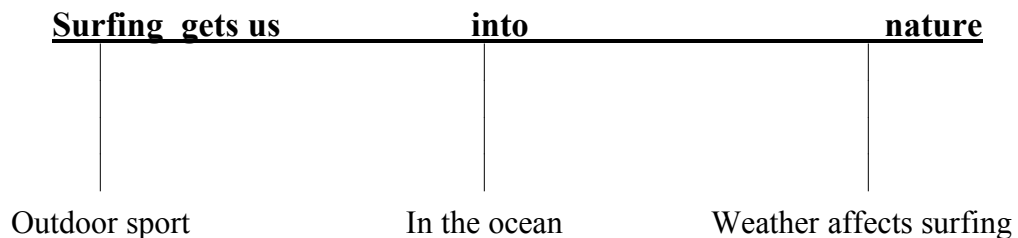
1. Because it gets us into nature,
2. keeps us healthy,
3. and is an individual sport

*These three points will be found as your topic sentences at the start of each paragraph*

*The Thesis: this is the underlying theme of your paper*

Surfing may be one of the best sports to consider.

**And as the illustration above shows us: You offer at least three supports for your topic sentence. In larger papers, you may have to offer more.**



### **Common Methods of Introduction.**

1. **Broad Statement:** Using factory work as an example, you might start out by saying the following: Working in a factory might be one of the worst jobs. And then you go into the specific factory that you're writing about, for example, an egg factory.

2. **Contrast:** Start with an idea that is the opposite of the one you will develop: working in an office is a nice, clean job. You have comfortable chairs, a desk, a computer, a cup of coffee nearby, but working in a factory does not have the niceties found in an office.

3. **Relevance:** What makes your topic special? Convince the reader that the topic applies to them or is important. So many of our ancestors, when they first came to this country, found themselves working in factories.

4. **Anecdote:** An interesting short story that coaxes the reader into the world of your essay. The story should be related to your thesis. I once met a man named Victor who was missing two of his fingers. Victor told me that he lost his fingers because of an accident at work. He caught his hand in the wheels of a conveyor belt at the egg factory where he worked.

5. **Quotation:** Quote something from your research, or find a dictionary quote that relates to your topic:

“Perhaps it seemed to me,” Wrote Henry David Thoreau, “that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any time for that one” (342). This is how I felt after working in an egg factory for two years. I had other lives to live. I had wasted enough of my life here.

### **Concluding Paragraph**

The concluding paragraph should summarize the essay by restating the thesis and even restating the main supporting points. Also, the conclusion brings your paper to a graceful end, leaving the reader with a final thought on the subject. Here is where you get to offer your opinion on the subject.

### **Three Ways to Conclude Your Paper using La Jolla Shores (a local beach) as an example.**

1. End with a summary or final thought:

La Jolla Shores, then, is one of the most inviting beaches in San Diego. The beaches there are wider, cleaner, and safer. It is not surprising that a growing number of San Diegans are traveling to La Jolla Shores to experience this great beach.

2. A thought-provoking question:

Appeal to the reader that your subject is bigger than your essay.

Comment on any one of these:

The future

Which choice should be made

Why is your subject important

Wouldn't La Jolla Shores be the beach of choice for anyone who wants to experience an enjoyable day by the ocean?

3. A prediction or recommendation

Even with its growing popularity, La Jolla Shores will always be the most pleasant beach experiences San Diego has to offer.

## Quotations

Use a colon when a quote is introduced by an independent clause:

Judith Ortiz Cofer tells us: "It was as if the heart of the city map were being gradually colored in brown—café- con-leche brown. Our color" (156).

A comma follows when the quote is melded into the sentence:

When asked what writing forms she uses, Amy tan says, "I use them all---all the Englishes I grew up with" (38).

Use no punctuation with the word "that":

Comparing our minds to the ocean, Steven Kings says that "I think that our minds are the same nutrient bath all the way down to the bottom, and different things live at different levels" (20).

Quotes can be placed at different parts of your sentences. This operandi adds variety to your writing.

### Beginning

"I preferred, much preferred, my version," Maya Angelou writes in "The Angel of the candy counter" (153).

### Middle

Bell hooks tells the reader that "As I wrote, I felt that I was not concerned with accuracy of detail as I was with evoking in writing a state of mind, the spirit of a particular moment"(164)—a good lesson for all writers of autobiography.

### End

In "Judgment of the Birds," Loren Eiseley explains: "It is commonplace of all religious thought, even the most primitive, that the man seeking visions and insight must go apart from his fellows and live for a time in the wilderness" (105).

## Long Quotations

Place quotations longer than four typed lines in a free-standing block of typewritten lines, and omit quotation marks. Start the quotation on a new line, indented one inch from the left margin, and maintain double-spacing. Your parenthetical citation should come after the closing punctuation mark. When quoting verse, maintain original line breaks. (You should maintain double-spacing throughout your essay.)

**Value Words (words that raise awareness of the reader)**

Resistant, crucial, absurd, logical, important, negligent, telling, ethical, nightmare, observant, bleak, restrictive, amalgam, disgusting, marginal, insignificant, primordial, reasonable, compelling, consistent, resistant, undesirable, sufficient, remarkable, focus, should, affinity, foreshadows, equivocal, necessary, evident, persuasive, tarnish.

**Signal Words**

**Words that introduce ideas (use with author's names)**

Demonstrates

Comments, describes

Reports

Says, points out

Contends, develops

Concludes, argues

Proposes

Warns

Emphasizes

Notes

Observes

Predicts, insists, indicates

**Word Bridges**

**(Words that connect ideas. These are great for transitioning)**

Moreover, further

Conversely

Nevertheless (don't use however for nevertheless)

Nonetheless

Additionally

For example

However, but

Furthermore

Therefore

Finally, in conclusion

First, second. . .

Consequently

Also, specifically, for instance

Similarly, on the other hand

Next, hence

**Outline Form for Essays**

**Thesis Statement (paragraph #1)**

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**1<sup>st</sup> supporting point for paragraph #2 (transition from previous paragraph: First, etc.)**

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Specific support #1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Specific support #2 \_\_\_\_\_

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Specific support #3 \_\_\_\_\_

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**2<sup>nd</sup> supporting point for paragraph #3 (transition from previous paragraph)**

Transition remark and topic sentence \_\_\_\_\_

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Specific support #1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Specific support #2 \_\_\_\_\_

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Specific support #3 \_\_\_\_\_

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**3<sup>rd</sup> supporting point for paragraph #4 (Transition from previous paragraph)**

Transition remark and topic sentence \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Specific support #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Specific support #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Specific support #3 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Concluding remark (tie into your final paragraph)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion: (tie-in 3 points and thesis)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Description Checklist

\_\_\_\_\_ I have made it clear in my opening paragraph what I will write about.

\_\_\_\_\_ I offered a good, strong thesis and stuck to this thesis throughout my essay.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have offered three points (plan of development) in which to explore the description I chose.

\_\_\_\_\_ I stuck to my method of development. (1-3-1)

\_\_\_\_\_ I have used transition words as I moved to each subject and from paragraph to paragraph, so my essay reads smoothly like water rolling down a hill. There are no sudden changes of subjects without gracefully transitioning into them.

\_\_\_\_\_ My concluding paragraph binds my essay together and brings me back to the thesis of my essay.

\_\_\_\_\_ My simple sentences offer one thought only.

\_\_\_\_\_ I vary my sentences. I make sure to use compound and complex sentences, so my essay has a musical quality to it, but I do not overdo it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have reviewed my essay and removed all redundant words. I avoided wordiness and stuck to concision.

\_\_\_\_\_ I've used strong verbs and colorful nouns instead of adjectives and adverbs.

\_\_\_\_\_ Instead of linking verb (be, is, am, was, were, been, being) I used strong, picture-forming verbs.

\_\_\_\_\_ I emphasized the five senses: smell, touch, hearing, taste, sight

**Checklist for Required Work**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Prewriting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Copies of research
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rough draft
- \_\_\_\_\_ Two edited drafts (with correction marks)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Peer (or individual) evaluation checklists.
- \_\_\_\_\_ two works cited
- \_\_\_\_\_ quotation from our readings, properly introduced and cited.
- \_\_\_\_\_ proper MLA format has been followed
- \_\_\_\_\_ outline form filled out to be handed in
- \_\_\_\_\_ You will read, or have another student read, your opening paragraph to the class.

**Peer (or individual) Evaluations**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Read the essay once without making any comment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Draw a line under any awkward wording that is difficult to understand.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Correct spelling or grammar errors that really stick out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Highlight the thesis statement (or draw a wavy line under it)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plan of Development there? Draw a straight line under the support points.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Highlight or wavy line under topic sentences in each paragraph.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Circle transitional words and phrases.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Write the words “vague” or “specific” in the margins next to specific details.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Circle or highlight: slang, clichés, repetition, and misspelled words.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If MLA format is off, state at bottom of paper.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the focus clear? Which parts lose you? Make comments in side spaces of essay.

Write your last name above the title.

## Grading Rubric for Essays and Papers

Grade	A	B	C	D
<b>Unity (Purpose)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis is not only argumentative, but is also “surprising” or “risky” and responds to assignment clearly.</li> <li>Essay’s purpose is clear, shows strong plan of development and originality.</li> <li><b>All material on target in support of thesis.</b> Makes one point and sticks to it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis is argumentative, responds to assignment clearly and reflects author’s purpose</li> <li>Essay’s purpose is clear, but could use a little more originality and independent thought</li> <li>Good sense of material but point is spread too thin, maybe off Point a bit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis is argumentative, but could respond to assignment and reflect author’s purpose more clearly</li> <li>Essay’s purpose is somewhat clear, but lacks originality and independent thought</li> <li>Barely hits the target in support of thesis, but does stick to a point.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis not argumentative and does not respond to assignment or reflect author’s purpose clearly</li> <li>Essay’s purpose is unclear</li> <li>Off target, unclear. Not sure what point is.</li> </ul>
<b>Support: Do you back up your points?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan of development supported through specific evidence and sound, thorough reasoning</li> <li><b>Topic sentence</b> identifies paragraph’s content.</li> <li>Strong, vivid specifics that support the topic sentence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan of development is supported with a good amount of evidence and sound reasoning.</li> <li>Topic sentences reflect <i>most</i> paragraphs content but not totally on target.</li> <li>Specific evidence is there but not as strong or vivid as it could be.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan of development is supported with some evidence and reasoning.</li> <li><b>Topic sentences</b> do not consistently reflect paragraph content</li> <li><b>Specific evidence</b> is somewhat unclear and a bit ineffective..</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claims and ideas are underdeveloped and unsupported</li> <li>Topic sentences unclear or non-existent</li> <li>Specific evidence is unclear and ineffective.</li> </ul>
<b>Coherence: Organized and connected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall message of paragraphs is logical and purposeful with a clear method of organization.</li> <li>Quotes are synthesized well with text.</li> <li><b>Transitions</b> and connecting words used to tie material together. Good sense of flow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall message of paragraphs is mostly logical and purposeful yet organized</li> <li>Quotes are synthesized fairly well with text.</li> <li><b>Transitions</b> indicate relationships between paragraphs. OK sense of flow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall message of paragraphs is sometimes illogical with <i>basic</i> organization.</li> <li>Quotes are somewhat synthesized into text, but sometimes random.</li> <li><b>Transitions</b> sometimes do not indicate relationships between paragraphs. No sense of flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall message of paragraphs is inadequate.</li> <li>No quotes or quotes are not synthesized into text</li> <li>Transitions fail to indicate relationships between paragraph</li> </ul>
<b>Sentence skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The essay is free from grammatical or mechanical errors</li> <li>Word choice is specific, purposeful, dynamic, and varied throughout essay</li> <li>Sentences are clear, active (Subject – Verb – Object), and to the point</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grammatical or mechanical errors exist, but not enough to distract from reading</li> <li>Word choice is specific and purposeful, and somewhat varied throughout essay</li> <li>Sentences are mostly clear, active (SVO), and to the point</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grammatical or mechanical errors distract somewhat from reading</li> <li>Word choice is often unspecific, generic, redundant, and clichéd</li> <li>Sentences are somewhat unclear; excessive use of passive voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper is full of grammatical and mechanical errors</li> <li>Word choice is excessively redundant, clichéd, and unspecific</li> <li>Sentences are very unclear</li> </ul>
<b>MLA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conforms to MLA rules for formatting and citation of sources perfectly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conforms to MLA rules for formatting and citation of sources with minor exceptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conforms to MLA rules for formatting and citation of sources with several, somewhat major, exceptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often fails to conform to MLA rules for formatting and citation of sources</li> </ul>

Comment