

Descriptive writing: the planner, the seven techniques, and a word bank

Plan in five minutes

The subject and the mood (four words): _____

Camera stop 1 (wide): _____

Camera stop 2 (closer): _____

Camera stop 3 (close): _____

One detail for each sense (sight / sound / smell / touch / taste): _____

One comparison, true to the subject: _____

The last image: _____

The seven techniques: tick each one you used

- ☐ The senses, specifically: one precise detail, not a list
- ☐ Show, don't tell: evidence, not the feeling named
- ☐ Precise nouns and strong verbs; adjectives only when they add
- ☐ Figurative language sparingly: one comparison per idea
- ☐ Varied sentence length: long to build, short to land
- ☐ A structure that moves: wide to close, or in time
- ☐ A controlled ending: an image, not a summary

Word bank

Sense	Nouns	Verbs	Avoid
Sight	glare, haze, silhouette, glint, rust, soot, grain, shadow, outline	flicker, loom, glint, smear, blaze, fade, hunch, sprawl	beautiful, bright, big, dark
Sound	hiss, murmur, clatter, hum, creak, thud, drone, whistle, echo	rattle, crackle, drum, rasp, mutter, roar, snap, whine	loud, noisy, quiet
Smell	diesel, woodsmoke, damp, jasmine, frying oil, wet stone, rust, salt	drift, cling, hang, sting, rise, seep	nice, bad, smelly
Touch	grit, grain, chill, film, static, bark, splinter, slick, damp	prickle, cling, numb, scrape, press, chafe	soft, hard, cold
Taste	salt, ash, metal, sourness, sugar, dust	linger, coat, sting, bite	delicious, yummy
Movement	shuffle, lurch, drift, surge, scatter, stall	hurry, edge, slump, sidle, jostle, slip	walk, go, move

A model paragraph, annotated, and the mistakes

A railway station at dawn

The sentence	The technique
The first thing was the smell: coal smoke and wet stone, before the platform was even in sight.	A sense other than sight; a specific pair, not a list
Under the iron roof the light came grey through a century of soot, and the pigeons had not yet woken.	Precise nouns (iron, soot); a detail that tells the time
A porter's whistle cut through the hiss of the engine.	Sound; a strong verb
Three hundred feet shuffled toward platform four.	Show: the crowd without the word crowd
Nobody spoke.	A short sentence to land
On a bench by the tea stall, an old man held a steel tumbler in both hands and watched the steam rise, as if it were the only warm thing in the city.	One simile, true to the moment; the camera closes on one person

What the exams reward

Exam	Scores
GCSE English Language (Q5)	A deliberate structure; precise vocabulary; varied sentences; controlled punctuation; sustained tone
Cambridge IGCSE 0500	Well-chosen detail and a sense of the whole (16); precise, varied vocabulary and sentence control (24); 350 to 450 words
CBSE Class 9-10	Content, order, expression and accuracy in 100 to 150 words
US grades 6-8	Sensory detail, precise and figurative language, organisation, conventions

The six mistakes

- [] Telling the feeling instead of showing the evidence
- [] Adjective strings instead of one precise noun
- [] A simile in every sentence
- [] Sight only
- [] No structure for the reader to follow
- [] The summary ending ('a day I will never forget')

Five words that mark a draft as unfinished

very, really, beautiful, amazing, nice: find each one and replace it with the thing itself.

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