

## Choosing the Right Words for More Powerful Descriptions

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## Why is it important that we write good descriptions?

- Relate to your audience & ensure they understand the material
- Provide a convincing argument
- Eliminate misunderstandings
- Engender trust and create cooperative readers

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## Remember Rules 1 & 2 of writing good descriptions:

- Rule 1:
  - Use clear and concise language
  - Evoke the five senses
  - Put the reader in the place you're describing/help them picture the object you're describing

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## Compare:

### Gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*)

Long, glossy fur, light brown to brown. Ears dark, usually black; longer than in any other myotis; when laid forward extend 1/4 cm (7 mm) beyond nose. Tragus long and thin. Calcar keeled.

### Mariana fruit bat (*Pteropus mariannus mariannus*)

The Mariana fruit bat is a medium-sized fruit bat in the family Pteropodidae that weighs 0.66 to 1.15 pounds (330 to 577 grams) and has a forearm length ranging from 5.3 to 6.1 in (13.4 to 15.6 cm); males are slightly larger than females. The underside (abdomen) is colored black to brown, with gray hair interspersed, creating a grizzled appearance. The shoulders (mantle) and sides of the neck are usually bright golden brown, but may be paler in some individuals. The head varies from brown to dark brown. The well-formed and rounded ears and large eyes give the face a canine appearance; members of the family Pteropodidae often are referred to as flying foxes.

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- Rule 2
  - Organize the description in a logical manner
  - Organizational techniques: chronological, cyclical, spatial, comparison

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Just north of the nation's first wildlife refuge, Pelican Island, on Florida's Atlantic coast, is the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, the most important nesting area for endangered loggerhead and green sea turtles in the Western Hemisphere. Hundreds of the enormous turtles swim long distances each June to haul themselves onto the same beaches where they themselves hatched, carefully dig their nests in the sand, and lay 100 or more eggs. Two or three months later, the eggs hatch and young turtles dig their way up through the sand, get their bearings from the luminescent surf, and rush for the sea.

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## Preparation techniques to help you apply the Rules

- Planning, drafting and revising
- Free-writing, sketching, creative thinking about the object/place
- Begin with the end in mind
- Choosing the right words and knowing what “word resources” there are

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## Planning

- What/where are you going to describe
- What is your reason for writing the description? (remember the Writing Triangle)
- Are there particular qualities you want to focus on?

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## Drafting

- What details are important?
- What details should be included to ensure readers come away with a vivid impression?

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## Revision

- Have you provided enough detail?
- Have you left out any minor but important details?
- Are there any unnecessary details?
- Are your paragraphs ordered effectively?

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The first sight of Kofa is awesome—jagged peaks rising abruptly several thousand feet from the desert floor, altering in hue with every light change. It is stunning during a springburst of brilliant fuchsia and gold cactus and paloverde bloom, with one of Kofa’s famed bighorn sheep marked out against the sky, the distant mountains receding in shades of purple and blue sunset.

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## Exercise!

- You are a refuge manager. You are asked to write a description of your refuge for a visitor brochure.
- Consider the planning and drafting process and who your audience is.
- What types of details might you choose to include?
- Take three minutes to jot down some thoughts.
- When you’re done, click on the green checkmark or “raise your hand”

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## Techniques for developing your description

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### Describe an item from memory

- Close your eyes
- Picture the object in your mind
- Imagine you are close enough to touch it. Imagine holding it.
- Look at it closely
- What does it look like? Feel like? Smell like?
- Open your eyes and free-write for one to two minutes.

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### Sketch

- Draw a picture of the object
- Forces you to recall details
- Freehand sketch for one minute

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### Begin with the end in mind

- What do you want your description to accomplish?
- What should the outcomes be for you and the reader?
- Take notes

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### Exercise!

- I'll give you the name of something
- Use a preparation technique to help focus your description
- Take five minutes to write a description (don't worry too much about grammar, etc.)

### Waterfall

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### Word choice

- Helps create a relationship with the reader
- How to make good word choices in your descriptions:
  - Use a thesaurus (book or Word version)
  - Read good descriptive writing: books, magazines, newspapers, etc.
  - "Show, don't tell"

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**"Telling":**

Great Lakes piping plovers utilize the open, sandy beaches, barrier islands, and sand spits formed along the Great Lakes' perimeters by wave action. They do not inhabit lakeshore areas where high bluffs formed by severe erosion have replaced beach habitat. They prefer sparsely vegetated open sand, gravel, or cobble for a nest site. They forage along the rack line where invertebrates are most readily available.

**"Showing":**

If your eyes are strong, you may search the sky and see him, wings aflutter, circling among the woolly clouds. If your eyes are weak, don't try it; just watch the fence posts. Soon a flash of silver will tell you on which post the plover has alighted and folded his long wings. Whoever invented the word "grace" must have seen the wing-folding of the plover.

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**Remember...**

- Planning, drafting, revising
- Describe an item from memory
- Sketching
- Begin with the end in mind
- Keep your "word resources" handy
- READ good descriptive writing

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