

PAPER #1: DESCRIPTIVE NARRATIVE (10%)
(“SPATIAL STORYTELLING”)

Due Friday 3/11

For your first paper, you will write an 800 word (minimum) descriptive essay, using only the descriptions of a place and the details within that space to tell a story.

Don't think of this as a typical “beginning, middle, end” story with a plot, characters, dialogue & action. You are simply describing a place to me, trying to give me a clear visual of what it looks like. Something has happened in this place, but it's over now; the people are gone, and all that remains is what was left behind. By showing me the place and describing what's left over, I should be able to figure out what happened. I am the detective trying to figure out the story, and you are the one giving me the clues.

- The place you choose to focus on could be anywhere: it could be a bedroom, a coffee shop, a car, a bank, a hospital, a medieval castle, a space station—*anywhere*. It could be a place that exists in real life, one that only exists in fiction or mythology, or one you completely made up yourself. Or it could be a kind of hybrid of reality and fantasy, e.g. a real place that has imaginary or made-up elements in it.
- Whatever happened in this place is already over and done. The people are gone, the action is finished; we are just looking at the end result. Basically, think of it like time is on pause, and you are just giving me a snapshot of the place through your descriptions.
- Whatever details you choose to describe about this place should be clues that help me figure out the story. So, for instance, if a murder happened in this place, show me the blood stains on the walls. If it's a bedroom of a student who just got accepted to college, show me the acceptance letter on their desk. I should be able to figure out what happened based on what you show me.
- You should *not* have characters walking around, doing things, talking, etc. Remember, the action is supposed to be already over, and time is on pause. However, you are of course allowed to make references to characters in your descriptions. For example, you could describe a photograph of Susan on the wall, but you shouldn't have Susan herself walking around and doing things.
- Try to keep focused on a single place. I don't mean that you have to stick to a single *room*; you could describe a house by going from room to room. But don't venture outside the house—stay focused just on that one location. This will keep you from getting too overwhelmed.
- **“Show, don't tell.”** Don't simply come out and explain what things mean. Let the visuals speak for themselves. For example, if you show a bunch of bloodstains on the wall, don't say “These are the bloodstains from when Steve got murdered!” That's boring to read. Just show me what's there and let *me* guess what it means. If you do a good job, I should be able to figure it out.
- **Organize your description in a logical way.** Think about how you would really move throughout this place if you were there, where your eyes would go first. Don't jump around from

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one room to another and then back again, or from inside to outside without warning. If you're describing the left side of the room, finish describing everything that's there before you move on to the right side of the room. Divide different chunks of information into paragraphs.

- **HELPFUL TIP:** Show me big or eye-catching things first before the little details. For instance, say you're describing an abandoned building and you write something like this:

“A line of ants is crawling up the far wall, alongside the edge of the window. The air is dim and dusty. A huge elephant stands in the middle of the room.”

That's going to make me stop and go, “Whoa, hold on, how did you notice the ants on the other side of the room before the ELEPHANT?!” It won't feel natural to describe things in that order. So think about what your eyes would see first when you walk into the room, and describe things in that order.

- **Avoid using the first-person “I.”** In most papers, it's completely fine to use the first-person “I.” But since this story is not supposed to have any active characters, it's best to avoid it. Pretend you are simply a camera, showing me what's here. Rather than saying, “I open the door and can't believe what a mess the room is!,” instead just say “The room is a horrible mess!”
 - **NOTE:** It *is* okay if you want to make references to yourself in your descriptions of the place. For example, it's okay if you said something like “My bed stood in the corner.”
- **Write in present-tense verbs.** In other words, don't say “The doorknob was broken,” say “The doorknob is broken.” Talk about it as if you're right there, in the moment. This is not only good practice for paying attention to your verb tenses, but also will help keep your mind grounded in the idea that time is on pause & you are just a camera describing what's in front of you.
- If possible, try to end your story with some kind of dramatic twist, reveal, or punchline that brings it all together. This isn't absolutely required, but it is a good way to make the paper feel complete. For example, if you describe a burned-down building, you could end with some clue that suggests it was arson (gasp!) If you describe an apartment belonging to a cute couple, you could end with a clue that suggests they got engaged (aww!)—or, if you want to go the sad route, a clue that implies they broke up (oh no!). Basically, try to give the whole thing some satisfying resolution.

THINK OF THIS AS “SPATIAL STORYTELLING”—IMPLYING A STORY BY DESCRIBING THE SPACE WHERE THE STORY HAPPENED.

SOME MORE EXAMPLES TO HELP GIVE YOU IDEAS

1. Say you want to tell a story about a grandparent who died during your childhood. You could describe the grandparents' house, focusing on an interesting part of the house that you remember clearly, such as a basement full of old keepsakes. Your description of this basement and these keepsakes should tell me something about the grandparent's life and personality, and also about your relationship with him/her. You could even include some imaginary objects in this space (such as a wedding gown, a cradle, a hospital bed) to signify important events in the

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grandparent's life. But focus on just the setting: you and your grandparent should not actually appear in the story, except maybe in photographs or something like that.

2. A very different but equally acceptable example: say your story is about a road trip you took with some friends. You could describe what the car looks like after the trip is over and everyone has gone home. Show me the objects that are left behind in the car (i.e. trash, ticket stubs, empty sunscreen bottles) to give me hints about what happened on the trip and about you and your friends' personalities. Again, though, focus just on the space itself and the objects inside it: you and your friends should not actually appear in the story, except maybe in photos.
3. Yet another example: you could describe a completely imaginary space which represents a memory or emotional experience that was meaningful to you. Say you went through a period of depression or loneliness in your life: you might describe an island that represents your mental state, full of objects that you associate with that time in your life. Or say you once achieved an amazing life goal: you could describe a mountain from bottom to top, with objects all along the path to the top that represent your journey to achieve that goal. In this example, the place & objects you describe wouldn't be literal, but would rather have a symbolic meaning.

Be imaginative! Think outside the box!

PURPOSES OF THIS ASSIGNMENT

- **Descriptive Writing:** This assignment is meant to challenge your descriptive writing skills, forcing you to create a clear visual picture while working within several limitations. Be as descriptive with your words as possible! Use vivid, specific words rather than vague, bland words. Think about which words and images would be the *best* ones to use to really help me picture everything in my head.
- **Audience Awareness:** One of the most difficult challenges of writing and communicating in any form is being aware of your audience and how they might interpret (or misinterpret!) what you're saying. Since you aren't allowed to tell me the story directly, but must provide me enough clues in your description that I can figure it out, this paper is designed to make you think hard about how a reader might interpret your words. Are you being clear enough? Are you giving enough clues? Are they presented in a way that's easy to follow, so the reader can make connections?
- **Organization:** One of the requirements of this assignment is that you organize your description into a logical flow, describe things in an order that makes sense, and divide your chunks of information into paragraphs. Knowing how to organize and structure your content is a useful skill no matter what kind of writing you're doing!

FORMAT REQUIREMENTS:

- 800 words minimum (note: I don't mind if you go over the word count, but don't go under it)
- Font: Times New Roman, 12 pt.
- Double-spaced; indented paragraphs; no extra spaces between paragraphs, please.
- MLA style heading and page numbers

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ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES:

- **Brainstorming** = due Thursday 3/3 (on paper)
 - This is a quick exercise where you come up with ideas for what to write about. It should be done on physical paper, and should be at least a complete page, but you can do it in whatever way you find to be personally most helpful to you. Please complete this assignment on paper and either turn it in to me in person, or upload pictures to Canvas.
- **Rough Draft** = due Sunday 3/6
 - Submit your rough draft of Paper #1 to Canvas by no later than midnight on Sunday night. It should be at least 500 words, though it doesn't have to have an ending yet. At the end of your rough draft, please include at least 3 questions about the paper that you want your peer review partner to answer, e.g. "Do you think ___ part is weak? How would you suggest improving ___?"
- **Peer Review** = due Tuesday 3/8
 - You will be randomly assigned someone else's rough draft to peer review. Look over it, leave feedback for how they might improve, and fill out the rubric that will be included. To get full credit for this assignment, you must 1) edit the paper, 2) answer the questions your partner asked at the end of their paper, and provide some general feedback; and 3) fill out the rubric, with comments where applicable.
 - Someone else will also be looking over your own rough draft, so use their feedback when you are typing up your final draft!
- **Final Draft** = due Friday 3/11 (online)
 - Submit the final 800-word (minimum) version of Paper #1 by no later than midnight on Friday. Make sure you look over the Paper #1 checklist beforehand to be sure you have met all the requirements! Remember, I do not accept late work when it comes to the three big papers. Once midnight hits, if I don't have your paper, it's a zero—no exceptions.
- **Revision** (optional) = due anytime before Sunday 5/15
 - After I have graded your paper and given you feedback, you have the option to revise the paper again and turn in a new version in order to raise your grade. How much your grade changes depends on how much work you put into it and how much you take my feedback into consideration. You may submit a revision anytime throughout the semester. All revisions should be sent to me either through Canvas inbox or email, with the subject line clearly stating what it is.
 - NOTE: You may not actually see an improvement in your grade for a while, especially if you turn in a revision early, since I often don't get around to grading them till close to the end of the semester.

OTHER OPTIONAL HELP:

- I will be giving everyone basic feedback on your rough drafts, but if you'd like me to give you more detailed feedback (helping with grammar, organization, etc.), then you can email your rough drafts to me early and I will look over them when I have time. However, I will not look over any rough drafts sent to me the day before the final draft is due, so make sure you send it before then—the earlier, the better!

For any questions or concerns, please email me: klotzem@gmail.com or emily.klotz@hccs.edu

- You may also have an HCC tutor look over your rough draft ahead of time. You can contact an online tutor by going to <https://hccs.upswing.io/>. Provide me with evidence that a tutor looked at your paper, and I will give you extra credit points. 😊