**Elements of Description**

Descriptive writing gives a vivid picture to the reader. Description is telling what our five senses observe. Good description contains the following elements:

1. **Sensory Details** – vivid language that appeals to the five senses: taste, touch, smell, sight and sound. Be sure to include *all* 5.
2. **Comparisons** (similes and metaphors) – the writer clarifies for the reader. Make the unknown known by comparing it with the already familiar (brain// broccoli; tiger// a big cat)
3. **Literary Devices and Figures of Speech** – personification, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, alliteration, etc.
4. **References** – to people (height, body type, hair, features, etc.,), objects (colour, texture, shape, etc.), and places (features, temperatures, nature, business, etc.).
5. **Diction**: to draw mental pictures that are vivid as well as accurate, you must consider not only the fundamental idea behind the words (denotative), but the shades of associated meaning of which they have become possessed (connotative)

Eg. denotative connotative

* Basic - implied
* House - home
* Fat - plump
* Famous - notorious

1. **Point of view** – Decide on a particular point of view. Is it physical, mental or emotional?
2. **Organize** your selection of detail carefully. You may use the following plans:
3. *Chronological order* – the details are revealed in the order they are seen
4. *Order of space* – the details are arranged from top to bottom, near to far, left to right, outside to inside, etc.
5. *Climactic Order* – the less important details are presented at the beginning and the details of greatest significance are pictured last.
6. *Logical order* – the general characteristics are given first while the particular details follow.

**Description vs. Narration:**

*Recall*: A “narrative” attempts to tell the reader a story. It provides a narration of a plotline. It focuses on a sequence of events (conflicts, rising action, climax, falling action etc).

Descriptive writing focuses on *describing one of these* *moments* in a plotline, a character from a story, or an object. Therefore, avoid providing a summary of events or relaying information about what is happening in the scene. Instead, discuss the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feeling that scene evokes. (\*Note: You may need to include some *hints* of a plot event to make your descriptive piece develop).

**A narrative piece of writing looks and sounds like…  
  
“***The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix-- the villagers pronounced this name "Dellacroy"--eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at the boys. and the very small children rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.”*

**Whereas a descriptive piece of writing looks and sounds like…**

*“Then the creeping murderer, the octopus, steals out, slowly, softly, moving like a gray mist, pretending now to be a bit of weed, now a rock, now a lump of decaying meat while its evil goat eyes watch coldly. It oozes and flows toward a feeding crab, and as it comes close, its yellow eyes burn and its body turns rosy with the pulsing colour of anticipation and rage. Then suddenly it runs lightly on the tips of its arms, as ferociously as a charging cat. It leaps savagely on the crab, there is a puff of black liquid, and the struggling mass is obscured in the sepia cloud while the octopus murders the crab.”*

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

Questions:

1. What changes in the shape, colour, and movement of the octopus did the writer observe?
2. Name the other colours observed by the writer.
3. Why are the verbs “oozes” and “flows” particularly suitable to describe the movements of the octopus as it approaches the crab?
4. The smallest details observed by the writer were the eyes of the octopus. What change did he notice in these?
5. What comparisons are used by Steinbeck to help his reader see the movement of the octopus as he saw it.
6. From each of the last two sentences, select an adverb that suggests the fierce quality of this movement.
7. Select the noun used in the first sentence to indicate the writer’s strong feeling about the attack he observed. Find a verb in the last sentence that repeats the idea suggested by the noun.