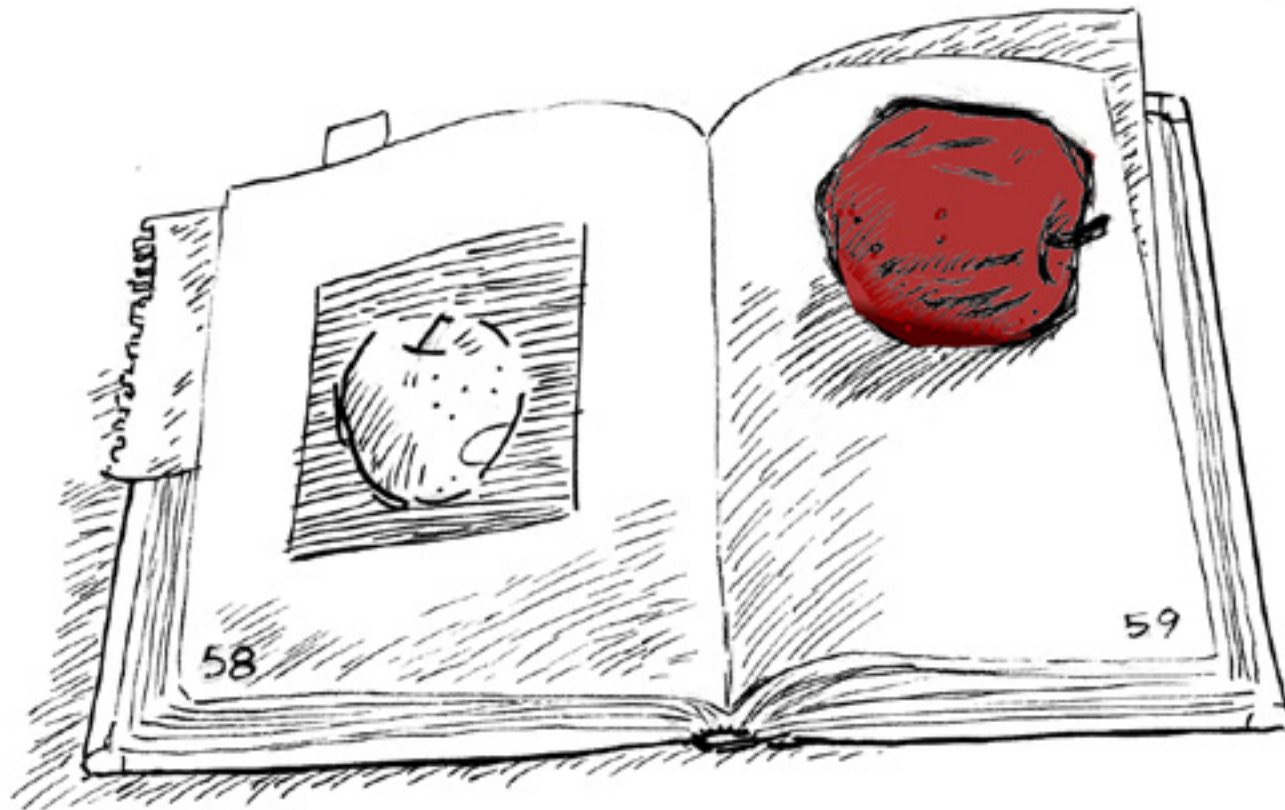


Descriptions & Literary Devices



Types of Description

**The are two types of descriptions,
both contain a form of opinionated language:**

- Objective
- Subjective

Objective Descriptions

Objective descriptions: these remain neutral to the author's feelings, yet contain strong sensory words to connect with the reader. The sentence shown in the below example is arbitrary due to the use of the phrase:

“unexpected citrus scent”

which stresses a *possible* reaction from the audience if they smell this particular species of rose. The author does not reflect his/her personal feelings towards the rose itself.

example:

The Hampshire rose, with a pale-off-white hue, has an unexpected citrus scent when cultivated properly.

Subjective Descriptions

On the other hand, **subjective descriptions** want to convey an *emotional* response and capture the author's opinions, all in order to get a *reaction* from the audience. In the example provided, it is clear the author has an agenda and wants to shift your emotional reaction to his/her cause. Material such as this would fit a specific industry, a political commentaries, newspaper editorials, or other genres which require overt opinions. *Be careful when using this technique.* If too obvious, or too didactic you will turn your audience away from your writing. The example below overstates its judgements.

example:

Desperate to free his twisted, bloody leg from the rusty teeth of the trap, the timber wolf savagely and fanatically gnawed through his own flesh and muscle.

Literary Devices

Two important literary devices used in all forms of writing are the *metaphor* and the *simile*.

Both metaphors and similes have the same function, which is to *describe* a *comparison* between elements; even in essay writing, strong descriptive language can embellish a paragraph, or reinforce an opinion.

Simile

A simile makes comparisons of elements and ties them together with key words:

like or ***as***.

example:

*The manuscript's yellow pages proved to be
as bright as a late October moon.*

Metaphor

On the other hand, a metaphor uses language that *implies a relationship* between two unlikely elements. A well known example comes from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

example:

All the world's a stage.

•

There are various types of metaphors.

Three basic metaphors are:

- **extended metaphor**
- **implied metaphor**
- **mixed metaphor**

Extended Metaphor

This type of metaphor motions beyond the opening phrase and continues its theme into subsequent sentences. Again, using the Shakespearian phrase itself, the monologue continues:

example:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.*

Implied Metaphors

In the case of implied metaphors, these are more subtle, “hidden” or indirect metaphors. Poetry uses this technique; it can be argued that any full poem is an implied metaphor to explain a poet’s theme.

example:

Angrily she barked commands at her husband.

Mixed Metaphor

In the case of a mixed metaphor, these types of devices create an analogy between elements which cancel one another out or sound ridiculous when paired together. For comedy or sarcastic writing these can embellish your work. However, for a serious academic research paper an instructor may be prone to count off for illogical reasoning.

example:

All at once he was alone in this noisy hive with no place to roost.

—Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*

Sylvia Plath

Metaphors

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*. Ted Hughes, ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

Personification

One other common type of literary device is called *personification*.

This is a figure of speech which gives an inanimate object or an abstract idea personalities and human characteristics. For informal essays and creative writing a personification adds a sense of the writer's presence to a project. However, mentioned in the past, as you can guess, this literary device would not work well with a formal research paper.

example:

Death sat in the corner, thoughtfully smoking his pipe, staring at the young men and women in the pub.

Organization

These methods enhance the understanding of the scene you want to describe—

- **chronological**—linear time line; hour by hour accounts or day to day changes
- **spatial**—describing a room in precise order of logical sequence:
top to bottom, left to right; detailing the physical appearance of a person from head to foot
- **emphatic**— minor, mundane details leading to a very extreme element; last point the most compelling; a good example, writing about the psychological effects of living with an alcoholic parent / partner
- **sensory impressions**— arranging paragraphs by smell, sight, hearing, touch, and taste; include as much as possible when tackling this form of organization