

Revision Plus Lesson 1

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LESSON 1: REVISING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS

Writing a descriptive paragraph is usually a successful introductory writing lesson for two main reasons:

- The writing task is manageable because the length of the paragraph is flexible. Students at all skill levels can easily be engaged.
- The topic of the writing can be wide-ranging. Everyone can find a descriptive writing topic they care about and know well.

This lesson offers your students an opportunity to consider their first draft descriptive paragraphs and, using *Revision Plus*, make significant corrections and changes.

Focusing Revision Strategies

From each of the five sets of task cards, select the **eleven** cards discussed below. If any of the revision tasks are unfamiliar to your students, take time to introduce the concepts in a mini-lesson or a series of mini-lessons. You may decide to use one or a few of these cards as your students revise, rather than work with all eleven at once. This will depend upon the skills of your students and the time you have in one class period to devote to revision.

Choice

Find a simple descriptive word.

Replace that word with a more effective one found in a thesaurus.

Initially, as students write their descriptions, they may find themselves choosing very simple words—the first ones that come to mind. At the revision stage, descriptive language may be made more interesting if the writer makes more effective choices using a thesaurus (or the “synonyms” option on a computer).

Choice

Find a place where you used a complex word that is not effective. Write a simpler word that is effective.

Students sometimes believe that “bigger” words are better. Yet, these words can sound awkward if not chosen carefully. This task card reminds students that sometimes it’s best to keep things simple.

Choice

Find a word that is vague (such as “things”). Replace it with a specific, clearer word.

Students can easily slip into using short-cut language that may be

vague, especially when describing a topic they know very well. They clearly imagine lots of details about what they are describing and may not recognize that others need more specific language in order to see the same clear picture.

Ideas

Find a place where description is missing. Add more details to make your “picture” clearer.

When they are describing a topic they know well, writers imagine complex details—they *see, hear, taste, touch* and *smell* everything. Yet they may not include enough of these details in their first draft writing. Reading aloud to a partner may help students recognize where details are missing.

Ideas

Find a place where you have written clear and interesting description. Give yourself a check mark.

This task card provides an opportunity for students to recognize where they were successful in writing description. For those who struggle with this concept, encourage them to revise their description and then to give themselves a check mark.

Organization

Number your sentences in one paragraph so they will be in the best order when you write your next draft.

Reconsidering organization is not a simple task. Students tend to believe that the initial order of their sentences is most coherent—that’s the way they thought of the idea, so it must be logical. To encourage them to think about changing sentence organization, ask students to look at the last sentence in their paragraphs and decide whether this might work as the first sentence. This activity will encourage students to see the organization of their writing differently.

Organization

Find a place where your writing is off topic. Delete the ideas that do not connect to your main topic.

Depending on the length of the descriptive paragraph, the writer may add details that wander off topic or that do not clearly support the main idea of the paragraph. If students have problems identifying ideas that need to be deleted, ask them to underline the main idea of their paragraph, usually stated in the first sentence but sometimes stated in the closing sentence. Then ask them to judge whether or

not each of the remaining sentences clearly support this main idea, putting a check mark or an X in the margin next to each sentence, as reminders for revision.

Correctness

Find an example of unnecessary repetition of words. Correct the problem by deleting words or by replacing them.

For this task, it is important that students consider the concept of “unnecessary repetition.” There are times when repetition is an effective writing choice. Yet, it is common in first draft writing that words are repeated, perhaps because students reach for familiar words as they begin to develop ideas. Encourage students to use a thesaurus (or the “synonyms” option on a computer).

Voice

Find a place where your own writer’s voice is very clear. Give yourself a check mark.

As students build upon their writing experiences, they will begin to see ways in which their choices (themes, words, sentence structures, etc.) help to create individual writer’s voice. Encourage students to recognize the connections between these choices and voice. For those students who may have difficulty recognizing individual writer’s voice, highlight a few clear examples on their draft pages.

Voice

Why is the topic you’ve chosen important to you? Write yourself a brief note to explain your answer.

This is an opportunity for students to reflect on purpose in their writing and to gain a deeper understanding of their personal connections to themes they choose. The writing can become more meaningful when a writer has taken the time to consider the relationship between topic choice and voice.

Decide your own revision task.

This task card gives your students an opportunity to think of specific details in their own descriptions and make changes that will strengthen the writing. Encourage students to explain (either verbally or in writing) their reasons for these revision decisions. This will reinforce what they already know and will give you a clearer understanding of their writing development.

Rethinking and Rewriting

When you are confident that your students are familiar with the tasks you have selected, invite them to form five groups. Give each group the task cards you have selected. It will be more productive if the members of each group work together, one task card at a time. Those who do not need to make changes suggested on the task cards will be able to help by advising others, perhaps showing strong examples from their descriptive writing. You will be free to circulate from group to group, listening to the conversations and noticing when individuals need support from you.

Sharing “Before and After”

Whenever possible, encourage students to share with each other some of the changes they make in their draft writing. This can be achieved by inviting them to work together in small groups or by calling upon individuals to share with the whole class. It will be helpful for those who may be struggling with the revision concepts to see and/or hear the shared examples. You might want to create a classroom display of “before and after” examples generated by the students, particularly when the focus of your lesson is on a specific writing element, such as organization.

Reflecting on Learning

Finally, suggest that students write notes to themselves, perhaps in a writer’s notebook, explaining one strength in their own descriptive writing and one reminder for improvement in the future. These notes can be useful as you confer with students and assess their skill development.