

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY  
ENGLISH 125.068

DUE DATES:

Rough draft: Wednesday, 15 October. Bring 4 copies to class.  
Final: Wednesday, 22 October. Bring 2 copies to class, along with your personal reflection, rough draft, peer reviewer comments, and peer review worksheets.

FORMAT:

5 pages, 12pt Times New Roman, double spaced, one inch margins, stapled.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT:

Construct an essay in which you describe the central issues and terms of your theme in a way that anyone, even those who do not share your expertise, will be able to understand. Doubtless you will also want to let your audience share your enthusiasm. Because of this, your description will likely have an implicit argument: namely, that what you are describing is worth your reader's interest. You will want to be concise, lively, and engaging, taking care to eliminate the dull, trite, and commonplace. You have a unique vantage on your theme, particular to your own experience. Let your reader see as you do.

The central challenge of this piece is that it requires you to anticipate some of the content of your next two essays. Think about what you will want to argue later in the semester, and ask yourself what your reader will need to understand about your theme in order to make sense of your arguments. Ask what terms you will need to bring in, then provide definitions for these terms – not in the dictionary sense, but as they relate to your area of focus. Ask what people will not understand about your theme, or what they may misunderstand, and set them straight. Think of this assignment as the introduction to a book: it should pique interest and provide a brief, nonexhaustive overview of what's coming. Save the nuanced particulars for your later essays. Here, you are laying the foundation for those particulars.

The best descriptions are not laundry lists; their focus is the particular, and their evocation of that focus is as illuminating as it is brief. Recall the example from Ezra Pound, who described the denizens of the Paris Underground in a mere two lines:

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

Words are coins. Use them to get what you want, but be thrifty.