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### **Place with Character (Descriptive) Writing Assignment**

Write a description essay in no less than 500 words on the following topic:

“Place with Character”

1. Locate a place of interest, or as I call it “with character,” for example, Sloss Furnace or Noccalula Falls.
2. Make one or more photographs of the location and upload them in the discussion link.
3. Respond to the other discussion prompts.
4. As you did with the biography, approach this like a popular writing for a magazine. However, continue to use MLA format and formal, standard English.
5. Interview someone who is associated with the location, such as a home owner, tour guide, etc. Follow the same guidelines as you did for the interview for the biography. Record the interview and post a transcription of the interview. (When you write the paper, make sure you introduce the reader in the paper. Do not just randomly begin to quote without the reader knowing who is speaking.) Include a works cited that cites your interview. (See web link on how to cite personal interviews.) Also, cite any other source that you use for information about the location.
6. Indicate a dominant impression that will provide coherence for the paper.
7. Post a draft in the draft discussion and get feedback from your peer group. Be sure to give feedback to those in your peer group.
8. After you get feedback, make any changes needed and the upload the final version in the assignment link by the due date indicated.



Remember to:

- use subjective and objective detail, and be specific
- focus on a dominant impression
- establish a tone early in the writing process
- “show rather than tell”
- DO NOT turn this into a narrative, which is quite different from description!

Restrictions:

- You must be able to see, hear, smell, etc., the place from one vantage point; therefore, you cannot write about a whole city or town, etc.
- Do not turn into “reasons why I like it.”
- Not a “walking tour”
- Must be fixed in time (present)
- Nothing religious (a religious location is fine, but not a religious event or experience please.)

Revised November 2020



## Descriptive Writing Concerns

You need to read carefully the content in your text about descriptive writing. However, there are a few points that I would like to emphasize.

### **Dominant impression-**

You should have a clear, overarching, dominant impression that unifies the essay. The descriptors you select should grow out of and support this dominant impression. Without a dominant impression that unifies the essay, your essay will disintegrate into a mere list.

### **Vivid modifiers-**

Keep in mind that descriptive writing appeals to the senses. You don't have to incorporate all five senses with a descriptive work, but using more than one tends to strengthen your writing. Also, since you are appealing to the senses, your writing should be clear and precise; therefore, you need to use vivid modifiers. It is acceptable to use what I call value words, words that express a subjective judgment, as long as you use vivid modifiers to clarify them.

- Unacceptable: "The beautiful car stunned everyone at the car show."

The term "beautiful" is ambiguous. Which car is the beautiful car? If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, what is a beautiful car for one person might not be the same for another.

- Acceptable: "The beautiful, 1966, candy apple red Mustang stunned everyone at the car show."

The value word "beautiful" is qualified by "1966, candy apple red Mustang." The descriptors are vivid and clear.

### **Spatial (space) order-**

The item you describe will exist in space, in three dimensions. Show the spatial or space relationship of your descriptors, whether you're describing a person, a place, or a thing.

Use words and expressions that reflect space relations, such as the following:

In front	Behind	Beside
Over	Beneath	Between
Next to	Near	Around
In the foreground	In the background	



Caution: Use location, not motion words.

- Unacceptable: “As you walk into the room and look to the right...”

This focuses is on motion rather than spatial order or location. It is not necessary to show motion in order to indicate location. In fact, this highlights one of the most frequent pitfalls that student writers fall into, that of narrating instead of describing. Be careful not to lapse into narrating instead of describing.

- Acceptable: “Inside the room to the right...”

Note that no motion is required to indicate that whatever is being considered is inside the room and to the right. Walking and looking is not required. The item is there whether anyone walks and looks or not.

### **Description, not narrating or musing-**

As I mentioned above, all too often student writers tell a story, thinking they are describing. Certainly, narration usually involves description because stories take place in a specific location and that location needs to be described. The difference between a descriptive paper and a narrative is the focus. Sometimes this is a fine line, but there is a line, nonetheless. For example, you could describe a football field and mention players on the field or fans in the stands. On the other hand, if the focus becomes the event or the experience of the game, then you have lapsed into narrating.

Likewise, student writers often muse about a place and what they like about it without actually or adequately describing it. A clearly stated dominant impression helps avoid this error.

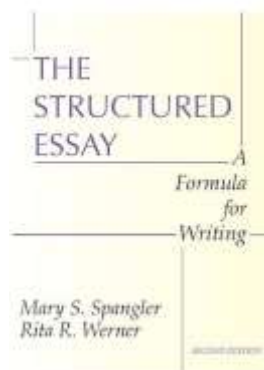
### **Sample descriptive paragraph-**

Below is a sample descriptive paragraph, not a full essay, but it reflects the significant ideas that I discussed above. Note the dominant impression. Note the use of location, not motion words. Note the vivid modifiers. Also note that, though the paragraph is clearly related to a narrative about the discovery of King Tut’s tomb, the paragraph focuses on description. Also note that the writer does not muse, but describes.

On November 27, 1922, when archaeologist Howard Carter unsealed the door to the ancient Egyptian tomb of King Tut, he stared in amazement at the fantastic objectives heaped all around him. On his left lay the wrecks of at least four golden chariots. Against the wall on his right sat a gorgeous chest brightly painted with hunting and battle scenes. Across from him was a gilded throne with cat-shaped legs, arms like winged serpents, and a back showing King Tut and his queen. Behind the throne rose a tall couch decorated with animal faces that were half hippopotamus and half crocodile. The couch was loaded with more treasures. To the right of the couch, two life-sized statues faced



each other like guards. They were black, wore gold skirts and sandals, and had cobras carved on their foreheads. Between them was a second sealed doorway. Carter's heart beat loudly. Would the mummy of King Tut lie beyond it?



Years (and years and years) ago, I borrowed most of the ideas in this handout from The Structured Essay by Spangler and Werner.

## Sample Discussion Post: Exploring Dominant Impression Discussion Post

Dominant Impression is the overarching impression (an adjective) that you can apply to a scene, situation, or person.

Posted are various pictures. Open the pictures one at a time. For each picture determine the dominant impression, the one overarching impression that you have of the scene or the person in the picture. (See the handout Descriptive Writing Concerns.)

(In my LMS page, these are full size images.)







## *A House to Live In*

Elegance and rustic beauty define the home of Joey and Debbie Sanders

Words by Stephen W. B. Rizzo | Images by Al Blanton

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Mid-September 1940. A limousine winds its way through the dusty, dirt roads of Walker County. Seated inside, President Franklin D. Roosevelt surveys a farm purchased with aid from the Bankhead-Jones Farmstead Act.

Almost 50 years later, Debbie and Joey Sanders saved this same property from being crowded with convenience stores and housing developments. Here, five miles from his work at the airport and five from hers at Young Jewelers, they have created their own version of Henry David Thoreau's Walden, a place where history, beauty, and function—along with a healthy serving of Southern hospitality—meet.

In recent years, the Sanders refurbished two 1930s Farmstead homes and retained a 1940s block barn. To transform the terraced farmland, Joey lowered the front three acres six feet to make a place for the home. To this historical setting, they added their current, Georgian-style home.

"We didn't want the front of the house to look like a particular decade," Debbie explains. "We just wanted it to look like we were saying 'You're welcome, come on in, and I'm going to wrap my arms around you.'"

Set on 25 acres, the house was designed in 1991 by architect Jim Earnest. "He took our list of 30 things we wanted in a home, pictures and ideas, then made our master plan," Debbie says.

Completed in 1993, the house includes poured, solid walls, making it hurricane proof, and a geothermal cooling system that circulates water through lines in the pasture or pulls it from a 400-foot-deep well to cool the house. Other features include the fireplace in the den, which is actually a wood-burning furnace that heats the entire house, and a water pumping system that circulates hot water continuously to every faucet, using no more energy than a 100-watt lightbulb.

In the back of the property, the original farm field is now being transformed into a clover field to feed Joey's newest passion—honeybees.

Family and refinement characterize the interior of the home. In the den beneath a frame of Joey's military ribbons and medals are pictures of their daughters' families: Jessica, William, and their son, William "Bunky" Walker; Iris and Grant and their daughter, Monroe "Monie" Jarvis.

The spacious kitchen also reflects the family focus with two special maps. One is a world map covered with pushpins, chronicling their travels, including the refueling route Joey flew across the Atlantic while he was in the Air Force. The other is





a gift from grandson, Bunky, and a custom map of the property from a child's perspective by artist Sarah O'Mary Roberts. The map, pictured above right, includes Billy Goat Gruff's bridge over the creek and the Noah's Ark playset.

In the living room is an antique tea server that once belonged to Debbie's great-grandaunt and a bookshelf that displays a collection of Herend hand-painted porcelain, imported from Hungary. Alongside is a pocket watch, which was passed down from her grandfather Young.

The centerpiece of the living room is a hand-loomed cream-colored rug with a delicate blue design. Debbie is quick to point out this same floor once served as a pathway for Iris and Jessica's tricycles. "We enjoy having our friends here," Debbie says.

But it's the grill house, added five years ago, that has become the social center for family and friends. "The grill house was built with the grandchildren in mind," Debbie says. "The outdoor kitchen is supplied with plenty of snacks. There is a convenient restroom, TV, a toy chest, and music!"

A fireplace and suspended heaters ensure that the grill house is enjoyed virtually year-round for family get-togethers and church group gatherings.

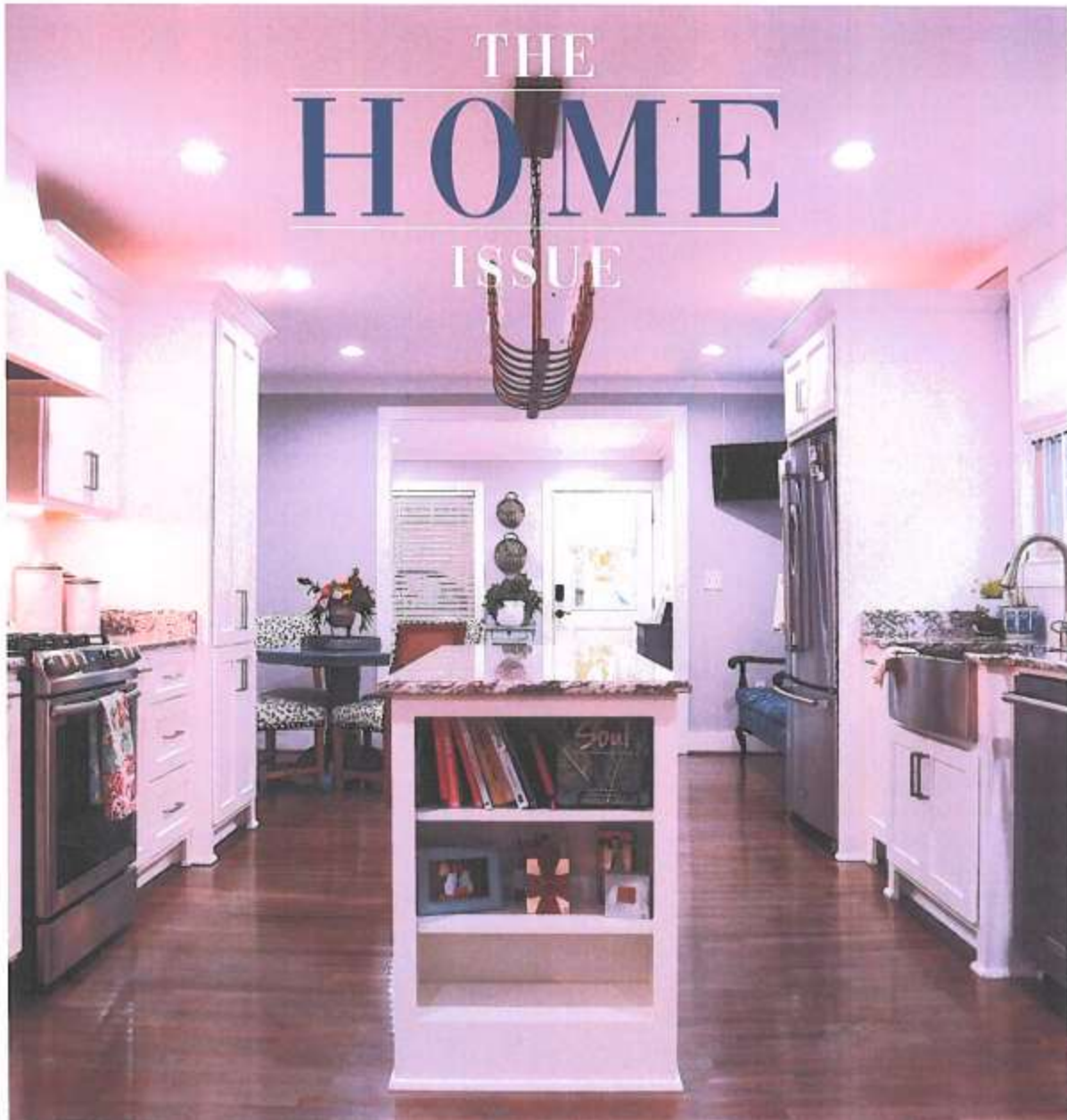
By any measure, the Sanders' house and farm is extraordinary. Still, for all its engineering marvels, the elegant décor, and the breathtaking natural beauty, to the Sanders this is just home. As Debbie puts it, "We use every square inch of this house. We built it to live in." 78



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