

Writing to Describe



Qu. Describe a visit to a fairground.

In real life, we would *never* tell a friend about something *without there being a reason* – if there wasn't, who would want to listen? We *always* have what we might call a 'central idea' running through what we say. This makes the telling easier because *all the time we have at the back of our mind why we're telling it*. With a joke, of course, it's a build up to the punch line; but whenever we relate an incident, we will be telling in a way that builds up to the reason for telling...this is because we've learned it's the way of telling that is interesting to hear. Here, this writer wants to let his reader in on the THRILL and FUN of a visit to the fair. But he's not just going to say, "My visit to the fair was a thrill and fun!" Telling may be quick and easy, but it's not entertaining or convincing: "showing" is far more effective. That's what this writer does – that and releasing the details in a controlled and logical manner, that persuades the reader to want to read on. This means creating an account that has a *clear and useful structure*.

A sense of tension and energy is always better than 'flatness'!

Notice how the structure is helping the writer work the scene through in a logical manner: *this is helpful both to the writer and the reader*.

Sophisticated punctuation... a real mark grabber!

Personification adds an emotional touch to the description.

Walking towards the fairground was a thrill in itself – one that grew with every step. The night was cool but dry: perfect for a great night out! The fair wouldn't be visible until we turned the final corner but already our expectations and the sheer suspense of it all were building to a peak. Sounds were already beginning to pour through the air, "Boom! Boom! Boom!" and laser lights were lighting up the clouds making them seem somehow unearthly and weird. We were going to have the time of our lives.

Always set the scene. Don't miss the chance to get in some description early on! Create a mood or add an atmosphere by describing the quality of the sky, the air, the weather...!

Notice the use of sensory description: what can be seen, heard, etc.

Then we arrived. The first thing we saw, because it was so huge, was the big wheel. The blurb had billed it as the biggest outside of London and wow was it big! It shone like a circle of diamonds in the sky, spangled, bright and vivid. Surely the London Eye can't be bigger than this? How can they transport something that huge on the back of a lorry?

Notice the vivid use of a simile to help your reader to imagine the scene for themselves – "showing" not "telling". – always a mark grabber!

The next thing that hit us was a gloriously warm smell unique to funfairs: a mingling of frying hot dogs, burgers, fried onions, candyfloss, toffee apples and... diesel fumes! This was a delight for the senses: lights, sounds, smells, the thought of tastes to come... even the very air felt electric as if it was alive and urging us to take part. And take part we were going to do! As we looked to our left we saw the scariest ride we'd ever seen, "Hell's Door" it was called. Were for it!

Metaphors also help to show rather than tell the reader and help them imagine the scene and "be there".

Using "active" and precise vocabulary choices such as "jolt", "tossed" and "gushing" add vividly to the description. Precisely chosen words are much more effective than "flat" words boosted by an adjective. Adjectives have their place in description, of course, – but some words seem to come with their own adjectives "built in" – choose them, every time!

As we were strapped into our seats the already electric air became alive with yet more feelings. As the safety restraint descended over our shoulders we felt safer – if safe was the right word for this ride! With a jolt our necks were tossed backwards and off we went, twisting, turning, lights flashing like the vast strobes of a pop concert, rock music gushing out of the giant speakers, first right way round then upside down. This was living to the full. This was "Hell's Door". This was the beginning of a night to remember.

Another simile – too many would spoil the effect, but two or three are very powerful – and gain marks!