Evaluating and Improving Student Writing

Using Description to Develop Characters, Events, and Experiences in Grades 3-5
Module Objectives

• Identify student expectations for using description in narrative writing according to the standards
• Explain why and how to effectively use description in narrative writing
• Explore the use of description in authentic mentor texts and student exemplars
# Use of Description in Narrative Writing

**Georgia Standards of Excellence, Grades 3-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELAGSEW3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.</td>
<td>b. Use dialogue and <strong>description</strong> of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.</td>
<td>b. Use dialogue and <strong>description</strong> to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.</td>
<td>b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, <strong>description</strong>, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.</td>
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Use of Sensory Details in Narrative Writing
Georgia Standards of Excellence, Grades 3-5

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<th>3</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELAGSEW3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.</td>
<td><em>Use of sensory details is not specified at this grade.</em></td>
<td>d. Use concrete words and phrases and <strong>sensory details</strong> to convey experiences and events precisely.</td>
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</table>
Skill of Focus
Use of Description

In narratives, good writers use description to help the reader imagine the characters, settings, and events.

Good writers also use description within dialogue, which heightens the effectiveness of this technique.

Using description requires the writer to use the five senses.
Skill of Focus
Use of Description

Ineffective use of description:

*The kids at my new school were friendly.*

Effective use description:

*I stepped into the classroom. I worried that I would not make new friends in my class. After the teacher introduced me, she asked me to tell the class where I was from. “I moved to Georgia from India,” I said. “This is my first time in the United States.” Everyone in the class smiled at me with shining eyes. “Welcome to our class,” a girl in the front row said. “Would you like to sit with me at lunch today?”*
Skill of Focus
Use of Description

Think...Who are the characters? What is the setting? What is the main event? ....that you need the reader to know.

Describe the characters, setting, and event so readers can create a picture in their mind.

Create unique experiences and events using the five senses.
## Four-Point Holistic Rubric, Grade 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The student’s response is a well-developed narrative that fully develops a real or imagined experience based on text as a stimulus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effectively establishes a situation and introduces a narrator and/or characters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effectively uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop rich, interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses a variety of words and phrases consistently to signal the sequence of events</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses concrete words, phrases, and sensory language consistently to convey experiences or events precisely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Integrates ideas and details from source material effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has very few or no errors in usage and/or conventions that interfere with meaning*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Four-Point Holistic Rubric, Grades 3-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAIT</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
<th>GRADE 3 CRITERIA</th>
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<th>GRADE 5 CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This trait examines the writer’s ability to effectively develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, descriptive details, and clear event sequences based on a text that has been read.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>• Effectively uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue and description to develop interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations</td>
<td>• Effectively uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue and description to develop rich, interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses concrete words and phrases, and sensory language consistently to convey experiences or events precisely</td>
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Mentor Text

Analyzing Author’s Use of Description
Mentor Text
Casey at Bat (Ernest Lawrence Thayer)

• Author introduces two main characters (the pitcher vs. Casey) and supporting characters (the fans, the team) to develop the story
• Creates a setting that includes the allure of American love of baseball at the final half-inning of the game; intense pressure
• Anticipation of winning the game with Casey at bat, but Casey lets two strikes pass him by
• Crowd in a frenzy awaiting the perfect pitch, but Casey strikes out
• **Casey at Bat** (pdf version of the narrative poem)
## Mentor Text Analysis
### Casey at Bat (Ernest Lawrence Thayer)

The author effectively uses...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Description</th>
<th>Use of Sensory Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description…to develop rich, interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations</td>
<td>“upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory language …to convey experiences or events precisely</td>
<td>“It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- “If only Casey could but get a whack at that”
- “Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third”
- “For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.”
- “favored land”
- “And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go”
- “mighty Casey has struck out”

- “there rose a lusty yell”
- “the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air”
- “while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip”
- “The sneer has fled from Casey's lip, the teeth are clenched in hate”

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Richard Woods, Georgia’s School Superintendent | Georgia Department of Education | Educating Georgia’s Future
Milestones Exemplars

Focus on Student Use of Description
Narrative Item and Scoring Samplers
Excerpt from, “A Bright Little Worker”

A Bright Little Worker

The firefighters of Fire Station 6 in Livermore, California, are strong and reliable. They brighten the community. They respond to the community’s needs day and night, during all seasons, and under any conditions.

As hardworking and enduring as the firefighters are, though, there is something in the fire station that has worked longer than they have. It is a four-watt light bulb that has been burning for over 110 years! Though this sounds unusual, so too is the light bulb. It is the Centennial Light Bulb, and it has quite a unique history.

The Centennial Light Bulb was made by the Shelby Electric Company in Shelby, Ohio, around the year 1900. The inventor created a way to improve the filament, or wire, inside the light bulb. He discovered that a thicker filament made the light bulb last longer. However, no one would have guessed that one of the light bulbs would last quite as long as it has.

The Centennial Light Bulb was donated to the fire department in 1901 and has been burning ever since. The fire department has moved it three times. During the moves, the light bulb was shut off for only several minutes. In the 1970s, Guinness World Records announced that the Centennial Light Bulb was the oldest-known working light bulb.

Excerpt from, “The Older, the Better”

The Older, the Better

Several weeks ago, my family decided to make scrambled eggs and toast for breakfast. We plugged the toaster, but it did not work. We were disappointed because it is only three years old. It was just another example of what I have known for a while: the electronics of today are not made as well as the electronics of long ago.

Many people agree with me. My neighbor has a great washing machine that is forty years old. Another friend has a stove from 1952 that still bakes a crisp apple cobbler. My grandmother has a refrigerator from 1930 that keeps tea icy cold. A consumer magazine published an article featuring appliances that were fifty years old and still running well. Examples like these have led me to conclude that items were of higher quality long ago.

One of the best examples of a long-lasting product is the Centennial Light Bulb in California. This light bulb has been burning for over 110 years! That means it has worked for more than 950,000 hours. Compare that to the light bulbs of today. Today’s best light bulbs will last about 50,000 hours. That’s only 5 percent of the time that the Centennial Light Bulb has lasted!
“A Bright Little Worker”
• Provides background about the hardworking firemen as well as a very important light bulb - The Centennial Light Bulb, made by the Shelby Electric Company in Shelby, Ohio, around the year 1900.
• The light bulb had been burning for over 110 years!
• Author states: In an age where so much is disposable, it is refreshing to see a product that lasts.

“The Older, the Better”
• Provides a comparison of items built today to the Centennial Light Bulb - One of the best examples of a long-lasting product is the Centennial Light Bulb in California.
• The author explains that manufacturers of today do not want to create products that last a long time because they want consumers to purchase more of their product.
• The author ends with - Today, manufacturers do not want to create long-lasting products. Years ago, manufacturers did not think that way.
Imagine that you are a Livermore firefighter in 1903. Write an original story in which a firefighter convinces the fire chief to take the Centennial Light Bulb with them when they move to Station 1.

Use the ideas from “A Bright Little Worker” to develop your story.
Grade 5 Narrative Item and Scoring Sampler

Narrative Writer’s Checklist

Be sure to:

• Write a narrative response that develops a real or imagined experience.
• Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters.
• Organize events in a clear and logical order.
  ○ Use a variety of transitional words and phrases to sequence the events.
• Use dialogue, description, and/or pacing to:
  ○ develop events.
  ○ show how characters respond to situations.
• Use concrete words, phrases, and sensory details to describe the events.
• Include a conclusion.
• Use ideas and/or details from the passage(s).
• Check your work for correct usage, grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
"So we're actually moving to a new station, huh?", Watson said, wiping his brow from all the moving they had done that day. "Yeah... We've had some interesting memories here, but I'm guessin' it's time for fate to step in.", Mier replied. Watson glanced over and saw the Centennial Light Bulb which was donated to them two years ago by Dennis Bernal. "What is it Watson?", asked Mier, noticing Watson's curious expression. "I wonder...", Watson jumped up and gasped, "I've got a 'bright' idea!" "Oh goodness boy... That pun tells me trouble...", Mier said, as he put his face into the palm of his hand. "No, no! It's literally a bright idea! I'm gonna ask Paul if we can take the Centennial Light Bulb with us to Station 1!", Watson ran out of the room and into the fire chief's office. "What might you need, Watson?", Paul, the fire chief, said. "How 'bout we take the Centennial Light Bulb with us to Station 1?", Watson asked innocently. "Hmm... I'm not so sure...", Paul replied, rubbing his chin. "Come on! You just gotta do it! I went to a fortune teller and she said that epic history would be made if we brought the bulb with us.", Watson begged. "Voodoo? I don't-" "But Paul please! I swear that if it doesn't contribute to California or even just Livermore's history I'll let you 'fire' me!" Watson was on his knees at this point. "I oughta fire you for all your puns! Fine. We'll bring it with us.", Paul decided, agitated. "Thank you so much! You'll never regret it!", Watson said happily.

• Use of description and/or sensory language is highlighted in blue.
## Writing Analysis

### Student Response

The student effectively uses...

### Use of Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description...to develop rich, interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations</th>
<th>“time for fate to step in”</th>
<th>“noticing Watson's curious expression”</th>
<th>“asked innocently”</th>
<th>“Watson said happily.”</th>
<th>“epic history”</th>
<th>“oughta fire you”</th>
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### Use of Sensory Language

| Sensory language...to convey experiences or events precisely | “wipping his brow” | “rubbing his chin” | “put his face into the palm of his hand” | “Watson was on his knees at this point.” |
It is April 25, 1903 and today all of the people, including me, that work at the fire station are moving to Station 1. I have packed everything I want or need except for one thing, a Centennial Light Bulb. The light bulb that I am mentioning to you is a special light bulb, however. We have had this light bulb for 9 months now, and I think we should bring it to the new station. So, I walked up to the chief and said, "Chief I have to ask you something."

"What is it, son," he replied.

"Can we take the Centennial Light Bulb to the Staion 1?" "Well, why would we need to do that?"

"This light bulb has lasted so long and I feel that it is fairly special."

"I don't see why we can't take it with us." he said to me softly.

I was over the moon that he let me bring the bulb to Staion 1!

• Use of description and/or sensory language is highlighted in blue.
Writing Analysis
Student Response

The student attempts to use...

Use of Description

“The light bulb that I am mentioning to you is a special light bulb.”
“everything I want or need”
“I was over the moon”

Use of Sensory Language

“he said to me softly”
**Excerpt from, “The Golden Fish”**

The Golden Fish

In a small Chinese village lived a poor fisherman. Each day he went to the nearby lake to catch fish that he would later sell at the market. The fisherman made enough money to live a good life, but he was far from being a rich man. I wish I could catch a fish of gold, he thought. Then I would be the richest man in the village, and I would wear the finest clothes and live in a fine house with many rooms. Sadly, the fisherman knew that there was no such thing as a golden fish.

One day, as he did every day, the fisherman was sitting in his boat in the middle of the lake with his fishing line in the water. Suddenly, he felt a sharp tug and quickly began to pull up the line. This must be a big fish, he thought, because the line is very hard to pull! Finally, the fisherman pulled the fish out of the water. He blinked once. He blinked twice. The fisherman couldn’t believe his eyes. He had just caught a fish made of gold!

“This is the golden fish of my dreams!” exclaimed the fisherman. “What a wonderful surprise!”

Before he could get over this surprise, however, the fisherman was surprised again. The golden fish began to talk!

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**Excerpt from, “Henry’s Lesson”**

Henry’s Lesson

Henry was a bad dog, a very bad dog indeed. He dug up flowerbeds, swam in the neighbors’ pools, and barked at every car that drove by. Henry was never satisfied. He always wanted more. When his owners took him for a walk, the walk was never long enough. When he went to the park to play with the other dogs, he always demanded to stay longer than everyone else. Henry’s owners did everything they could to teach Henry to behave and to be satisfied, but nothing worked. “One day,” they told Henry, “you will learn your lesson.” Maybe, thought Henry, but that day is not today!

One morning Henry woke up very hungry. He gobbled his breakfast and wanted more. He went next door to see his friend Tapper. I hope Tapper has some food to share, thought Henry, as he peeked inside Tapper’s doghouse. To Henry’s surprise, instead of Tapper, he found a huge piece of meat sitting in Tapper’s bowl. Before he could stop himself, Henry snatched the meat between his teeth and ran away.
Grade 4 Narrative Item and Scoring Sampler
Summary of Stimulus Paired Passages

The Golden Fish
- Takes place in a small Chinese village
- Fisherman dreams of becoming rich by catching a golden fish. Suddenly his dream came true when he caught a golden fish, who began to talk to him.
- The golden fish begged for freedom, but the fisherman refused – instead he made a deal with the golden fish. The fish followed through with his part of the deal; the fisherman did not keep his promise. He had become greedy and wanted more.
- The fisherman’s greed led to great loss.
- “Here is your lesson, fisherman. He who is greedy is always in want.”

Henry’s Lesson
- Takes place in a dog’s world – a doghouse and a bridge over water
- The dog, Henry, is hungry and finds a large piece of meat in his friend’s doghouse. Not wanting to get caught eating his friend’s food, he walked over the bridge to hide.
- Then, he saw a larger piece of meat in the river below. He wanted it. He tried to grab the meat and lost the meat in his mouth as it fell into the water.
- The fish in the water said to Henry, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. That is a good lesson for you to learn, my friend.”
In the story “Henry’s Lesson,” a big fish eats the meat Henry drops into the river. Think about how this event might change the way Henry acts from now on. Write a story about what happens the next day when Henry’s owners take him for a walk in the park.

Use details from the story when writing your own story.
Grade 4 Narrative Item and Scoring Sampler

Narrative Writer’s Checklist

Be sure to:

- Develop a real or imagined experience.
- Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters.
- Organize events in order.
  - Use transitional words and phrases to sequence the events.
- Use dialogue and/or description to:
  - develop events.
  - show how characters respond to situations.
- Use concrete words, phrases, and sensory details to describe the events.
- Include a conclusion.
- Use ideas and/or details from the passage(s).
- Check your work for correct usage, grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
The next day, Henry’s owner took him for a walk in the park. To their surprise, Tapper and his owners were their, too. Tapper raced over to Henry and said “Guess what?” “What,” Henry answered, but he knew what Tapper was going to say. “Yesterday, I had a big piece of meat in my doghouse for breakfast, but my water was running out so, I went inside to get some more. “ Henry asked nervously, “What happened next?” Tapper replied,

“Well, I got some more water, but when I got back in my dog house the meat was gone!” Henry hung his head.

“Well, here’s the thing, I took your mean because I was really hungry and I went to burry it, but then I saw an even bigger piece of meat in the river but I dropped it in and a fish ate it.” He said in one long breath. Tapper was devastated that his friend would steal from him but then said, “You know, you really have to learn to be satisfied with what you already have, but sometimes all you have to do is ask.” Henry sighed, “I’m really sorry that neither of us got to have any of that delicious meat.”

At that moment Tapper pulls out a giant piece of meat, even bigger and juicier than the one lost in the river! He said, “If I share this piece of meat with you, will you promise me that instead of stealing, you will always ask?” Henry wagged his tail. “Yes, yes, I will!” he replied. “You’re the best friend a dog could ask for!”

- Use of description and/or sensory language is highlighted in blue.
The student effectively uses…

**Use of Description**

- Description...to develop rich, interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations
- Sensory language...to convey experiences or events precisely

> “Henry answered, but he knew what Tapper was going to say.”
> “Henry asked nervously”
> “devastated that his friend would steal from him”
> “You’re the best friend a dog could ask for.”

**Use of Sensory Language**

> “Henry hung his head”
> “a giant piece of meat, even bigger and juicier than the one lost in the river”
> “He said in one long breath”
> “all you have to do is ask.” Henry sighed”
Next morning Henry’s owners took him for a walk. Henry played with his friends and had a good time. Henry’s owners called for him to get back on his leash. He came running back. His owners were surprised he came back and didn’t want no more time, but Henry had learned his lesson and was ready to go back home.

• Use of description and/or sensory language is highlighted in blue.
Writing Analysis
Student Response

The student attempts to use...

Use of Description ★

Description... to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations

Words or phrases... to convey experiences and events

“Henry played with his friends and had a good time.”
“His owners were surprized he came back and didn't want no more time”

Use of Sensory Language ★

“He came running back.”
Excerpt from, “Fruits and Vegetables”

Fruits and Vegetables

What is the difference between fruits and vegetables? They are easy to confuse. Both are parts of plants. But if you ask botanists—people who study plants—they can tell you the main difference: fruits help make sure that more new plants will grow.

What makes it a fruit?

If you want to know whether something you’re served is a fruit, a good question to ask is, “Does it have seeds?” According to botanists, a fruit is the seed-producing part of a flowering plant. Fruit has
Fruits and Vegetables

• People think of fruits as sweet food for snacks or dessert, which is sometimes true, but not always.

• The best way to tell a fruit from a vegetable is to look at the seeds. Fruits and vegetables both have seeds, but unlike vegetables, fruits need to separate from plants, so that the seeds inside can grow into new plants.

• Seeds inside – it’s a fruit.
• Seeds outside – it’s a vegetable.
Imagine someone brings you a food from a strange plant. They want to know if the food is a fruit or a vegetable. Write an original story in which you work to find out if the food is a fruit or vegetable.

Be sure to use information from the article to help you develop details in your story.
Grade 3 Narrative Item and Scoring Sampler

Narrative Writer’s Checklist

Be sure to:

• Develop a real or imagined experience.
• Include a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters.
• Organize events in order.
  ○ Use words and phrases to show the sequence of events.
• Use dialogue and/or descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to:
  ○ develop events.
  ○ show how characters respond to situations.
• Include a conclusion.
• Use ideas and/or details from the passage(s).
• Check your work for correct usage, grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
Grade 3 Narrative Item and Scoring Sampler

Student Response

Yesterday, someone brought some sort of food. I was at a new resteraunt by the Mall of Georgia. I couldn’t tell what it was so, I asked our waitress. She smiled and replied, “It’s a new plant. The boss wants you to figure out if it’s a fruit or a veggie. “I quickly asked her if she knew where it was from. “All I know is it’s been dug up.”, she said. This was going to be a test of my vegetable and fruit knowledge. Luckily, I knew alot. Carefully, I cut open the weird plant. It was full of the smallest seeds I had seen in my life. The husk was rough and pale purple with green pocka dots. So far it was hard to tell what this weird thing was. Then I took a bite. It was sweet and delightful. Finally, after pulling all of my hints together and coming to a conclusion, I called the waitress to my table. “This”, I said, pointing to the plant “is a fruit. Oh ,and can you bring me another?” “Sure” she said.

• Use of description is highlighted in blue.
Writing Analysis
Student Response

The student effectively uses...

Use of Description ★

Description...to develop interesting experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations

“She smiled”
“Carefully, I cut open the weird plant. It was full of the smallest seeds I had seen in my life.”
“The husk was rough and pale purple with green pockadots.”
“sweet and delightful”
My name is jacob and this is a story about me.

One day I walk down the street and some lady asks me is a strange thing a fruit or a vegetable. I reply "give it to me and I will find out".

That night I cut it open and it has little seeds. Then I scan it and make shure it is edible. It is so I eat it and it tastes citrusey.

The next morning I bring it back to the lady tell her it is a fruit.

- Use of description is highlighted in blue.
The student attempts to use...

Use of Description

“little seeds”
“tastes citracey”

Description... to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations
Conclusion

• Standards W3b and W3d specify that students use description and sensory details to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.

• The primary purpose of using description in narratives is to help the reader imagine the characters, settings, and events, within a story.

• In narratives, good writers use description and sensory details to answer three important questions: who are the characters, what is the setting, and what is the main event?

• Use of description and sensory details, or sensory language, are both criteria evident in the Georgia Milestones narrative writing rubric across grade levels and courses.
Additional Support
Resources & Professional Learning
Georgia Milestones Assessment System Resources

• Assessment Guides

• Study Guides
  ➢ Comprehensive Writing Unit inclusive of Narrative Writing

• Item & Scoring Samplers
  ➢ Stand-alone Narrative Sampler

• Writing Rubrics

• Writer’s Checklists
  ➢ Narrative Genre
English Language Arts Curriculum & Instruction Resource

Narrative Writing Professional Learning
Participants will explore resources for both interpreting and teaching the narrative writing standard.

*Presenters: English Language Arts Team, Georgia Department of Education - Curriculum and Instruction*

The learning can be accessed at [GeorgiaStandards.org](http://GeorgiaStandards.org).