

Writing Details

General: It was a cold morning.

Specific: It was ten degrees below zero.

Concrete: On the porch the milk cartons bulged.

General: Some children were playing ball in the lot.

Specific: In Carson's lot, three boys were playing with a football.

Concrete: In Carson's muddy lot, three boys tossed a football back and forth.

General: One time the old lady who lived next door warned me to keep my dog out of her garden.

Specific: One August evening the old lady who lived next door, Mrs. Harrell, warned me, "Better keep that hound out of my tomatoes."

Concrete: One hot August evening Mrs. Harrell, wrinkled and gray-haired, leaned over the back fence, peered at me through wire-framed spectacles, and quavered, "Better keep that hound out of my tomatoes."

What's going on here with those 3 sets of sentences?

Terms to know:

Specific details—exact information—who, what, when, where, how many. Names, places, numbers

Concrete details—specific details that are more exact through sense appeals—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

Revise these sentences using specific details:

1. I saw birds in the garden.
2. A book is on the table.
3. The boy climbed a tree.
4. They spent the holiday on his boat.
5. She gave them candy.
6. He tripped over something in the dark.
7. I love the sound of the ocean.
8. He stepped on her shoe.
9. After studying for a long time I wanted a snack.
10. She listened to her favorite music.

Now, become even more specific. Be selectively specific with six of the above sentences:

1. birds in tropics or in backyard or in the arctic
2. book in kindergarten class, college class, someone's home
3. in Vermont, in Hawaii, in Florida
4. at Halloween, at Christmas
7. on a quiet summer evening, during a storm
8. in gym class, at the prom



Develop these general statements by adding one or two specific details or by restating the generalization in specific terms. Do not use concrete details here.

Example: The iron was hot. (general statement)

The iron was hot, about 220 degrees (added detail)

The temperature of the iron was 220 degrees. (restated in specific terms)

1. It rained hard.
2. He is very old.
3. I drove rapidly.
4. Her garden contained several kinds of flowers.

For each of the following general words first make them specific and then add a brief concrete phrase that makes us “experience” the word:

1. junk food
2. shoes
3. teacher
4. pet
5. drink

Preview Practice for what’s coming up:

Turn at least three of the following general phrases into concrete sentences by using appeals to the senses.

You may use more than one sense for your descriptive sentence if you wish.

Example: The stream (general)

The mountain stream flickered through spots of sunlight. (appeal to sight)

N.B. Do not try to describe by stating an opinion about the detail. For example do not write “The mountain stream flickering through spots of sunlight was beautiful” or “The mountain stream was beautiful.”

Do you see what I mean?

1. A spider web across your face
2. Taste of a pickle or an oyster or some other distinctive food
3. Walking barefoot in mud
4. Sunset
5. Smoke in your eyes

- We will do some more work with sensory language that will make your writing POP!
- You will probably all write something that will be published in **Making Waves** too!

For now, be sure you know and use these techniques whenever you write for any class:

**“Don’t tell me the old lady screamed;
bring her on and let her scream.”**

~Mark Twain

