

Teacher's notes

Use sheet 1 to model how to annotate a descriptive passage. You could either give them the passage already annotated, or remove the annotations and model only the first couple, before instructing them to continue. They could then compare their version with other pairs and the original.

Use sheet 2 to model how to use annotations to create original descriptions in a completely different situation. The words in bold are taken directly from the extract on sheet 1. The writing also shows revisions where the writer has either used a thesaurus or thought of better phrasing. Ask them to assess the changes the writer made and see if they can improve the writing further. Basically, this is to encourage the skill of proofreading and revision – particularly where time is plentiful, such as in coursework assignments.

Use sheet 3 to provide students with a guide on how to repeat this exercise independently.

The extract provided at the end of the resource may then be distributed to individuals, pairs or groups. Enlarging it to A3 would allow them plenty of room to make their annotations.

Why not follow this activity with students choosing their own extracts and producing a piece of original description from that? They could then present these to each other for further inspiration.

N.B. Always emphasise to students that they should use the texts **for inspiration only** – plagiarism is completely unacceptable and could mean coursework is disqualified by an exam board.

Inspiration for descriptive writing

SHEET 1

Example of how extracts might be annotated.

appeals to senses –
better than 'strong smell'

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

Complex sentence structure to add information about a character

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which

he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable

Interesting vocabulary choice, better than 'many'.

cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the

Uses repetition

honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum,

Interesting vocabulary choice

whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the

Interesting phrase

burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then

Vivid phrases – creates a clear image for the reader.

the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long

tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the

huge window...

Uses alliteration to subtle effect. The word 'flitted' could be applied to other things, e.g. an expression across a face?

Extract from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

SHEET 2

A **delicate** film of perspiration appeared on the upper lip of the old lady, as she struggled under the **burden** of her **innumerable** shopping bags. She paused ~~for a moment~~ momentarily for a short rest, and her **tremulous** hands pushed back a few **flame-like** strands of hair that had fallen across her face. There was a sudden knock from the window ~~joined to~~ adjoining the ledge on which the lady was ~~sitting~~ resting, and an ~~annoyed~~ irate face appeared above a body that was ~~telling~~ gesticulating for her to move along.

As the autumn **breeze stirred amidst** the crisp packets and other ~~rubbish litter~~ detritus on the ground, the weary woman once again gathered her ~~bags~~ belongings. A look of disillusionment with the world **flitted** across her face as she ~~walked~~ trudged toward her unknown destination.

SHEET 3

How can I use others' writing to improve my own?

Easy peasy!

Task 1

Read through the extracts and highlight / annotate the following:

- Any words or phrases you do not know or are not 100% sure of the definition.
- Any words or phrases you think would be useful for describing:
 - ▶ character – physical, personal
 - ▶ landscape / setting
 - ▶ the weather / atmosphere

Task 2

Now use these words and phrases to create your own useful phrase bank / examples. Remember you cannot copy word-for-word, so make sure you change your material enough to be considered original.

Task 3

Now find your own extract(s) and do the same again... regularly!

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Extract from *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens

London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds.