
UNIT 20 DESCRIPTIVE COMPOSITION- 2

DESCRIBING PLACES AND OBJECTS

Structure

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20.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall help you to describe

- places, and
- objects.

You will learn to give details like *location*, *size*, *shape* and *colour* while describing a place, and also give a general idea of the *atmosphere* of a place by noticing details like *sounds*, *smells* and *activities*. You will also learn to describe a *particular object*, giving details like those for a place, as well as its *design*, *texture* and *use*.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 19, you learnt how to describe people and their habits. But people are always associated with their surroundings. They live, move and work in different places—the house, the office, the factory, the market, etc. They also use various objects in their daily life—furniture, modern machines, various appliances and gadgets—at home and in the office. They buy or sell things in the shops. In one situation or another, we need to describe places and objects. With a good description we can make others see, hear and feel as we do. This requires two things:

- ability to see more details
- ability to describe them.

For the first, you must sharpen your senses—your hearing and vision. For the second, you must improve your stock of descriptive words and phrases.

There are various situations in which you need to describe a place or an object. Some of these situations might be the following:

- i) You are describing an interesting event that took place at the railway station. You have to give a few details of the platform and the objects found there.
- ii) You are describing the beautiful scenes of a hill-station to your family. You write about the location, the height, the houses, the hills, the flowers, etc.
- iii) You want to sell your house and advertise in the local newspaper. You must give various details like location, accommodation, fittings, etc.
- iv) You want to buy a bicycle of a particular type. You describe the special features of the bicycle to the shop-keeper.

These are only some of the situations where a description is necessary. There are, of course, many more. Each of these situations requires a different kind of description.

20.2 LOCATION AND SIZE

Read the following passage:

My Uncle's House

My uncle has a small, single-storeyed house. It has only two living rooms. The larger one is 10 feet by 8 feet in size. The smaller one is only 6 feet long and 5 feet wide. The ceiling is quite low. It must be only 8 feet high. The doors are only 5 feet 6 inches high and you have to bend your head to enter the house. The house is situated at the end of Mandir Marg, just opposite Rajkot Public Library. Behind the house there is an open field where children fly kites and play football. My uncle has used the little space on both sides of the house to grow vegetables and fruit trees. The house is hardly two hundred metres away from the Central Market and it takes only ten minutes to walk from the house to the market.

The words and phrases that tell us about the *location* of the house are:

at the end of Mandir Marg;
just opposite Rajkot Public Library;
behind the house there is an open field;
space on both sides of the house;
hardly two hundred metres away from the Central Market.

The *size* is indicated by these words and phrases:

small
single-storeyed
two living rooms
larger room: 10 feet by 8 feet in size
smaller room: only 6 feet long and 5 feet wide
ceiling is quite low—8 feet high.

Notice that all the verbs are in the present tense—simple present or present perfect.

My uncle *has*
It *has*
The ceiling *is*
My uncle *has* used
It *takes* only ten minutes

Self-check Exercise 1

Read the following conversation.

Rajiv : You know, Ganga, we've bought a new house in Vasant Vihar and we're throwing a house-warming party on Sunday. You must come.
Ganga : Thank you very much. But how do I get to your house?
Rajiv : Take a bus from your locality and get off at the post office at Vasant Vihar. There is a lane on your left as you face the post office. Our house is the sixth on the left in this lane. It is opposite Raja Dairy and just ahead of Little Flower School.
Ganga : Is it a large house?
Rajiv : Well, it is quite large. There are five rooms—three on the ground floor and two on the first. The plot of land is about fifty feet by forty feet in size. There's a lawn in front and a kitchen garden at the back.

Ganga : That really is a large house. I must come to your party to see the house. Goodbye till then.

Rajiv : Bye

Write down the words and phrases which describe the *location* and *size* of the house. Check your answers with those given by us at the end of the unit.

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20.3 SOUNDS AND SMELLS

You can describe a place by giving details of the sounds and smells associated with it.

Read the following passage.

It was the beginning of November when we left Calcutta for Harsingpur. The place was new to me, but the scents and sounds of the countryside pressed round and embraced me. The morning breeze coming fresh from the newly ploughed land, the sweet and tender smell of the flowering mustard, the shepherd-boy's flute sounding in the distance, even the creaking noise of the bullock-cart, as it groaned over the broken village road, filled my world with delight. The memory of my past life, with all its ineffable fragrance and sound, became a living present to me, and my blind eyes could not tell me I was wrong. I went back, and lived over again my childhood. Only one thing was absent: my mother was not with me.

I could see my home with the large peepul trees growing along the edges of the village pool. I could picture in my mind's eye my old grandmother seated on the ground with her thin wisps of hair untied, warming her back in the sun as she made the little round lentil balls to be dried and used for cooking. But somehow I could not recall the songs she used to croon to herself in her weak and quavering voice. In the evening, whenever I heard the lowing of cattle, I could almost watch the figure of my mother going round the sheds with lighted lamp in her hand. The smell of the wet fodder and the pungent smoke of the straw fire would enter into my very heart. And in the distance I seemed to hear the clanging of the temple bell wafted up by the breeze from the river bank.

(From Rabindranath Tagore: 'Vision' in *Hungry Stones and Other Stories*, Macmillan India Ltd., 1985).

Glossary

embraced/im'breɪst/: took and held (me) in the arm; surrounded (me)

ploughed/plaʊd/: made ready for sowing seeds by breaking the earth and making grooves in the soil

mustard/'mʌstəd/: a plant with yellow flowers and tiny seeds that are ground for oil

shepherd-boy/'ʃepəd bɔɪ/: a boy who takes care of sheep in the field

creaking/'kri:kɪŋ/: like the sound of a badly-oiled door when it opens
groaned/grəʊnd/: made a loud sound as if in pain
ineffable/ɪn'efəbl/: which cannot be described
fragrance/'freɪgrəns/: a sweet smell
wisps/wɪsp/: small strands
lentil/'lentɪ/**balls**: balls of ground lentil (small round seeds of a beanlike plant dried and used for food)
croon/kru:n/: sing gently in a low, soft voice
quavering/'kwɛvərɪŋ/: shaky
lowing/'ləʊɪŋ/: noise made by cows
fodder/'fɒdə/: rough food (like grass and straw) for cattle
pungent/'pʌndʒənt/: having a strong, sharp and stinging smell
wafted/'wɑ:ftɪd/: carried lightly through the air

The words and phrases in the passage which describe the *smells* of the countryside are:

the sweet and tender smell of the flowering mustard;
 fragrance;
 the smell of the wet fodder;
 the pungent smoke of the straw fire.

The words and phrases which describe the *sounds* are:

the shepherd-boy's flute;
 the creaking noise of the bullock-cart;
 groaned;
 croon;
 weak and quavering voice;
 the lowing of cattle;
 the clanging of the temple bell.

Note the difference in the meaning of the following words:

smell/smel/: a quality noticed by the nose
scent/sent/: a) a smell as left by animals and followed by hunting dogs;
 b) a particular, usually pleasant smell
fragrance/'freɪgrəns/: a sweet or pleasant smell
odour/'əʊdə/: a smell, especially an unpleasant one
perfume/'pɜ:fju:m/: a kind of sweet-smelling liquid, often made from flowers

Self-check Exercise 2

Read the following passage. Pick out the words describing sounds and smells.
 Check your answers with those given by us at the end of the unit.
 (Use your dictionary if necessary.)

My little room overlooks a busy street in the town. Early in the morning I am rudely awoken by crows cawing for scraps of food. The dogs bark and the pigs grunt at the garbage heaps. The first carts laden with vegetables and fruit trundle along. The cycle-rickshaws pass by with their bells tinkling. Cars screech to a halt at every turning. In the middle of the street, there is a bull bellowing for his daily ration. Every time a car or a truck goes by, thick choking fumes fill the air. And when the garbage is removed, the rotten smell of decaying vegetables and fruit rises to my window. But sometimes, the fragrance of incense is wafted from the shop below.

20.4 THE OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH A PLACE

When describing a scene—a railway station, a post office, a busy street, a hospital, or a beautiful landscape—you must focus attention on the various interesting things that are part of the scene. They may be permanent features of the scene or moving objects usually found there.

Read the following passage:

The hot and crowded bazars blazed with light as they made their way through the press of all the races in Upper India, and the lama mooned through it like a man in a dream. It was his first experience of a large manufacturing city, and the crowded tram-car with its continually squealing brakes frightened him. Half pushed, half towed, he arrived at the high gate of the Kashmir Serai: that huge open square over against the railway station, surrounded with arched cloisters, where the camel and horse caravans put up on their return from Central Asia. Here were all manner of Northern folk, tending tethered ponies and kneeling camels; loading and unloading bales and bundles; drawing water for the evening meal at the creaking well-windlasses; piling grass before the shrieking, wild-eyed stallions; cuffing the surly caravan dogs; paying off camel-drivers; taking on new grooms; swearing, shouting, arguing, and chaffering in the packed square.

(From Rudyard Kipling: *Kim*)

Glossary

blazed/bleizd/: shone brightly

press/pres/: a crowd

mooned/mu:nd/: wandered about

manufacturing/,mænjʊ'fæktʃərɪŋ/: producing things in large quantities by machinery

tram-car/'træmkɑ:/: an electric car running on rails through streets used as public transport

squealing/'skwi:lɪŋ/: making a long and very high sound

towed/təʊd/: pulled along

arched/ɑ:tʃt/: having arches (= curved tops)

cloister/'kloɪstə/: a covered passage with open archways on the sides

tethered/'teʃəd/: fastened with a rope so that the animal can move only within a limited area

ponies/'pəʊnɪz/: small horses

bale/beɪl/: a large tightly tied mass of goods

windlass/'wɪndləs/: a machine for pulling objects by means of a turning part, often with a handle

shrieking/'ʃri:kɪŋ/: crying out with a high sound

wild-eyed/'waɪld aɪd/: showing strong feelings, especially of anger, in the eyes
stallion/'stæljən/: fully grown male horse used for breeding
cuffing/'kʌfɪŋ/: giving a light blow with the hand
surly/'sɜ:li/: bad-tempered
caravan/'kærəvæn/: a group of people with vehicles or animals travelling together
swearing/'swɛərɪŋ/: cursing
chaffering/'tʃæfərɪŋ/: haggling, bargaining

Now let's see what objects are mentioned and what details are given about them.
 We may also note the various sounds.

<i>Objects</i>	<i>Details (size, sights & sounds, shape, location, activity)</i>
bazars	hot and crowded; blazed with light
city	large, manufacturing city
tram-car	crowded; continually squealing brakes
square	huge; open; against the railway station; packed
cloisters	arched
ponies	tethered
camels	kneeling
well-windlasses	creaking
stallions	shrieking; wild-eyed
caravan dogs	surly

The general *atmosphere* of the place is also built up by describing various *activities*:

- the lama mooned through it;
- half pushed, half towed;
- tending tethered ponies;
- loading and unloading bales;
- drawing water;
- piling grass;
- cuffing the surly caravan dogs;
- paying off camel-drivers;
- taking on new grooms;
- swearing, shouting, arguing, and chaffering.

Self-check Exercise 3

Read the passage below, which describes a village market. Fill in the chart given below with details from the passage. Use your dictionary if necessary.

The Gopalganj Market

The vendors sit in a large semi-circle with their baskets around them. Poles are fixed in the ground and clothes are hung on them. The red, yellow, green and lemon-coloured 'chunnis', blouses, shirts and pants flutter in the breeze like little flags. Pyramids of potatoes and other vegetables are piled up in front. Silver bangles, ochre dyes and vermillion powder are arranged in containers. Everywhere you hear the noise of haggling and hawking. The children rend the air with their whistles. The smell of frying onions and garlic fills the air.

Let's describe the scene. While doing so, we shall have to imagine the colours, smells and sounds of the place.

My Grandfather's House

My grandfather's house stands near the Gaggar River. It is pale yellow in colour and has lovely red and blue windows with soft, white curtains. Half of the house has a red tiled roof with a chimney. The other half has a terrace where we sit on pleasant summer evenings. A creeper climbs up the right side of the house. Jasmine plants grow near the door. The sweet fragrance of roses and jasmine flowers fills the air. The whole day you hear the chirping of birds and at night the crickets sing. A narrow path winds up from grandfather's house to a little house with a sloping roof and two large chimneys. A wooden bridge is used to cross over to the other side of the river. In front of grandfather's house, there are two large rocks surrounded by pebbles.

Glossary

terrace/ˈtɛrɪs/: a flat roof used as an outdoor living area

jasmine/ˈdʒæzmin/: a type of flowering plant

cricket/ˈkrikit/: (here) a type of insect

path/pɑːθ/: a track or way made by people walking over the ground

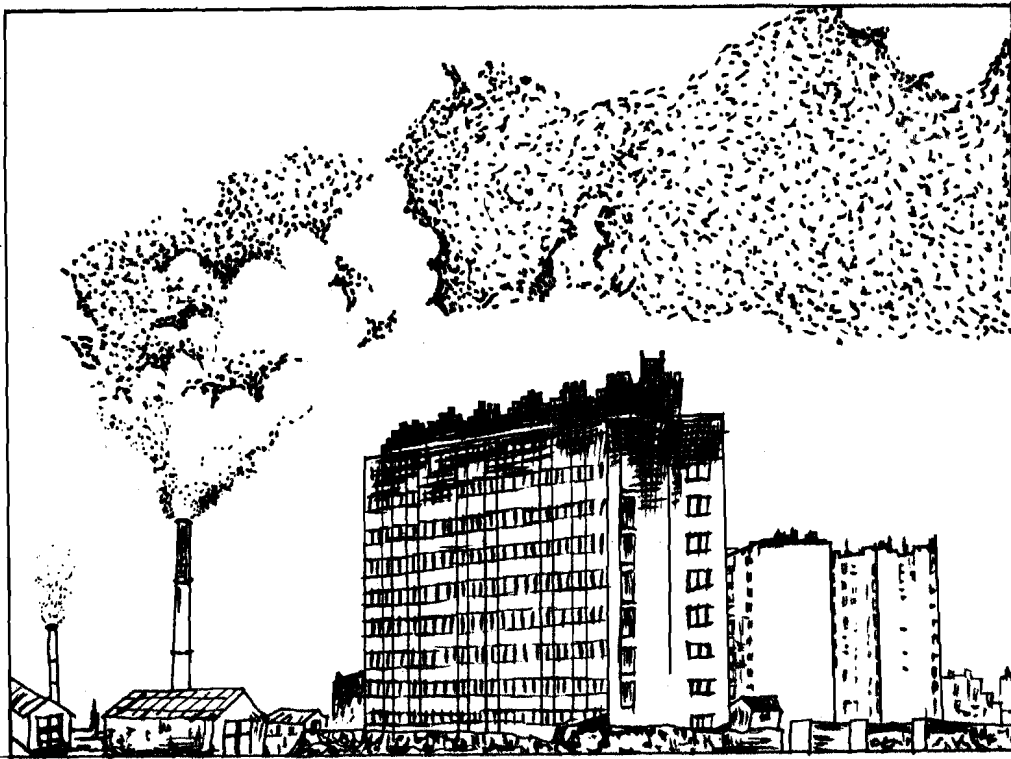
pebbles/ˈpeblz/: small roundish smooth stones

Note the following details in the passage:

<i>Object</i>	<i>Details</i>
house	stands near the Gaggar River (location); pale yellow (colour)
windows	red and blue
curtains	soft, white
roof	red; tiled; with a chimney
terrace	we sit there on pleasant summer evenings (activity)
creeper	up the right side of the house
jasmine plants	near the door (location)
roses and jasmine	sweet fragrance
birds	chirping
crickets	sing
path	narrow; winds up
another house	little; with sloping roof and two large chimneys
bridge	wooden; to cross over (use)
rocks	in front of grandfather's house; two; surrounded by pebbles

Self-check Exercise 4

Look at the picture below and describe it in about 100 words. Imagine the colours, sounds, and smells. Compare your answer with that given by us at the end of this unit.



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20.5 DESCRIBING PARTICULAR OBJECTS

You have already learnt how to describe a place and the objects found there. Now you must learn to focus your attention on describing a particular object. While describing an object you must give the same details as when describing a place—location, size, shape, colour, sound and smell. You must add a few more details:

- texture
- use

When considering the texture, you have to describe what material the object is made of, and how its surface feels to the touch. This will depend on the design of the material. For example, if you run your hand on a piece of cloth, it might feel rough, ribbed, dotted or smooth as silk. You can say that the cloth has a rough texture, a smooth texture, and so on.

Read the following passage which describes the tea-set in the picture below. We shall have to imagine the colours.



The china crockery here includes a large plate in which one may serve snacks. The plate is curved up slightly at the rim. It has a golden border, and a number of circles are painted at some distance from the rim. At the centre is a picture of a red rose with buds and green leaves all around it. The tea-pot has a narrow bottom, but curves outward towards the centre. It has a spout and a handle like a triangle. There are designs in bas-relief along the borders of the lid and the pot. The milk-pot has a concave shape with a gently curved lip. There is also a convex bowl for sugar and a tea-cup in a saucer. All of them have the same floral design. The background colour of the set is light pink.

Glossary

crockery /'krɒkəri/: cups, plates, etc. usually made of china clay

snacks /snæks/: things eaten informally between meals

spout/spaut/: an opening from which liquid comes out

bas-relief /, bɑ:ri'li:f/: a design that stands out on a surface

concave /,kɒn'keɪv/: curved inward

convex /,kɒn'veks/: curved outward

floral /'flɔ:ral/: of flowers

The description above gives these details:

plate	large (size) for serving snacks (use) curved up slightly at the rim (shape) golden border (colour) circles (design) pictures of a red rose with buds and green leaves (design)
tea-pot	narrow bottom (shape) curves outward towards the centre (shape) handle like a triangle (shape) designs in bas-relief along the borders (design)
milk-pot	concave (shape) gently curved lip (shape) for milk (use)
bowl	convex (shape) for sugar (use)
All the objects	light pink background (colour) floral design

Self-check Exercise 5

Make up a small dialogue between two friends. One of them is describing a wall-clock that he got as a gift. Write only about 150 words. Compare your answer with that given by us at the end of the unit. Begin the dialogue like this: "What did your grandfather give you for your birthday?"

This image shows a full page of a document template designed for handwritten notes or answers. It features approximately 28 horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced dots, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The background is plain white, and there are no margins, headers, or footers visible.

20.6 ACTIVITY

Look carefully at some of the objects at your house and in your office. Write down brief details about them.

20.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt

- to write and speak about a place by giving details like location, size, shape, colour, etc.,
- to describe the atmosphere of a place by giving details of sounds, smells and activities, and
- to describe objects of daily use by giving details like those for a place, as well as the texture, design and use of the object.

20.8 KEY WORDS

atmosphere: feeling, e.g., of good, evil, that the mind receives from a place

location: position or place

20.9 SUGGESTED READING

Rabindranath Tagore: *Hungry Stones and Other Stories*, Macmillan

Rudyard Kipling: *Kim*

20.10 CASSETTE RECORDING

A video-cassette recording based on Units 19-20 is available at the study centres of the University.

20.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

- Location** : in Vasant Vihar;
lane on your left as you face the Post Office;
the sixth on the left in this lane;
opposite Raja Dairy;
just ahead of Little Flower School;
a lawn in front;
a kitchen garden at the back
- size** : quite large;
there are five rooms;
The plot of land is about fifty feet by forty feet in size.

Exercise 2

- sounds** : crows cawing;
dogs bark;
pigs grunt;
carts trundle along;
bells tinkling;
screech to a halt;
bull bellowing
- smells** : rotten smell of decaying vegetables and fruit;
fragrance of incense

Exercise 3

Person/ Object	Location	Size	Shape	Colour	Sound	Smell	Activity
place where vendors sit		large	semi-circle				sit hawking
poles	fixed in the ground						
clothes	hung on the poles						
'chunnis', blouses, shirts & pants				red, yellow, green, and lemon- coloured			flutter in the breeze
potatoes and other vegetables	piled up in front		pyramids				
bangles, dyes, powder	arranged in con- tainers			silver, ochre, vermillion			
	everywhere				haggling, hawking		
children					rend the air with their whistles		
onions and garlic						smell of frying	fills the air

Exercise 4

This is an industrial area in a big city. There are three multi-storeyed buildings. The staff and workers of the nearby factory live in the hundreds of flats here. You can see a chimney, about 100 ft. high, in the distance. Thick black and yellow smoke is coming out of it. A foul smell of gas fills the air. You can hear the sound of machines and trucks day and night.

Exercise 5

Specimen Answer

- Salim : What did your grandfather give you for your birthday?
 Ajit : A beautiful wall-clock.
 Salim : What's it like? Can you describe it for me?
 Ajit : It's round, about 12 inches in diameter. The border is golden and the dial is chocolate brown. The hands have radium on them and shine in the dark. Below the dial there is a glass cover through which you can see the pendulum. This is in the form of a bird which sways to and fro. Every hour you can hear the chime.