

Lesson 20: Exaggeration

Television commercials, magazine advertisements, and other sales materials continue to successfully influence today's buyers. They do this through clever writing that tells about the product's excellent qualities. Below (or on a separate sheet of paper, make a list naming examples of advertisements that come into your home. Include a variety of sources.

1. (example) Realtors' flyers
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Advertisers often use vivid description to impress (and therefore influence) customers. Sometimes they exaggerate their claims about a product to make it *almost* sound too good to be true. Do these look familiar to you?

- Diet fads that assure instant weight loss.
- Exercise machines that "guarantee" bulging biceps in 30 days
- Kitchen gadgets promising that you will cook like a gourmet chef
- A yo-yo that claims you will be the champion of your neighborhood

Writing a Travel Advertisement

Have you ever traveled with your family to a place that sounded sensational in the brochure, only to arrive and wonder what the fuss was all about? Do you remember from history books how people were lured to America from England, or convinced to travel west, based on what they saw in the newspaper? Skilled writers, using descriptive, colorful words, stretched the truth to make each spot appealing. This assignment, using a similar approach, will give you a fresh understanding of the power of such words.

As you have been learning, descriptive writing brings ordinary objects and events to life. In this lesson, you will try something new with your descriptive writing. You will develop an exaggerated travel agency advertisement for a resort that has fallen upon hard times. Calling on your skills as a descriptive writer, you will paint a glowing picture of a location that hopes to draw tourists to boost its dying economy.

Consider that this location is not all it is cracked up to be. Perhaps a natural disaster, like a fire or flood, has caused damage to the area. Maybe the place has become run-down or weather-beaten and in need of repair. Maybe it is the "off" season, when the weather is less than ideal. In any case, tourism is down, and the resort owners have hired you to entice travelers to bring their families for a stay.

NOTE: *The purpose of this assignment is not to teach you to deceive! Rather, it is to make you aware of the power of words to influence and entice. This exercise helps you stretch your creativity as well as increase your awareness of advertising techniques used to persuade.*

Directions

Webster's *New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines **exaggerate** as "to represent (something) as greater than it is." In your first paragraph you will portray this location as it actually appears. Then, in the second paragraph, you will use **exaggeration** to describe the resort's accommodations and scenery in an idealistic way.

For example, the dried up remains of a pond might be represented as a "refreshing lake." A beach strewn with litter from a storm could instead be a "driftwood-decorated shoreline." Encouraging visitors to "enjoy a glorious afternoon on horseback" would fail to mention that the resort only has two old swayback mares.

Read for ideas. Gather a few of the following materials from a travel agency, library, or your own bookshelves:

- travel magazines or Auto Club publications
- bridal magazines (honeymoon section)
- Sunday travel section of the *L.A. Times*
- *National Geographic*
- tour guides

To see how writers describe scenic resorts, browse through several ads or articles. Look for key words that appeal to the senses or emotions, like *paradise*, *romantic*, *hideaway*, *famous for*, etc. Below (or on a separate sheet of paper) make a list of the words you find.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Choose a location. Decide on a location for the resort you will advertise. Here are some ideas, but you might also think of your others on your own:

- a run-down dude ranch
- a ghost town
- a beach resort in the aftermath of a hurricane
- a desert hotel with a "pool" and/or "mineral hot springs" nearby
- a mountain resort with individual family cabins
- an ancient castle in Scotland (or England, Germany, France)
- a tropical island during monsoon or hurricane season
- a normally lush, green area in the midst of a drought
- a frigid location during the winter (think *freezing!*)
- a lakeside boating resort
- a campground that "offers conveniences" like showers or recreational facilities
- other _____

Write Your Composition

1. Discuss the instructions for the assignment with your parent Make sure you both understand the assignment.
2. You will write two paragraphs. The first paragraph (not an advertisement, but merely factual) will accurately describe the resort---"run-down, drafty, and isolated," for instance. The second paragraph (the advertisement) will exaggerate and stretch the truth---"provincial, airy, and private."
3. Write each paragraph on a SEPARATE sheet of paper. Each must be seven to nine sentences long.
4. Hide the imperfections of the resort with colorful, flowery words. However, be sure the wording fits the locale. Your second paragraph should describe the resort idealistically, perfectly. Help the reader see it through "rose-colored glasses." Overstate, pad, stretch the truth. (If your resort has a small spa with cracked tile and algae stains, you may overstate it into a sparkling swimming pool, but it may not be exaggerated to become a lake.)
5. Overemphasize the true, positive elements. A miserably humid tropical location might still have a magnificent sunset on which you could focus. Blooming weeds can be called "flowers." "Run-down" becomes "rustic." A scorching desert sun sounds more appealing as "warm rays of the sun." Greasy burgers from a roadside diner become "juicy and finger-licking." Readers will never know that the "lake stocked with fish" has not been stocked in ten years!

6. Use rich imagery and the most descriptive, vivid words you can find. Your Word Lists and thesaurus are required tools! Take care, though, to use synonyms accurately. Know their definitions. Just the right wording can make a cheap motel sound like a luxurious hotel. Thatched, weedy grounds can sound breathtakingly beautiful. Give the impression that the place is up-to-date and well-maintained, perfect for a visiting couple or family.
7. Use vocabulary that appeals to the senses and emotions. Refer to the previous page for some of the terms you found in the magazines. Words like *exotic* and *private* have irresistible drawing power!
8. Give your resort a realistic name.
9. Begin by brainstorming for ideas. See "Brainstorm" section below.
10. Remember: When you write, you will not describe every single detail. Pick out several and go from there. Use the practice paragraph as a guide.
11. Have fun with this activity. Let's see what your creative mind can produce!

Brainstorm Before You Write

Suggestion: Do this as an activity around the dinner table. Sometimes it's fun to involve the whole family in the brainstorming process!

1. Using the "Exaggeration Worksheet," write thoughts in the first column about what the place actually looks like. In the second column, jot down ways those same accommodations and scenery could be exaggerated to sound appealing. Remember to brainstorm for more information than you will need in your composition. This always gives you a larger pool of information to draw from when writing your "sloppy copy."
2. Facilities. Talk about the comforts and conveniences that would appeal to the traveler (lodging, pools, restaurants and food, shopping, nearby attractions, entertainment, etc.). Then brainstorm specifically about the things that would draw people *to your resort*.
3. Scenic Environment. Talk about the kinds of scenery that attract sightseers (fall foliage, forests, beaches, mineral hot springs, tropical foliage, snow, natural wonders, bodies of water, historic buildings/monuments, etc.). Then brainstorm about the scenery that would particularly entice visitors *to your resort*.
4. Activities. Talk about the kinds of activities that might lure a tourist (biking or hiking; camping, fishing, or horseback riding; sightseeing tours; winter sports; water sports/boating; nature activities; etc.). Then brainstorm in detail about the activities that would draw visitors *to your resort*.

Lesson 20: Practicing with Exaggeration

Directions

1. Read the following paragraph. You will write a second paragraph exaggerating the claims of Paradise Palms Resort.
2. Begin by brainstorming on the "Exaggeration Worksheet (Practice Paragraph)."

Paradise Palms Resort

Looking abandoned along the deserted highway, the Paradise Palms Resort sits back from the road in a sparse grove of shaggy palm trees. Weathered and peeling, its chipped salmon-colored paint begs for a fresh coat. A sagging porch, overgrown with bougainvilleas, offers little shelter from the sweltering tropical heat. Aging canvas umbrellas and beach chairs droop wearily around a yellowed pool. Mosquitoes drone over the filmy surface. A sliver of ocean in the distance promises relief from the soaring temperatures, but a weedy trail seems to be the only path. Next to the dilapidated motel, a simple thatched hut displays local fruits and cheap trinkets for sale, and an easygoing native in a ragged straw hat pushes jeeps and bicycles for rent. His selection, however, appears as rusty and tired as the old resort itself. Paradise Palms, so it seems, is a long way from paradise.

Lesson 20: Exaggeration Worksheet (Practice Paragraph)

Brainstorming ideas for (name of resort) Paradise Palms Resort

The Resort's Actual Features	The Resort's Features (Ideal Condition)
❖ Facilities ❖	❖ Facilities ❖
chipped paint	
sagging porch	
❖ Scenic Environment ❖	❖ Scenic Environment ❖
deserted highway	
sparse grove of shaggy palm trees	
❖ Activities ❖	❖ Activities ❖
rusty old jeeps and bikes for rent	

Lesson 20: Skill Builder

Word Usage

How does an author find the balance between writing in a concrete, sensory, descriptive manner and writing in an imposing, pretentious way? In *WriteShop*, we want to encourage you to try out new words, have fun with your thesaurus, and use vivid language as you write. We also desire to teach you to use new vocabulary with care and humility.

When you use too many new or strange words, the reader may feel that you are trying to make an impression. Too many flowery, high-sounding, or unfamiliar words can make you sound pretentious or even arrogant. Work to find a good balance between overly-simplistic and "stuffy" vocabulary. Astute writers choose their words wisely. Their writing is concise yet descriptive.

- Try not to use too many long words.
- Make sure your vocabulary is appropriate for your reader.
- Instead of stringing together a long list of adjectives to describe a weak noun, often a single well-chosen noun will work. ("Tall, thirty-story glass-covered building" might be more simply written "skyscraper.")
- When using your thesaurus, be sure to look up unfamiliar synonyms. Say exactly what you mean. If you want to find a synonym for the word *party*, what kind of party are you writing about? You could choose *soiree*, *fete*, *bash*, or *coalition*, but be careful--one describes a dressy evening affair, one an outdoor party, one an occasion of joy or celebration, and one a political alliance. Choose wisely!
- Another common error using a thesaurus is picking a synonym that is a different part of speech or is informal, slang, or archaic (so old it is not in use anymore). Again, look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary. This extra step may save you embarrassment later on!

Lesson 20 Skill Builder

DAY ONE: *Communicating Clearly*

1. Use a good dictionary to define these terms. Think about how they might relate to your writing.
2. If there is more than one definition, choose the one that would apply to writing.

concise _____

effective _____

flowery _____

grandiose _____

pompous _____

pretentious _____

verbose _____

DAY TWO *Incorrect Word Usage*

The following sentences contain words used incorrectly. Words, as you have been learning, have fine meanings. For instance, a mansion, a cabin, and a shack may all be called a house, but not all houses are mansions. Neither are they all cabins or shacks.

You must always make certain that the synonym you choose fits the context of the sentence. **Incorrect word usage** is characterized by long, uncommon words, incorrect use of synonyms, and words not relevant to the topic.

Using your thesaurus and/or dictionary, find a more appropriate word to replace the underlined words below.

1. The ancient log chateau was nearly swallowed by the dense forest. Arboreal formations crowded in on every side.
chateau _____
arboreal formations _____
2. The dense foliage obfuscated the narrow path leading to the infinitesimal cabin and threatened to smother it.
obfuscated _____
infinitesimal _____
3. Towering trees cast their adumbrations over the nugatory shack.
adumbrations _____
nugatory _____

DAY THREE: *Overly Descriptive Writing*

The following sentences contain words or phrases that are overly descriptive. Sentences are typically wordy or overly long. Too many modifiers, such as adjectives and adverbs, confuse the reader. Redundancy, or repetition of synonyms, as well as too much flowery description, also cloud the writing. Self-important or pompous language and overuse of figures of speech (metaphors, similes, and personification) decrease the effectiveness of the writing.

Pompous-sounding language does have its place, particularly when describing showy, stuffy, or arrogant people or events. However, beginning writers tend to use overly wordy, overly descriptive writing for simple and ordinary objects and events. As an example, flowery writing would certainly be appropriate to describe a costume ball but would not be appropriate to describe a trip to Grandma's. To a certain extent, grandiose writing may even be appropriate in this week's writing assignment, as you seek to exaggerate and embellish (do you need to look up this word?) the claims of a run-down resort. As always, choose your words with care.

WriteShop II

- Rewrite each sentence in a concise yet descriptive way.
- Break down long phrases and ask yourself, "What is this trying to say, and how could I write it more simply?"
- Use a dictionary or thesaurus to look up unfamiliar words. If you don't know what they mean, you will not be able to simplify them!
- Eliminate repeated words and words that contradict other thoughts in the sentence.

1. Before the noisy, creaking, overloaded wagons, filled with tools, provisions, and food, arrived at the majestic mansion, they stopped and paused to rest in front of a dilapidated, weather-beaten, shabby shanty.

2. The stacked orbs of snow, magnificently embellished with fragments of coal and carrots and wrapped in a long, fringed plaid scarf, commenced to slump and grow slushy and turn into a puddle precisely at the location where Dad parks his automobile.

3. Sam's extremely furry, shaggy canine dog, alabaster with raven streaks, poses enthusiastically on the porch in front of the family domicile, with his tail solemnly between his legs. He lingers until Sam reappears from the park where he has been recreating in the baseball game at which his team triumphed.

Lesson 20: Student Writing Skills Checklist

- ▶ After you write your "sloppy copy," go over it carefully with this checklist.
- ▶ USE BOX 1 to check your first paragraph. USE BOX 2 to check your exaggerated paragraph.

CONTENT

1 2

- Do all my sentences support my topic sentence?
- Did I communicate clearly?
- Are my topic and choice of words pleasing to the Lord and edifying to others?
- Do my titles capture the essence of each composition?

STYLE

1 2

- Did I choose a strong topic sentence that introduces each paragraph?
- Did I use no more than one "to be" word in each paragraph? (**Circle** to be words in red.)
- Did I avoid the use of repeated words? (**Underline** repeated words in blue.)
- Did I use concrete words and avoid weak words? (**Underline** vague or weak words in green.)
- Did I use the same tense throughout each paragraph?
- Did I vary my sentence structure by using these sentence variations once in each paragraph?
 ___ used a simile (one only) ___ began with a prepositional phrase
 ___ began with paired adjectives ___ began with a present or past participle
 ___ used a subject-verb sentence ___ began with an -ly adverb ___ used an appositive
 ___ began with a subordinate conjunction (*although, as, because, if, since, though, unless, when, where, while*)
- Does each paragraph contain a sentence of six words or fewer?
- Did I write a strong closing sentence that wraps up each paragraph?

MECHANICS

1 2

- Did I put my name and date in the upper right-hand corner?
- Is **each paragraph** seven to nine sentences long? How many? 1st ____ 2nd ____
- Did I indent the first sentence of each paragraph and leave margins around my composition?
- Did I remember to skip every other line?
- Did I use good spacing between words and sentences?
- Did I double-check my spelling? (**Circle** and **look up** suspected words.)
- Did I double-check and **correct** capitalization and punctuation?
- Did I use complete sentences and avoid run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers?
- Did I correctly use this Checklist, including using colored pencils to underline and circle as directed? (This includes making corrections before I write my revision.)
- BEFORE TURNING MY WORK IN:** Did I staple my papers together in this order?
(Brainstorming worksheet on the very bottom, "sloppy copy" on top of that, neatly rewritten copy next, and this Writing Checklist on the very top.)

Name _____

Subject Exaggeration (Actual)

Lesson 20(1): Teacher Writing Skills Checklist

Edit your paragraph one more time, making any necessary changes or improvements.

CONTENT

- | OK | needs improvement | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Followed instructions for this assignment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Communicated clearly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All sentences support topic sentence (no "carrots in your cookie jar") |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Topic and choice of words are pleasing to the Lord and edifying to others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Title captures the essence of the composition |

STYLE

- | OK | needs improvement | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong topic sentence introduces the composition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used no more than one "to be" word |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoided the use of repeated words |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used concrete words (specific, vivid, and sensory) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoided the use of "weak" words |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used the same tense throughout the paragraph |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used each of the following sentence variations once in each paragraph. |
| | | __subject-verb sentence __began with an -ly adverb phrase |
| | | __used an appositive __began with a subordinate conjunction |
| | | __began with a prepositional phrase __began with paired adjectives |
| | | __began with a present or past participle |
| | | __used a simile (one only) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Included one sentence of six words or fewer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wrote concisely, avoiding wordiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong closing sentence |

MECHANICS

- | OK | needs improvement | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>Name</u> and <u>date</u> in the upper right-hand corner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Paragraph is seven to nine sentences long |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used proper form (indentation, margins, skipped lines, good spacing) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Double-checked spelling, capitalization, punctuation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used complete sentences, avoided run-on sentences, avoided misplaced modifiers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Correctly used checklist and used colored pencils, circling and underlining as directed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Included brainstorming sheet, all drafts of this composition, and your checklist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All papers are stapled together in proper order |

Comments _____