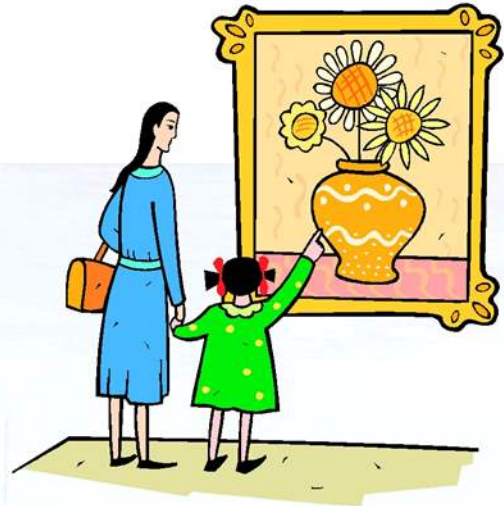


How to Describe a Painting



A description of a painting may have the following structure:

1st Paragraph: Details of the Painting (Title, Artist, Materials, Size, Location)

The title is generally written in italics. You could start by defining the painting in terms of art form or type. The painting can be a *portrait*, a *self-portrait*, a *land/ sea/ cityscape*, a *still-life* or an *abstract* painting .

Say also what period it is from (*'It dates from...'* or *'It was painted in...'*). Here is a list of the main periods in the history of art: *Middle Ages*, *Renaissance*, *Baroque*, *Neoclassicism*, *Romanticism*, *Modern Art*, *Impressionism*, *Symbolism*, *Art Nouveau*, *Cubism*, *Futurism*, *Surrealism*.

The most common painting techniques are *oil on canvas*, *watercolour*, *pastel on paper*, *tempera on board or wood panel*.

You can say: *'The painting measures ... by... (inches/ cm) and it is painted in...'*.

Finally, talk about the museum/gallery where it is housed. You can write: *'It is housed in ... or 'It hangs in ...'*.

2nd Paragraph: Description (Subject Matter and Structure)

The subject may be religious or it may be a *natural scenery* (mountains, hills, valleys, fields, woods, sky). If it is a portrait, it can be a *family portrait*, a *self-portrait*, a *nude*.

A *still-life* may have as a subject a vase with flowers, some books or some fruit.

Finally a historical subject may represent a hero of the past or mythological figures.

The verbs that you may need to describe the subject are: *to depict*, *to show*, *to represent*, *to illustrate*, and *to portray*.

At this point you can describe what you see in the foreground, in the middle ground, and in the background.



3rd Paragraph: Technique and Colours

Talking of technique, you might consider perspective and sfumato.

Lines may be *straight* or *curving*, and shapes are *geometric*, *spherical* or *linear*

Brushstrokes may be *broad*, *loose*, *fine* or *blended*, while texture can be *rough/smooth*, *glossy/opaque*.

As for colours, remember that warm colours are *yellow*, *orange*, and *red*; cold colours are *blue*, *purple*, and *green*.

Colours may also be *pale* or *bright*, *brilliant* or *soft*, *light* or *dark*.

4th Paragraph: Interpretation (Theme, Symbols, Atmosphere)

The theme of a painting may be the natural/urban world, life and death, myth, or a historical event. The verbs you may need to describe symbols are *to symbolise*, *to be a symbol of*, *to stand for* or *to represent*.

Finally, describe the atmosphere. The following adjectives may be useful: *peaceful*, *gloomy*, *sad*, *serene*, *violent*.

