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# Using Descriptive Language

Level 3 Project



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# Using Descriptive Language

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## About Using Descriptive Language

Descriptive language paints a picture with words. Whether the purpose of your speech is to inform, persuade, entertain, or inspire, descriptive language helps evoke specific imagery to illustrate your point.

In this project, you will learn to recognize the difference between literal and figurative language and determine when to use each. You will implement verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in your speech to create vivid descriptions. You will use literary elements and language to create evocative speeches.

## Resources

The following is a list of resources available in your digital project on Base Camp. Some of these resources, such as evaluations, are also available on the Resources section on Base Camp.

**Project Checklist**

**Evaluation Resource**

# Introduction and Assignment

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## Introduction

Skilled public speakers add descriptive language to enhance their message and create a rich sensory experience for their audience.

## Your Assignment

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to practice writing a speech with an emphasis on adding language to increase interest and impact.

**Overview:** You may speak on any topic. Develop a 5- to 7-minute speech describing the topic in detail and present it at your club meeting.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.



**Weblink:** Return to your digital project when you see this icon to link to a website or Base Camp location.

**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist.**

# Learning in Using Descriptive Language

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## Assess and Reflect



To assess and track your knowledge, complete the activity below by listing what you already know and what you wonder about the topic today. Add up to five items to each list. After you complete your project, you will have an opportunity to review your answers and add what you have learned.

## Know

**For example:** I know how to use verbs, adverbs, and adjectives to create vivid imagery.

## Wonder

**For example:** I wonder how to use evocative language to achieve my desired effect.

## Competencies

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Recognize the difference between literal and figurative language.
- Identify the best use of literal and figurative language when presenting to an audience.
- Use literary elements to enhance your speeches.
- Correctly implement verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in your speech to create vivid descriptions.
- Use evocative language to create memorable speeches.

## Literal and Figurative Language

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Both literal and figurative language can be evocative—the words can evoke feelings or memories for audience members and connect them more directly to what is being communicated in spoken and written word.

### Literal Language

Literal language refers to the established meaning of a word. In the example, “The planet Earth is bigger than the moon,” each word refers to its established meaning.

### Figurative Language

Figurative language changes the literal meanings of words. The figurative statement, “Their eyes were bigger than their stomach” is not intended to mean their eyes were literally larger, but refers to someone who thought they were hungrier than they truly were.

**Figurative language can take multiple forms.**

#### Simile

Explicitly compares one thing with another thing of a different kind.

For example: Sly like a fox.

#### Metaphor

Describes a subject by comparing it to an otherwise unrelated object. It does not use the explicit “like” or “as” to form the comparison.

For example: That speech was a piece of cake.

## Symbolism

Uses symbols to express ideas or qualities in art or literature.

For example: He gave her a heart-shaped necklace.

## Hyperbole

Exaggerates meaning as a figure of speech.

For example: I waited an eternity for you!

## Pun

The use of words to suggest different meanings or applications. Puns may also be words that sound alike or nearly alike but are different in meaning.

For example: A horse is a very stable animal.

## Specific Versus Vague Details

Specific details can enhance a story while vague details may not have the same lasting effect. Read the following examples and identify the one that is more likely to generate interest.

**Example 1:** *The boat came into the harbor.*

**Example 2:** *The blue boat sailed into the rocky harbor.*

The first example gives a vague description of the event. The second example uses descriptive words (blue, rocky) and a more specific verb (sailed).

The goal of being more specific in your word choice is to increase sensory impact.

## Using Literal Language

When you need to be direct and clear, use literal language. It can still be evocative, but intention and meaning must be evident. This is useful when you need to communicate detailed or factual information.



**Video:** Watch a Video on Base Camp to learn more.

## Using Figurative Language

Use figurative language to convey creative and original thought, or to make an emotional impact.

Each statement below is an example of figurative or literal language. In the space next to the statement, mark figurative language with an “**F**” and literal language with an “**L**.”

1. \_\_\_\_ The blue boat sails, quiet as a mouse, into the rocky harbor.
2. \_\_\_\_ The blue boat feels shaky as it careens into the rocky harbor.
3. \_\_\_\_ The air is thick with the smell of salt as the boat eases into the harbor.
4. \_\_\_\_ The captain can taste the feast that awaits them as the boat returns to the harbor.

ANSWERS: 1. Figurative 2. Literal 3. Figurative 4. Figurative

## Descriptive Words and Language

Understanding parts of speech is crucial to creating vivid descriptions. Although some of this information may be familiar to you, it is valuable to review.

### Verbs

Verbs are words that express action—either physical, mental, or states of being. Strong verbs convey precise action.

These three sentences all describe a similar physical action:

*Example 1: Eric went to the market.*

*Example 2: Eric ran to the market.*

*Example 3: Eric sprinted to the market.*

The verbs *went*, *ran*, and *sprinted* all express moving to a destination (the market) in these sentences. *Went* is neutral and does not tell us much about the action. *Ran* indicates that Eric may be moving quickly. *Sprinted* tells us that he was in a rush to get to the market. Each verb tells a different story.

### Adjectives

Adjectives are words that give specific details about nouns. These modifiers include the five senses, emotions, and states of being. For example, consider the following sentence, which contains no adjectives:

*The sculptor finished their masterpiece.*

Adding a few modifiers makes the sentence more descriptive and interesting:

*The young sculptor finished their beautiful masterpiece.*

These two adjectives—*young* and *beautiful*—enhance the impact of the sentence.

## Adverbs

Adverbs describe verbs by telling how something is done or how it occurs. Adverbs can also give information about adjectives and other adverbs.

One way to use an adverb is to describe how the subject (the sculptor) performed the verb (finished):

*The sculptor triumphantly finished their masterpiece.*

An adverb may also be used to describe when the subject performed the verb:

*The sculptor finished their masterpiece yesterday.*

When an adverb describes another adverb or an adjective, it quantifies (tells how much or to what degree) the modified word:

*The sculptor was extremely happy to finish their masterpiece.*

The adjective *happy* describes the noun *sculptor*, and the adverb *extremely* tells how happy they were.

A little description can go a long way. In one of the previous examples, adding adjectives changed a basic sentence into:

*The young sculptor finished their beautiful masterpiece.*

If many more adjectives are added, the sentence could look like this:

*The slim, young, attractive sculptor finished their beautiful, bright, and colorful masterpiece.*

Adding too many descriptive words and phrases to a speech can muddle the core message of your presentation. Determine the right amount to use for maximum impact.

# Literary Elements

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Another way to use descriptive language is to incorporate literary elements. A **literary element** is defined as a specific component of a literary piece—in this case, a speech. Common literary elements include:

- **Plot:** The logical sequence of events that develop a story.
- **Setting:** The time and place in which a story takes place.
- **Protagonist:** The main character of a story, novel, or play.
- **Antagonist:** The character in conflict with the protagonist.
- **Narrator:** The person who tells the story.
- **Dialogue:** A conversation between two or more characters in a story.
- **Conflict:** The issue around which the story revolves.
- **Mood:** The general atmosphere of a story.
- **Theme:** The central idea or concept of a story.



**Video:** Watch a Video on Base Camp to learn more.

## Exercise Ideas

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The following list of exercises—in addition to the assignment—will help you practice the concepts in this project. You are encouraged to perform these exercises to gain more experience. They are not required to complete the project.

### Visit a Place

Visit a place you enjoy and write a vivid description.

### Share a Description

Describe your favorite character from a story, movie, or television show. Determine if a friend or family member can guess the character you are describing.

### Take Note

When reading, take note of passages that are dedicated to description.

### Write a Description

Write a one-page description of yourself, a close friend, or family member.

# Review and Apply

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Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- Describe the value of using descriptive language in your speeches.
- What is the difference between literal and figurative language?
- How do literary elements enhance speeches?

# Complete Your Assignment

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## Project Checklist

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report. First, review your assignment.

### This project includes:

- A 5- to 7-minute speech

The following list includes tasks for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You can use the checklist here or complete the digital version in your project on Base Camp.

Choose your speech topic. You may choose to consider a specific situation, location, or memory that elicits an emotional response.

Schedule your first speech with the Vice President Education.

Write your speech. Be sure to use descriptive language. As an extra challenge, you may keep your topic a secret so others can guess what you were describing at the closing of your speech.

Rehearse your speech.

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

# Evaluation Criteria



Review the criteria for the evaluation in this project. Your evaluator will use the following scale:

5 – Exemplary   4 – Excels   3 – Accomplished   2 – Emerging   1 – Developing

## Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

## Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

## Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

## Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

## Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

## Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

## Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

### Descriptive Language

- 5 – Delivers exemplary speech with highly varied, evocative descriptions
- 4 – Delivers excellent speech with varied, evocative descriptions
- 3 – Delivers a speech with a variety of descriptive language
- 2 – Delivers a speech with some descriptive language, but needs improvement
- 1 – Delivers a speech with little or no descriptive language

### Literary Elements

- 5 – Makes exemplary use of literary elements (plot, setting, simile, or metaphor) to enhance speech
- 4 – Makes excellent use of literary elements (plot, setting, simile, or metaphor) to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses at least one literary element (plot, setting, simile, or metaphor) to enhance speech
- 2 – Uses at least one literary element (plot, setting, simile, or metaphor) during speech, though the effect is limited
- 1 – Uses few or no literary elements (plot, setting, simile, or metaphor) during speech

## Complete Your Project

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Once you have delivered your speech and received your evaluation, take a minute to review what you recorded under “Know” and “Wonder” in the Assess and Reflect section at the start of this project. Then add what you have learned while working through this project. Add up to five items.

### Learned

**For example:** I learned the difference between literal and figurative language.

# Before You Move On

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## **Review Your Learning**

Review all the material in this project.

## **Deliver Your Speech**

Plan, practice, and deliver your speech.

## **Receive Your Evaluation**

Receive your evaluation and complete any other tasks required by your club.

## **Assess and Reflect**

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

## **Congratulations!**

If you have completed every task, CONGRATULATIONS! You have completed your Using Descriptive Language project and you are ready to move on to your next project.



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