

Successful Writing

PROFICIENCY

Virginia Evans



Express Publishing

Introduction

To the Teacher

Successful Writing Proficiency consists of nine units which cover all types of composition writing (descriptions, narratives, letters, discursive essays, articles, reviews) required at advanced levels. Each unit starts with a lead-in listening activity through which the basic plan for the type of writing the unit deals with is introduced. This also serves as a brainstorming activity, giving the teacher the chance to elicit useful language and ideas on the topic under discussion. Detailed theory and plans are provided to be used as a reference by students. A variety of models in which the theory is applied are followed by exercises to improve students' writing skills, focusing on register and style. The exercises are graded, leading to the acquisition of those skills needed for students to be able to write successfully at advanced levels. Topic identification, "discuss and write" sections and study check sections reinforce students' knowledge and remind them of the structures previously presented, thus helping them revise the writing areas covered in the book. The Teacher's Book provides answers to the exercises, model plans, transcripts of the listening exercises and useful teaching tips. At the back of the Teacher's Book are marked model compositions to help teachers mark students' compositions. The book is accompanied by a cassette with all the listening exercises.

The units can either be presented in the order they appear in the book or teachers can select the unit they want to present according to their own judgement and their students' needs. The course can be covered in approximately 30 one-hour lessons.

Brainstorming Technique

The brainstorming technique can be used in all the units in this book. The technique may be applied each time the students come across a new topic, whether in a model or a writing assignment.

The technique is used as follows: the teacher invites students to think of as many words or ideas as possible related to the topic and writes them on the board. The teacher may choose to guide the students further by having them link or categorise related terms.

This technique aims to stimulate students' knowledge about the topic, thus drawing together ideas and vocabulary necessary for writing a successful composition.

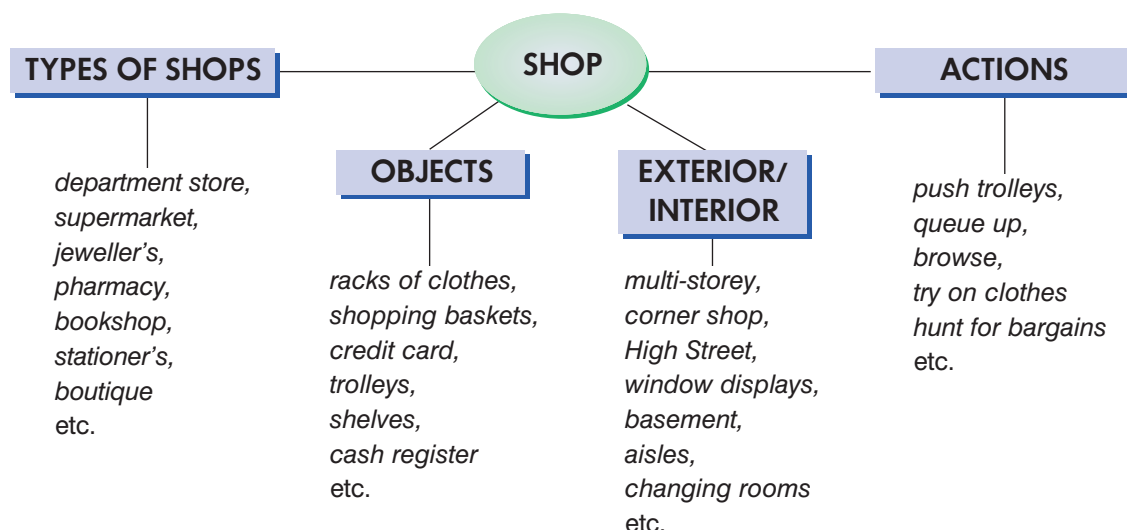
e.g. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of technological progress.

Brainstorming: *computers, genetic engineering, information networks, unemployment, satellite communications, cloning, nuclear accidents, medical research, etc.*

Ss can then be asked to think of the positive and negative aspects of each item.

e.g. Describe a popular shop in your neighbourhood.

Brainstorming: T writes the following key words on the board and asks Ss to give him/her as many words as possible related to each key word.



Contents

| | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | Describing People | 4 |
| 2 | Describing Places/Buildings..... | 18 |
| 3 | Describing Objects | 32 |
| 4 | Describing Festivals/Events/Ceremonies | 34 |
| 5 | Narratives | 38 |
| | Study Check 1 | 52 |
| 6 | Discursive Essays | 54 |
| | a. For and Against Essays | 60 |
| | b. Opinion Essays | 70 |
| | c. Essays Suggesting Solutions to Problems | 76 |
| 7 | Letters | 82 |
| | a. Letters of Request | 85 |
| | b. Letters Giving Information | 88 |
| | c. Letters Giving an Opinion | 93 |
| | i. Letters of Advice | 93 |
| | ii. Letters Making Suggestions/Recommendations | 95 |
| | iii. Letters to the Authorities/Editor | 97 |
| | d. Letters of Complaint | 101 |
| | e. Letters of Apology | 105 |
| | f. Letters of Application | 107 |
| | g. Transactional Letters | 111 |
| | Study Check 2 | 118 |
| 8 | Reports | 120 |
| | a. Assessment Reports | 122 |
| | b. Informative Reports | 126 |
| | c. Survey Reports | 128 |
| | d. Proposal Reports | 132 |
| | Study Check 3 | 135 |
| 9 | Articles/News Reports/Reviews | 136 |
| | a. Articles | 139 |
| | b. News Reports | 144 |
| | c. Reviews | 150 |
| | Study Check 4 | 154 |
| | Revision & Extension Section | 158 |
| | Appendix: Linking Words/Phrases | |

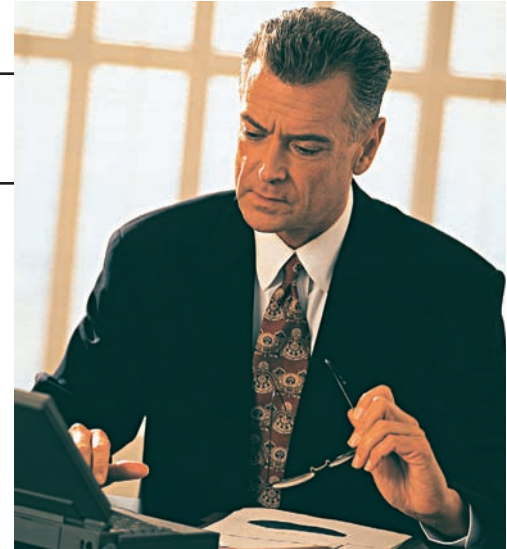
UNIT 1 Describing People

- 1 Look at the people in the photographs and talk about each in terms of appearance, personality and life/lifestyle.

Appearance: How would you describe each person's appearance?
Which features of their appearance are most noticeable?
What does their way of sitting, looking, etc. suggest?

Personality: What do you imagine each person is like?

Life & Lifestyle: What else do you imagine about each person concerning such things as profession, ambitions, interests/hobbies, daily routine, etc?



A composition describing a person should consist of:

- a) an **introduction** giving brief information about who the person is, where/how you met him/her, how you heard about him/her, etc;
 - b) a **main body** which may include description of such things as physical appearance, personality/behaviour, manner/mannerisms and/or details of the person's life and lifestyle, (hobbies, interests, everyday activities, etc.) and
 - c) a **conclusion** in which you comment on why the person is of interest, express your feelings/opinion concerning the person, etc.
- In a descriptive composition of a person, you may also be asked to *explain why* this person is successful/admirable/unusual, etc, why he/she made such a strong impression on you, how he/she has influenced you, etc.
 - Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence which summarises the paragraph. The content of the paragraph depends on the topic itself and where the emphasis is placed.
 - Descriptions of people may be included in several other types of writing tasks such as narratives, letters, assessment reports, etc.

Points to Consider

- To describe **physical appearance**, you should give details of the person's **height/build, age, facial features, hair, clothing**, etc. moving from the most general aspects to the most specific details. *e.g. Bill, who is in his early twenties, is quite tall and well-built, with thick black hair and piercing blue eyes. He is usually dressed in jeans and a T-shirt.*
- To describe **personality and behaviour**, you can support your description with examples of manner and mannerism: *e.g. Mark is rather unsociable, usually sitting silently in a corner observing others from a distance.*
- To describe **life, lifestyle and beliefs**, you should talk about the person's habits, interests, profession, daily routine, opinions, etc.
e.g. Being both a university student and a part-time assistant in a supermarket, Janet has little free time to go out in the evenings.
- If the instructions for the writing task ask you to describe someone related to the present, *e.g. "Describe a person who is unusual ..."*, you will describe the person using Present tenses. If you are asked to describe sb related to the past, sb who is no longer alive, or sb whom you met some time ago ... *e.g. "Describe a famous person you met who was not as you expected ..."*, you will describe the person using Past tenses.
- The use of descriptive vocabulary, *e.g. stunning, slender, etc.* and a variety of linking words and structures will make your writing more interesting.

Introduction

Paragraph 1

who the person is/
when/how you first met/
saw him/her

Main Body

Paragraph 2

physical appearance

Paragraph 3

personality/behaviour (with
justification/examples)

Paragraph 4

life/lifestyle/beliefs

Paragraph 5

explanation 1 + justification

Paragraph 6

explanation 2 + justification

Conclusion

Final Paragraph

comments/feelings about
person

- 2** Read the following composition and fill in the missing information in the plan. Look at the highlighted adjective-noun combinations, then close your books and try to remember as many of these as possible. What other words can you think of which could be used to describe a person's physical appearance?

Describe a person you know well

When I began working at Hillcrest Nursery School three years ago, I was introduced to Sharon Dunn, the school's headmistress.

Her **smart appearance** and **warm, friendly expression** made me like her immediately. She is a **small-boned, smiling woman** in her early fifties, with **twinkling blue eyes** and **soft, silver curls**. Although she dresses simply she always manages to look elegant.

She is a very **fair-minded person** who treats everyone at the school with equal respect. Despite clasping her hands nervously when she is upset, she is actually very calm, which is shown by her ability to keep her temper in the most difficult situations. Her quiet voice and **gentle, caring manner** make her popular with the children.

Ms Dunn has no children of her own; however, she says that she feels like a mother to all of the children in her school. In fact, she has no time for family life, since she dedicates her life to her job. Besides taking care of various administrative tasks every day, she always takes time to talk to the teachers and parents. In addition, she often holds meetings with the school's Board of Directors, as well as with staff and parents.

To my mind, Sharon Dunn is a dedicated professional who is a wonderful role model, not only for the children but for the teachers, as well.

Introduction

first met Ms Dunn at Hillcrest Nursery School, headmistress

Main Body

Appearance

smart; warm, friendly expression

Personality/Behaviour

Life/Lifestyle/Beliefs

Conclusion

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

- A description of a person's appearance could include such aspects as **height/build, age, facial features/expression, hair, clothes, etc.**

You may describe **visual details** (e.g. *A tall, heavily-built man wearing a black leather jacket ...*) and/or use words and phrases which describe the **general impression** created by the person's appearance (e.g. *Donna's slender, youthful build makes her look younger than she is, while her face, with its bright smile and friendly expression, is very attractive*).

Note that when you describe someone for official purposes e.g. *a police report*, you emphasise the person's physical appearance, giving the most accurate description possible.

sparkling/watery/piercing eyes
sarcastic/condescending/friendly smile
scars/freckles/wrinkles



C

- 3** Look at the photographs, choose the most appropriate descriptive words from those suggested, and then write a short description of each person, as in the example.

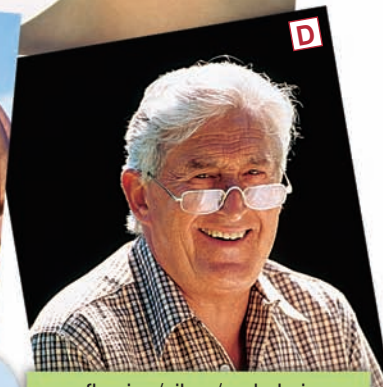


broad/hooded/button nose
fair/smooth/swarthy skin
bloodshot/sunken/protruding eyes

He has a hooked nose, swarthy skin and bloodshot eyes.



portly/slender/powerful build
tanned/clean-shaven/fine-featured face
flabby/bulging/withered biceps



flowing/silver/curly hair
warm/hostile/arrogant expression
dimples/pimples/wrinkles

Linking Words and Structures

- Writing which contains a series of short sentences or the same simple linking words (such as "and") soon becomes boring and repetitive. To avoid this, you should use a wide range of linking words and structures.

with

*She is tall and striking, **with** long blonde hair.*

Relative Clauses who/which/whose

*My neighbour, **who** is slightly eccentric, has dozens of filthy cats.*

*He is a scruffy child **whose** clothes are torn and dirty.*

*He has a broken nose, **which** makes him look like a boxer.*

Result so/such (a) ... (that)

*She is **so** beautiful (**that**) she looks like a film star.*

Addition in addition to, as well as/besides, moreover, furthermore, not only ... but also ..., etc.

*He is very tall, **in addition to being** very thin.*

*My grandmother has deep wrinkles, **as well as** thin grey hair.*

*He is **not only** artistic, **but also** a successful businessman.*

Contrast but/yet/However/Nonetheless/Even so + clause

Although/(Even) though/While + clause

In spite of/Despite + -ing form/noun/the fact that

*He is temperamental, **but/yet** he is a loyal friend.*

*He looks as though he's an old man. **However**, he is only 35.*

***Although** he has a huge, powerful body, he's a very gentle person.*

***In spite of being** very busy, she always has time for her children.*

- 4** Join the following sentences by using a variety of the structures shown in the table above, as in the example.

e.g. Kevin Boyce plays basketball for our school team. He is very tall. He is athletic, too. This makes him an excellent player.

*Kevin Boyce, **who** plays basketball for our school team, is **not only** very tall **but also** very athletic, **which** makes him an excellent player.*

- 1** The Masai are East African tribespeople. They are tall. They have noble features. They look extremely graceful.



- 2** Grace Kelly reached Hollywood stardom in the 1950s. She was famous for her delicate features. She married a prince too.
- 3** The postman is 56. He has thick black hair. It has only a few touches of grey. He has smooth skin. This makes him look younger than he is.
- 4** Mrs Russell is tiny. Her flat is next to mine. She has white hair and wrinkles. She looks 90 years old.
- 5** Maurice has black hair. He has a thick black moustache. He has a dark complexion.
- 6** The policeman's muscular build filled his large uniform. He had a high, broad forehead and a strong, square jaw. These gave him an air of authority.

PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOUR

- In descriptions of people we can include a clear description of a person's personality and behaviour with a variety of **character words**.

*e.g. He is **friendly** and **honest**.*

*She speaks very **rudely**.*

*He is **greedy** and a **miser**.*

These words should be **justified** in an explanation or example. *e.g. Brian, who is very **sociable**, **enjoys going to parties and meeting people**.*

- If you describe negative qualities, you should use mild language. Use: **tend to**, **seem to**, **is rather**, **can sometimes be**, etc. *e.g. Sarah is an excellent worker, but she **can sometimes be rather** impatient. (not: ~~She is impatient.~~)*
- You may describe personality and behaviour with examples of **manner and mannerisms** (the gestures people use, the way they speak/walk, etc) *e.g. Timothy is a very **tolerant** father; **no matter what his children do he doesn't lose his temper**.*

Note that personality characteristics should be stressed in certain types of writing, for example when you recommend someone for a job.

Linking Words and Structures

● LINKING CAUSE AND EFFECT

She is open and friendly. (Cause)

She is popular. (Effect)

because/as/since

owing to/due to (+ -ing/noun/the fact that) ...

As a result/consequence of

A/the result of ... is... ... ; as a result, ...

She is popular **because** she is open and friendly.

She is popular **due to being/due to the fact that she** is open and friendly.

A result of her being open is that she is popular..

... , so ...

therefore/for this reason ...

The reason (that/why) ... is...

She is open and friendly, **so** she is popular.

She is open and friendly, **therefore** she is popular.

The reason she is popular **is** that she is open and friendly.

- 5** All the sentences below use the simple linking word “because”. Look at the table above, then rewrite each of the sentences using the linking word or phrase in bold type.

e.g. People often find him offensive because he says exactly what he thinks.

A result of ...

A result of his saying exactly what he thinks is that people often find him offensive.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 People trust Paul because he is so honest. | Since ... |
| 2 He is very successful because he works extremely hard. | The reason ... |
| 3 Joan is an interesting person because she has lived in exotic places and has had so many strange experiences. | ... ; as a result, ... |
| 4 Don comes across as being inquisitive because he tends to ask people a lot of questions. | ... , so ... |
| 5 I dislike her because she is vain and self-centred. | ... due to ... |

Impressions, Opinions and Reactions

I think/feel/etc (that)

It seems to me that

To me/To my mind

As far as I'm concerned

In my opinion/view/eyes

sb seems/appears **to be** ...

sb strikes people/comes across **as** (being) ...

sb gives the impression **of being** .../the impression that ...

I/people/etc find/consider sb **to be** ...

I think of/see/regard sb **as being** ...

- 6** Using the expressions in brackets, write a complete sentence from each of the following ‘skeleton’ sentences, as in the example.

e.g. Graham / sometimes / be insincere / result / try / flatter / everyone (come across)
Graham sometimes comes across as being insincere, as a result of trying to flatter everyone.

- 1 He has / habit / speak with / mouth full / which I / be / disgusting (find)
- 2 Sarah / people / be / immature / since / often giggle / when someone / speak / her (strike)
- 3 Owing / fact / David / never pay / anything, he / be / mean (impression)
- 4 As / he / not return things / he borrow / he / be / dishonest (opinion)
- 5 Since my sister often forget / where she put / things, she / be / absent-minded (appear)

Compound Adjectives

Compound adjectives are formed with:

- a) **present participles**: a quick-acting officer, a hard-working doctor
- b) **past participles**: a stylishly-dressed woman, an open-hearted young man, a narrow-minded politician, a widely-known football player
- c) **cardinal numbers + nouns**: a three-year-old boy, a six-foot tall man
- d) **well, badly, ill, poorly + past participle**: a well-intentioned friend, an ill-mannered actress

- 7** Make compound adjectives to describe the following:

- 1 A baby who is crying constantly.
- 2 A speaker who has prepared thoroughly.
- 3 Students who are organised well.
- 4 A girl who has curly hair.
- 5 A boy who has brown eyes.
- 6 A basketball player who is 42 years old.
- 7 An artist who is dressed in funny clothes.
- 8 A child-minder who has been specially trained.
- 9 A man who has a short temper.
- 10 A man with one leg.
- 11 A dentist who has gentle manners.

Participles

In formal writing, present and past participles can be used to replace clauses as in the following examples.

She is so rich that she can buy anything she wants.

Being so rich, she can buy anything she wants.
She was so rich that she could buy anything she wanted.

Having been so rich, she could buy anything she wanted.

When he is seen from a distance, he resembles Paul Newman.

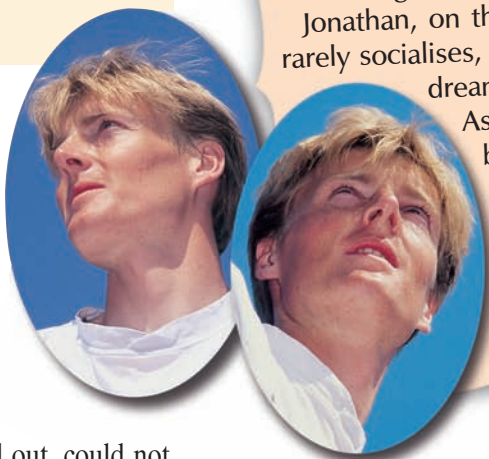
Seen from a distance, he resembles Paul Newman.

Monica, who was dressed entirely in red, entered the room.

Dressed entirely in red, Monica entered the room.

8 Rewrite the following sentences using participles.

- 1 Oliver, who was covered in dust, climbed down the ladder.
- 2 Veronica, who was tired out, could not go on with the journey.
- 3 Richard is so rude that he has no friends.
- 4 She is so intelligent that she can speak six languages.
- 5 Frank is so absent-minded that he always forgets his car keys.
- 6 Susan, who was laughing hysterically, couldn't speak.
- 7 Paul, who was walking on crutches, left the room slowly.
- 8 Louise is so patient that she is cut out to be a teacher.



- 9 The following text describes twin brothers. Read it, circle the words or phrases describing personality and behaviour, and underline the justifications or examples given.

Describe two people who are very different, despite their apparent similarity

Jason and Jonathan are identical twin brothers, who are in the same year at school as I am. Physically, they are indistinguishable; they are like "two peas in a pod", as the saying goes. They have the same short blond hair and fine features, and they tend to dress in the same casual style. When you get to know them, however, it soon becomes clear that their personalities are completely different.

Jason is very outgoing, assertive and ambitious — the sort of person who might run a large corporation. An example of this is the fact that he is already the president of the school debating society. Although people tend to find him rather pompous and conceited, to me he simply seems full of confidence. For instance, he is much more likely to say "I can do it" than "I'm the best". It is true that he comes across as stubborn, though, due to his habit of refusing to admit he is wrong in any disagreement.

Jonathan, on the other hand, is more of an introvert. He very rarely socialises, preferring to spend his time on his own. He is a dreamer who can spend hours staring at the clouds.

As a result, he sometimes gives the impression of being lazy, while a few people even regard him as slow-witted. On better acquaintance, however, he turns out to be not only enthusiastic and energetic, but also deeply caring which is shown by his tireless work on behalf of various charities.

- 10 Use the adjectives listed below to complete the following sentences describing character as in the example:

childish, cruel, dishonest, friendly, lazy, mean, moody, rude, shy, stubborn, tactless


Then choose from the list below the adjective which has a meaning almost the same as the word you have just used. Write each adjective next to its synonym.

blunt, deceitful, idle, immature, insolent, miserly, obstinate, timid, sociable, spiteful, temperamental

e.g. Maria is a friendly/sociable girl who loves meeting people and gets on well with everyone.

- 1 A good example of Roger's behaviour was the time that he refused to finish a game of chess because he was losing.

- 2 Andrew is so that he does nothing all day except sit and watch television.
- 3 Sandra is a rather girl who enjoys upsetting people and getting them into trouble.
- 4 Gerald tends to be a(n) person; it's difficult to believe what he says or to trust him.
- 5 Speaking to strangers is terrifying for Elaine because she is so
- 6 Melissa tends to be and often upsets people by saying what she thinks without considering their feelings.
- 7 My brother is very ; he can suddenly change from being perfectly charming to angry or miserable.
- 8 Mr Purvis is a rather old man who refuses to change his mind once he has reached a decision about something.
- 9 The way that he shouts at his teachers is just one example of his behaviour.
- 10 I think Carol is because she only spends money when she absolutely has to.

- 11**  Read the table, then listen to the cassette and complete the missing information. Using the information in the table and the linking words in the list, compare Anthony and June.

Similarities: also, too, as well as

Differences: however, on the other hand, whereas, while, but, although

e.g. In some ways, Anthony and June are very similar.

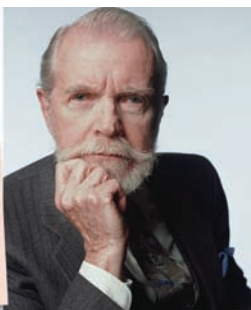
For example, they are both fashionable ... However, ...

| | BOTH | ANTHONY | JUNE |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Appearance: | <i>fashionable</i> | | , <i>conservative</i> |
| Personality & Behaviour: | <i>self-confident,</i> <i>sensitive</i> | , <i>enjoys</i> <i>easily</i> | <i>not outgoing,</i> <i>seems</i>, |

Manner and Mannerisms

- 12** Complete each of the following sentences with the set of character words which best matches the manner/mannerisms described.

- a arrogant, smug and condescending
b sensitive, generous and caring
c energetic, outgoing and confident
d distant, absent-minded and impolite



- 1 William comes across as because he holds his head up high, speaks in a loud, clear voice and looks at people with a steady gaze.
- 2 Most people regard him as on account of his sarcastic tone of voice and sneering expression.
- 3 The reason Lydia seems is that she often looks away in the middle of a conversation and sometimes doesn't answer when she is spoken to.
- 4 Phillip strikes me as since he always realises when someone is upset or worried and offers them comfort, advice and practical help.

- 13** Read the following descriptions and fill in each blank with a "character" word from the list below. Then rewrite each description in one sentence as in the example. Use as many different linking techniques as possible.

*aggressive, impatient, insincere,
nervous, timid, vain*

e.g. Kevin bites his nails. He jumps at loud noises. He is nervous.

As well as biting his nails, Kevin, who is a very nervous person, jumps at loud noises.

- 1 Cathy spends hours doing her make-up. She is always looking at herself in the mirror. She is
- 2 Jerry blushes easily. He looks at the floor when he is talking to people. He's very
- 3 Gordon shouts at people a lot. He also clenches his fists whenever he gets angry. He is
- 4 Paula flatters people she dislikes. She pretends to agree with them, even if she's of a different opinion. She's
- 5 Roberta taps her foot if she has to wait. She sighs if things don't happen quickly. She's

LIFE, LIFESTYLE AND BELIEFS

- In a description of a person you could include information that relates to their life, lifestyle and beliefs. You may refer to factual details such as **profession, qualifications, family, etc** e.g. *He is an eminent scientist who is famous for his research in genetics.* or aspects such as **daily routine, hobbies, interests, achievements, beliefs, ambitions, future prospects, etc.** e.g. *George is working hard because he wants to be promoted.*
- Information about life, lifestyle and beliefs gives the reader a clearer idea of what the person is and does, and often also suggests what the person's character is like.
e.g. *Andrew's ambition is to climb Mt Everest = athletic, adventurous*

14 Read the descriptions of three people's lifestyles and beliefs and try to guess what each person does. Which aspects of their life, lifestyle and beliefs do they mention? Now write a similar paragraph about a teacher or a reporter.

Ann has a very unpredictable lifestyle because she doesn't have a regular job. When she has a part, however, she tends to get up late as she works until late in the evenings. Then, she goes to the gym because it's important for her to be healthy. After that Ann learns her lines or attends extra rehearsals. She goes to work at about six o'clock. Ann's profession enables her to fulfil one of her dreams — to travel. She tries to keep an optimistic approach to life as you never know what the future holds.



Steve has a very busy lifestyle — getting up at five thirty, working out in the gym and then going straight to work. He often has working breakfasts and lunches and meetings to attend that go on until the early hours. Steve also has to travel a lot, so he isn't able to spend much time with his family and friends, although he tries to keep his weekends free. He believes in hard work and that the key to success lies in honesty and determination. His recent promotion gives him reason to hope that he will be a senior partner of the firm one day.

Claire's life is pretty much the same from day to day. On weekdays she gets up at seven, wakes up her teenaged sons and sees them off to school. Then she starts the housework, shopping and so on. She spends a lot of time working in the garden, which she really enjoys. Claire always tries to arrange something special for the weekends — a drive in the country with the whole family, for instance. She believes that taking care of her family is a job in itself and one that she takes great pride in.



15 Read the short extract below, and say which aspects of the person's life and lifestyle the paragraph deals with.

Moir's career as a respected painter keeps her busy from dawn to dusk. Fortunately she loves meeting new people, so she can combine her interests with her career. When she is not attending exhibitions and gallery openings she leads a very disciplined life. She paints from 6 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. She usually spends the early evenings with her husband and two children. Her ambition is to have a one-woman-show in an important London gallery — and her dream is to own an art gallery one day.

16 You will hear two people talking about a successful writer. Read the table, then listen to the cassette and fill in the missing information. Using the notes, first say then write a description of Emma's life and lifestyle similar to the one in Ex. 15.

| |
|----------------------------------|
| CAREER |
| successful writer |
| INTERESTS |
| |
| DAILY ROUTINE |
| writes from am to pm |
| FAMILY |
| |
| AMBITIONS |
| start school for |

- 17** Read the model below and give the topic of each paragraph. Then, list which aspects of description have been included, and underline the justifications/examples given.

Describe a person you regard as eccentric

Chris Martin moved into the house next door to mine two years ago. Even before he came round to introduce himself the following day, I could tell that he was truly eccentric.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Chris is his appearance. His slender body is usually adorned in some kind of tight-fitting, multi-coloured catsuit which makes him look like a comic book super hero. He generally tops this off with one of his flowing capes and a mask. His hair is as crazy as his clothes, going from yellow at the front, to red, to blue to green at the back, and it sticks up as if he's styled it with the aid of a powerful electric current. He has some rather strange mannerisms, too, such as his tendency to bow when introducing himself for the first time.

In spite of his strange appearance, Chris is a truly decent person and the world would be a better place if there were more people like him. He is very polite, friendly and is genuinely caring, always remembering birthdays with a photograph of a bouquet of flowers and bringing me chicken soup or Japanese tea if I'm ill. Chris will help if he possibly can and is ready to listen to everyone's problems. He tends to be aggressive from time to time, but this is because people make fun of him.

Although Chris could never be described as ordinary, I enjoy having him as a neighbour. Life is never boring when you have someone like him living next door, and his combination of unpredictability and genuine kindness make him a valuable friend.



Writing techniques

Certain writing techniques (use of weather description, direct speech or dramatic language to create mystery/suspense, reference to feelings/moods, etc.) can be used when describing people in order to make your description more vivid and interesting. See how an ordinary beginning can be made more exciting:

Instead of writing: *I first met my future wife, Heidi, in a café where I was doing my crossword on a warm afternoon in July.*

You could write: *I watched with a mixture of irritation and apprehension as the busker approached my table where I was doing the crossword on that balmy July afternoon. I felt irritated because I hate being disturbed when I'm enjoying my own company and apprehensive because I never know how to tell people politely to go away. To my surprise, however, the woman sat down opposite me and put her guitar down on the floor. "Can I play something for you?" she said with a cheeky grin. Little did I know right then that this woman, Heidi Tierney, was to be my future wife.*

- 18** 🎧 You will hear Stella telling her friend about a person she dislikes. Read the questions, then listen to the tape and answer them. You may keep notes while listening. Looking at your notes, describe the person.

1 Who is Stella describing?

.....

2 What do Stella and her friend say about his appearance?

.....

3 What does she say about his personality and/or behaviour?

.....

4 What *two* reasons does she give for disliking him?

.....

- 19** Read the following sentences and rewrite them using writing techniques.

- I first met Marion Browne, the famous writer, at a party where I hardly knew anyone.
- The man who was to become the greatest influence in my life, William Morrison, was introduced to me by my boss.
- The oddest person I have ever known was Jack Simpson.

20 Read the model below and compare it with the composition in exercise 17. Which writing techniques have been used?

It was late on a cold January night two years ago when I first laid eyes on Chris Martin, after hearing a removal van in front of the vacant house next door. Curious to see who my new neighbour was going to be, I peered out from between the curtains. Under the street lamp there appeared to be a multi-coloured clown-like figure gesticulating wildly and shouting, "Be careful with that box! That's a ten-thousand-pound amp you've got there!"

When Chris came round to introduce himself the following day, I was rather taken aback to discover that his curious guise the previous night had not been a trick of the light, but that it was, in fact his "normal" appearance. His slender body was adorned in a comic book, super hero catsuit, cape and mask and his rainbow hair looked as if it had been styled with the aid of an electric socket and a wet finger. He introduced himself with a low bow then took my hand and gently kissed it before murmuring in a deep, husky voice, "Chris Martin, at your service, Madam."

In the months that followed, I soon realised that Chris was one of the politest, friendliest and most genuinely caring people I've ever met — although he has a strange way of showing this. For instance, on my birthday, he rang my doorbell, greeted me with a bow when I opened the door, said "This is for you," and handed me a photograph of a bouquet of flowers. He brings me chicken soup and Japanese tea when I'm ill, and I know he's always ready to listen to my problems and cheer me up. Once, when I was feeling a bit low, he said, "I know! Let's go to the zoo — there's nothing like a nice elephant to make you feel better!"

Although Chris could never be described as ordinary, I enjoy having him as a neighbour. Just the other day he came round unexpectedly with an entire Thai meal beautifully laid out on a tray. When I thanked him, he merely shrugged and said, "What else are neighbours for?" It's this sort of thing that makes him such a valuable and unpredictable friend.

INTERPRETING THE TOPIC

- Various composition tasks in examinations ask you to describe a person or people; however, this description may be only one part of the composition. Composition tasks often ask you to **describe** a person **and explain** something about them.

In order to complete such a composition task successfully, you should not describe every aspect of appearance, personality, etc. You should choose the aspects which are most relevant to the particular question.

e.g. "Describe a person who has done a great deal for others, and explain how he or she has managed to achieve so much."

In answering this question, it is not as relevant to describe appearance

e.g. "He is a tall, well-built man with pale blue eyes ..."

as it is to describe the person's character, achievements and so on. *e.g.*

"She is strong-willed, outgoing, and dedicated to ..."

- It is important to **interpret the instructions** carefully. The instructions contain certain **key words** and phrases which you must not ignore; for instance, if the instructions say "Describe a famous person ..." you cannot describe someone who is unknown to the general public.
- The instructions may also ask you to **explain the reasons** for your impressions/reactions, for somebody's success, etc. *e.g. Describe a person who has influenced you greatly and explain the reasons for this influence.* You should state each reason in a separate paragraph with a clear **topic sentence** which summarises the main idea of each paragraph, and supports this with **examples** and/or **justification**.

e.g. The main reason I found him eccentric was the way he dressed.

[Topic sentence]

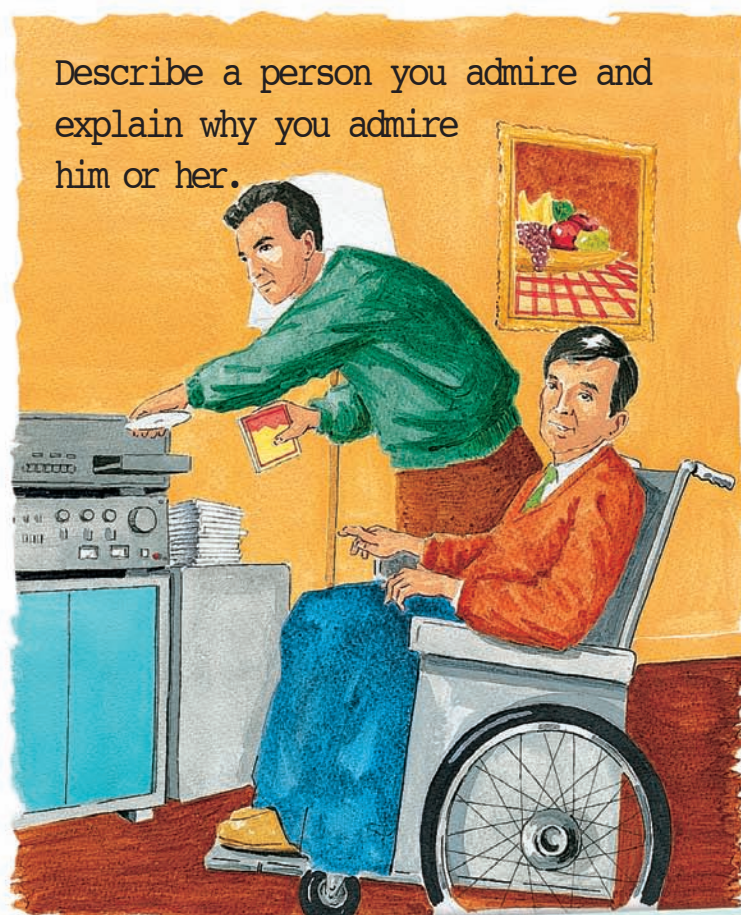
For instance, he often wore strange, enormous hats that seemed to belong to some other period in history. Furthermore, ...

[Examples/Justification]

21 Read the following composition tasks and underline the key words. What information will you include in each paragraph? How would you adapt the paragraph plan to organise your composition?

- 1 Describe a person whom you associate with a particular place and explain why you make this connection.
- 2 Describe a famous person from history whom you admire. Give reasons for your choice.
- 3 Describe a person you know well and say how he/she has changed since you first met him/her.
- 4 Describe two people you know well and say how their hobbies reveal their different personalities.
- 5 Describe someone you knew in the past and say in what ways you were influenced by him/her.

22 Read the model below, underline the topic sentences of each paragraph, and then complete the outline plan on the right.



Describe a person you admire and explain why you admire him or her.

* Introduction - Gary - fellow student

* Main Body

DESCRIBE

physical appearance

.....

Personality/Behaviour/Interests

.....

Life/lifestyles/beliefs

.....

EXPLAIN/REASON

"Why":

.....

"Why":

.....

* Conclusion

.....

The person I admire most is not famous at all, yet to my mind his achievements are as important as those of any historical figure. Gary Young is a fellow student of mine at college, and for him this fact itself is a major achievement.

Gary suffers from cerebral palsy, which makes it almost impossible for him to control his movements. As a result, he spends his life in a wheelchair, cannot write with a pen or pencil, and speaks so slowly and strangely that it takes patience to understand what he is saying. This, together with his thin, twisted body and awkward facial expressions, can often cause people to treat him as if he were a backward child.

However, behind his physical appearance, Gary is a warm, fun-loving, intelligent person. His disability affects his muscles, not his mind or personality. He enjoys the same things any student does — listening to music, meeting friends, and so on — and he is not only the best student in our class, but also has a wonderful sense of humour and genuine interest in other people. Unable to express himself easily in conversation, he uses a special typewriter to write letters to his friends, and beautiful poems which show the true depth of his thoughts and character. He lives a very regular life, studying every day and never allowing himself to fall behind in his schoolwork. Of course he enjoys going out as well, and he believes that a balance of work and play make life happy and fulfilling.

The main reason I admire him so much is that he is determined to lead a normal life, in spite of the physical difficulties he has to overcome. Although his condition prevented him from going to school, he gave himself an education by studying at home. He lives alone, cooking and cleaning with the help of equipment he designed himself, and he leads a full social life with his many friends, including visits to the theatre, or even (on one memorable occasion when I was with him) to the funfair.

Another reason I admire Gary, is the fact that he never feels sorry for himself. He says, for instance, that being unable to move around simply gives him more time to think. In fact, he always manages to see the bright side of any situation, so that, far from needing his friends to comfort him, he actually cheers us up when we are worried or depressed!

I would admire Gary as a person even if he didn't have any disability; the fact that he does, and refuses to let it spoil his life, makes him the most remarkable person I know.

- 23** 🎧 You will hear a film star talking about the importance and influence of her grandmother during her childhood. Listen and complete the notes below. Using the notes write two paragraphs about Liliana's grandmother.

Took care of me

- used to
- used to take me
- nursed me during long illness

Made me feel safe

- one thing in my life that never
- always there when I

Taught me everything

- always things to me
- taught me the difference between and

- 24** Fill in the topic sentences in the text opposite, then give the paragraph outline. What information is included in each paragraph? What tenses have been used? Why?

- a During the years I worked with her, my admiration for Miriam steadily increased.
- b Her ability to deal with several matters at once seemed almost miraculous.
- c My first impression of her was one of politeness verging on stiffness.
- d All in all, Miriam is the most admirable person I've ever met.
- e The most striking thing about Miriam, though, was her sensitivity towards others.
- f On my first day of work at Acrol Assurance I arrived nervous, soaking wet — and nearly half an hour late.



Describe a person who has influenced your life and explain why you admire him/her.

1 I had forgotten to take an umbrella, had missed the bus and was now ready for a good scolding. It was then that I met Miriam Bellings, the Managing Director, who was to have an enormous influence on my life and career.

2 She was a small, birdlike woman, her appearance giving the impression of a nervous, easily-flustered person. I soon learnt, however, that her true character was calm, warm and kind, yet unbendingly professional. After reminding me that lateness would not be tolerated in the office, she laughingly confessed to me that she had been over an hour late on her first morning because she had lost her way, which was typical of her sympathetic character. She then proceeded to explain the workings of the office to me with such clarity and accuracy, and with such patience to my rather naive questions, that I was left with the impression that she was a sort of superwoman of office management.

3 No crisis in the office ever caught her off-guard, and on the rare occasions when she could not answer a question, she would make sure that she had an answer for you within the hour.

4 I remember on one occasion when nearly everyone in the office had gone down with the flu, Miriam managed to keep the office running smoothly without seeming stressed or harassed in the least. We sometimes used to joke that if everyone in the office had been absent on the same day, Miriam would not even have noticed!

5 Although she had never married, she seemed to have a deep understanding of family relationships, and could always tell when an employee was having problems at home. She was not a "pull-yourself-together" sort of boss at all. If she sensed that something was wrong, she would call you into her office and encourage you to talk. Not only was she a good listener, but the advice she offered was always sound as well.

6 I lost touch with Miriam after her retirement, but I will always remember her as the "guiding light" in my working life, the woman who — through her example, help and advice — enabled me to be as successful as I am today.

25 Read the model below and correct the highlighted words. Write **S** for spelling, **WO** for word order, **G** for grammar, **P** for punctuation or **WW** for wrong word. Then, fill in the paragraph plan.

Describe an important person from the past and
explain
why he/she is of ^{in G} significant importance



Paragraph 1
who the person is

Thomas Jefferson, who was born **on** 1743 in Virginia, USA, was an extraordinarily able and gifted man **who's** influence on American politics and culture is still felt to this day. Best known as the author of the Declaration of Independence, (which stated America's reasons for needing to be free of British rule) and as the third president of the United States, Jefferson was a highly educated and multi-talented man **which** left his mark not only on politics but on agriculture, architecture, linguistics and philosophy, as well.

Paragraph 2

Jefferson was a tall, well-built man with striking features and a memorable physical presence. He was perceptive and sensitive in personal relations and, although **was he** involved in many political controversies, he did not bear grudges against his opponents. Despite the fact that he was a public figure, and often had as **much** as fifty people staying in his home, he was a very private person who kept his private life to himself. He was a linguistically learned man who **at least knew** six languages, had a keen interest in developing new varieties of food plants, instigated the first systematic study of American Indian dialects and designed his own home, Monticello, an outstanding example of 18th century neoclassical architecture.

Paragraph 3

Admirable in many ways, this man was most to be respected for his belief in the freedom of the individual, which he spent all of his life fighting for. His **more** fundamental belief was that every person has the right to be economically independent and to decide his or her own destiny, and this philosophy formed the basis of American thought which **still today survives**. He was scandalised by proposals to establish a dictatorship in the United **states**, and declared that "the very thought alone was treason against the people".

Paragraph 4

Jefferson believed in the importance of education for **whole** people. He held the belief that no country could function properly if its citizens were uneducated, and he fought **hardly** for the establishment of schools and also founded the University of Virginia, even designing the buildings and supervising their construction himself. He **referred** to this act as "The last service I can render my country", and it was indeed a valuable one.

Paragraph 5

All in all, Thomas Jefferson was a person **who he** earned esteem and affection **while** his lifetime, and who deserves our respect for his influence on political thought and for the long-lasting effects of all

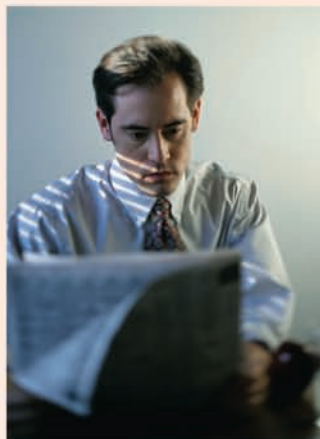
Unit 1 Describing People

26 Descriptions of people can be found in stories, letters of recommendation, police reports, newspaper articles etc. Read the following extracts and decide:

- where each extract is taken from.
- who the writer of each extract is.
- who each extract is addressed to.

1 To whom it may concern:

Paul Webster has been in our employment for the last five years. During that time, I have found him to be honest, reliable and trustworthy. He has proven himself to be a dedicated and highly-motivated member of our workforce. Always professional in his appearance and approach to his responsibilities, Mr Webster has been a great asset to our company and I have no hesitation in recommending him for any related post.



4 Although a career-girl through and through, Sonya claims motherhood hasn't changed her life very much. "I was lucky to be able to work from home," says the bright, 25-year-old publicity agent. Her short brown hair swept behind her ears and minimal use of make-up are signs that she has to be practical about combining the joint responsibilities of work and parenthood. But her trim figure and professional clothes help ensure that she maintains her dynamic businesswoman appearance.



2 Meryl Streep may be successful and talented, but she is not entirely satisfied that she is doing her best in either of her roles, as an actress or as a parent. Each job takes time and energy from the other, and she feels that if she had dedicated herself to one career she would have had greater satisfaction. But when we asked her what she would do if she had to choose between her glamorous acting career and motherhood she replied, "I cannot live without either!"



3 Matthew Robbins was reported missing on the night of Saturday 22nd August. He is of African origin, aged thirty-two, and of medium height (5 feet 10). He has a muscular frame and his black hair is cropped short. He also has a small moustache and a goatee. Robbins was last seen in the Maxwell Park area and was wearing a grey vest-type T-shirt and black jeans at the time. Robbin's family are appealing for any information on his whereabouts.



5 She was a lively child with long, golden hair and tight curls. She had inherited her mother's big blue eyes but when she smiled, I could see that she was the image of her father. There was such a directness in the way that she looked at you, while her thin lips gave away the insecurity that Michael had shown all those years before. She was so much his daughter and, while I played with her, all the old, painful memories came flooding back.

27 Read the extracts and write appropriate topic sentences for them.

1

.....

.....

.....

This is not immediately apparent as she still looks very much the same. Her youthful face and slim figure remain unchanged, and her clothes are as elegant as ever. However, to people who know her well the change is obvious. She was once a carefree and even frivolous person, but the difficult circumstances of her life have made her a more serious, compassionate and understanding person.

2

.....

.....

.....

There is nothing he cannot succeed in once he sets his mind to it. As a student at university, he worked at weekends in order to help pay his way while completing his degree in business studies. He started out at the bottom of the company, but his dedication and determination have meant that after just ten years he is now a director. Over the years his positive qualities have brought him success repeatedly, and he has earned the admiration of all who know him.



3

.....

.....

It's not that he's ever done anything to me or to any of our colleagues, but there's something about the way he looks at you that makes you feel uneasy. He is quite good-looking, but there is a rather sly, cagey look in his small brown eyes that makes you distrust him from the moment you meet him. He tends to be obsequious as well, telling everyone exactly what they want to hear and over-complimentary to anyone in a higher position than his. There may be no real basis for my dislike, but he is a person I simply cannot trust.



DISCUSS & WRITE

28 Look at the following composition task instructions and answer the questions below.

a) *Describe a person from your past you would like to see again, and explain why.*

- 1 What are the key words in the task instructions?
- 2 What do the phrases "your past" and "see again" suggest?
- 3 Could you choose to describe someone you dislike? Why (not)?
- 4 Which features/aspects of description will you include?
- 5 What reasons can you think of in answer to the "explain" part?
- 6 What examples/justification could you include?
- 7 What would a suitable paragraph plan for this composition task be?

b) *Describe a person you dislike, and explain why you feel this way about him or her.*

- 1 What are the key words in the task instructions?
- 2 Should you describe someone you know personally? Why (not)?
- 3 Should all of your description emphasise negative features?
- 4 Which features/aspects of description will you include?
- 5 What reasons can you think of in answer to the "explain" part?
- 6 What examples/justification could you include?
- 7 What would a suitable paragraph plan for this composition task be?

29 Choose ONE of the composition tasks above, and write a complete paragraph plan with notes. Then write the composition in about 350 words.