



USING DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

LEVEL 3 PROJECT



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Rev. 11/2016 Item 8318

INTRODUCTION



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.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT



For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 12.



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.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

5
EXEMPLARY

4
EXCEL

3
ACCOMPLISHED

2
EMERGING

1
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I am comfortable using verbs, adverbs, and adjectives to create vivid imagery.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand the difference between literal and figurative language.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am comfortable using both literal and figurative language.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am comfortable using evocative language to achieve my desired effect.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

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

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 changes the literal meanings of words. The figurative statement, “His eyes were bigger than his stomach” is not intended to mean his eyes were literally larger, but refers to someone who thought he was hungrier than he truly was.

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.



Figurative language can take multiple forms.

Simile

Explicitly compares one thing with another thing of a different kind. (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. (That speech was a piece of cake.)

Symbolism

Uses symbols to express ideas or qualities in art or literature. (He gave her a heart-shaped necklace.)

Hyperbole

Exaggerates meaning as a figure of speech. (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. (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.



USING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

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

Your topic will influence these decisions.

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 they boat eases into the harbor.
4. _____ The captain can taste the feast that awaits him, as the boat returns to the harbor.

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

DESCRIPTIVE WORDS AND LANGUAGE

Understanding the 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 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 are words that give specific details about nouns. These modifiers include the five senses, emotions, and states of being.

For example, consider the sentence below, which contains no adjectives:

The sculptor finished his masterpiece.

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

The young sculptor finished his beautiful masterpiece.

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

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 his masterpiece.

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

The sculptor finished his 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 his masterpiece.

The adjective *happy* describes the noun *sculptor*, and the adverb *extremely* tells how happy he was.

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 his beautiful masterpiece.

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

The slim, young, handsome sculptor finished his 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

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. The following list describes the most common literary elements.



Plot is the logical sequence of events that develop a story.

Setting is the time and place in which a story takes place.

A **protagonist** is the main character of a story, novel, or play.

An **antagonist** is the character in conflict with the protagonist.

A **narrator** is the person who tells the story.

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more characters in a story.

Conflict is the issue around which the story revolves.

Mood is the general atmosphere of the story.

Theme is the central idea or concept of a story.

EXERCISE IDEAS



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 you enjoy and write a vivid 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.
- When reading, take note of passages that are dedicated to description.
- Write a one-page description of yourself, a close friend, or family member.

REVIEW AND APPLY

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

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

Review: Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

Organize: Use the Project Checklist on page 12 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.



Schedule: Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.

Prepare: Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 13–15 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.



PROJECT CHECKLIST

Using Descriptive Language

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.

This project includes:

- A 5- to 7-minute speech

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

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

Schedule your 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 close of your speech.

Rehearse your speech.

After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

EVALUATION FORM

Using Descriptive Language

Member Name _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____ Speech Length: 5 – 7 minutes

Speech Title

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to practice writing a speech with an emphasis on adding language to increase interest and impact.

Notes for the Evaluator

Listen for descriptive words and literary elements, such as plot and setting. Think about the story the speaker is telling, even in an informational speech. Are you engaged? Interested?

General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

EVALUATION FORM – Using Descriptive Language

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
Clarity: Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Vocal Variety: Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Eye Contact: Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Gestures: Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Audience Awareness: Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Comfort Level: Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Interest: Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Descriptive Language: Delivers a speech with a variety of descriptive language					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Literary Elements: Uses at least one literary element (plot, setting, simile, or metaphor) to enhance speech					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Using Descriptive Language

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

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



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