

Lesson 20: Exaggeration

Television commercials, online advertisements, and other sales materials successfully influence today's buyers. They do this through clever writing that praises the product's excellent qualities. Below (or on a separate sheet of paper), make a list naming different types of advertising that come into your home or that you see around town. Include a variety of sources.

- ☐ (example) Flyers _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

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

- Diet fads that assure instant weight loss
- Kitchen gadgets promising you will cook like a gourmet chef
- Exercise machines that "guarantee" bulging biceps in 30 days
- Beauty products claiming to reverse sun damage or eliminate wrinkles

Writing a Travel Advertisement

Have you ever traveled with your family to a place that sounded sensational in the ads, only to arrive and wonder what the fuss was all about? You may 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. Using descriptive, colorful words, skilled writers stretched the truth to make those places sound appealing.

This assignment, using a similar approach, gives you a fresh understanding of the power of words.

As you've been learning, descriptive writing brings ordinary objects and events to life. In this lesson, you'll get to try something new with descriptive writing as you write an exaggerated travel advertisement for a resort that's fallen on hard times. Drawing from your skills as a descriptive writer, you'll paint a glowing picture of a travel destination that hopes to draw tourists to improve its dying economy.

This location is not all it is cracked up to be! Perhaps a fire, flood, or other natural disaster has caused damage to the area. Maybe the place has become run-down or weather beaten and is in need of repair. Maybe it is the "off" season, when the weather is either too hot, too cold, or too humid. In any case, tourism is down, and the resort owners have hired *you* to persuade travelers to bring their families for a stay.

The purpose of this assignment is not to teach you to deceive, but 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 persuasive advertising techniques.

Understanding Exaggeration

Webster's *New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines **exaggerate** as "to represent (something) as greater than it is." In your first paragraph you'll portray this location as it appears. Then, in the second paragraph, you'll 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 online sources, a travel agency, the library, or your own bookshelves.

- Travel blogs
- "Bucket list travel" websites
- "All-inclusive family resorts" websites
- Destinations
- Travel magazines, brochures, or Auto Club publications
- *National Geographic* magazine or website

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 page) make a list of words you find.

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Overview of Your Composition

1. **Discuss the instructions** with your parent or teacher to make sure you understand the assignment.

2. **Choose the Setting**

- Run-down dude ranch
- Beach resort after a hurricane
- Desert hotel with a "pool" and/or "mineral hot springs" nearby
- Mountain resort with individual family cabins
- Ancient castle in Scotland, England, Germany, or France
- Tropical island during monsoon or hurricane season
- Golf resort during a drought
- Frigid location during the winter (think *freezing!*)
- Lakeside boating resort
- Your own idea _____

3. **Begin with brainstorming.**

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

- In the first column of the "Exaggeration Worksheet (p. 20-7)," write about what the place *actually looks like*. In the second column, jot down ways you could exaggerate those same accommodations to sound appealing. Remember to come up with more information than you'll need in your composition. This gives you a larger pool of details to draw from when writing your "sloppy copy."
 - **Facilities.** Discuss the comforts and conveniences that appeal to vacationers (lodging, pools, restaurants and food, shopping, nearby attractions, entertainment, etc.). Then brainstorm specifically about the things that would draw people *to your resort*.
 - **Scenic Environment.** Talk about the kinds of scenery that attract sightseers (autumn leaves, forests, beaches, mineral hot springs, tropical vegetation, snow, natural wonders, bodies of water, historic buildings or monuments, etc.). Then brainstorm about the scenery that would entice visitors *to your resort*.
4. **Activities.** Next, 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 and boating; nature activities; amusement or water parks; etc.). Then brainstorm in detail about the activities that would draw visitors *to your resort*.

5. **Write two paragraphs.**

- Paragraph 1: Accurately describe the resort with facts—*run-down, drafty, and isolated*, for instance. This paragraph should not sound like an ad.
- Paragraph 2: This is the advertisement, where you'll exaggerate and stretch the truth—*provincial, airy, and private*.

6. **Write each paragraph on a SEPARATE page.** Each must be 7-9 sentences.

7. **Give your resort a realistic name.**

8. **Set the stage with a strong topic sentence.**

9. **Hide the imperfections of the resort with colorful, flowery words.** Just be sure the wording fits the locale. In your second paragraph, describe the resort as if it were in perfect condition. Help the reader see the place through "rose-colored glasses." Overstate, pad, stretch the truth—but within reason. For example, if your resort has a small spa with cracked tile and algae stains, you might exaggerate by calling it a sparkling swimming pool, but you can't call it a lake.

10. **Overemphasize the true, positive elements.** A miserably humid tropical location might still have a magnificent sunset. 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" or "finger-licking." Readers never know that the "lake stocked with fish" has not been stocked in ten years!

11. **Use rich imagery and the most descriptive, vivid words.** Your Word Lists and thesaurus are required tools. Use synonyms accurately. Know their definitions. The right words can make a cheap motel sound like a luxurious hotel or make a thatched, weedy hillside sound breathtakingly beautiful. Give the impression the place is up to date and well maintained, perfect for a visiting couple or family.

12. **Use vocabulary that appeals to the senses and emotions.** Refer to the previous page for some of the terms you found in magazines. Words like *exotic* and *private* have irresistible drawing power!

13. **Don't describe every single detail** when writing. Pick several and go from there. Use the practice paragraph as a guide.

14. **Make an emotional appeal in your closing sentence.** How do you want the reader to respond? Use words like *imagine, picture yourself, trip of a lifetime, visit, plan, discover, reserve, sign up, book your, don't miss, or package deal*.

Lesson 20: Practicing with Exaggeration

Directions

1. Read the following paragraph. Then write a second paragraph exaggerating the claims of Paradise Palms Resort.
2. Begin by brainstorming. Use the "Exaggeration Worksheet (Practice Paragraph)" on p. 20-6.
3. Fill in the first column of the worksheet with facts you read about in the paragraph about Paradise Palms Resort.
4. Fill in the second column with ways you could exaggerate those same features to make them sound appealing.

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

Brainstorming ideas for (name of resort) _____

| The Resort's Actual Features | The Resort's Features (Ideal Condition) |
|------------------------------|---|
| ❖ Facilities ❖ | ❖ Facilities ❖ |
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| | |

| | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| ❖ Scenic Environment ❖ | ❖ Scenic Environment ❖ |
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|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ❖ Resort Activities ❖ | ❖ Resort Activities ❖ |
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Lesson 20: Skill Builder

Word Usage

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

When you include a lot of new or strange words, readers get the feeling you're trying too hard to make an impression. Too many flowery, unfamiliar words can make you sound like a know-it-all.

Instead, work to find a healthy balance between simple and "stuffy" vocabulary. Wise writers choose their words carefully so their writing is descriptive yet concise.

Tips to Remember

- ☐ Try not to use too many long words.
- ☐ Make sure the vocabulary is appropriate for your reader.
- ☐ Instead of stringing together a long list of adjectives to describe a weak noun, a single well-chosen noun often does the trick. For instance, "skyscraper" is much cleaner than "tall, thirty-story glass-covered building," yet it's still descriptive.
- ☐ Choose synonyms carefully. When using your thesaurus, always look up unfamiliar synonyms so you say exactly what you mean. Before finding a synonym for the word *party*, understand what kind of party you're writing about. Though synonyms include *soirée*, *fete*, *bash*, or *coalition*, they can't be used interchangeably. That's because each word describes something very different.
 - *Soirée*: A dressy evening affair
 - *Fete*: An outdoor party
 - *Bash*: An occasion of joy or celebration
 - *Coalition*: A political alliance.

Which one did you mean? Can you see why it's important to choose synonyms carefully?

- ☐ When replacing a word, choose a synonym that's the same part of speech. Depending how they're used in a sentence, *dance*, *bear*, and *spy* can function as nouns or verbs. Synonyms for these words may not be interchangeable.
- ☐ Avoid words that are informal, slang, or archaic (so old it is not in use anymore). Again, look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary. This extra step can save you from embarrassment later!

DAY ONE *Communicating Clearly*

Directions

1. Use a 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 incorrectly used words. As you've been learning, words can have subtle differences in meaning. For instance, a *mansion*, *cabin*, or *shack* may be called a *house*, but not all houses are mansions. Neither is every house a cabin or shack.

Make sure the synonym you choose fits the context of the sentence. Incorrect word usage is characterized by long, uncommon words, **incorrectly used synonyms**, and words that **aren't relevant to the topic**.

Directions

Using your thesaurus or dictionary, find an appropriate word to replace the **bold 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 sentences on the next page include words or phrases that are overly descriptive. This can mean any of the following:

- Sentences are **too wordy or too long**.
- The writer confuses the reader by using **too many adjectives and adverbs**.
- **Repetition** or **flowery description** cloud the writing.
- **Pretentious, puffed-up language** and **too many figures of speech** (metaphors, similes, and personification) make the writing ineffective or hard to follow.

Fancy language has its place, especially when describing spectacular events or smug, stuck-up people. It's easy for beginning writers to become wordy or overly descriptive when writing about simple, ordinary things. Flowery writing may be appropriate to describe an elaborate costume ball, but it probably wouldn't work if you're writing about a visit to a dude ranch.

A bit of pretentious writing will probably work well in this week’s assignment as you look for ways to exaggerate and embellish the claims of a rundown resort. Just remember: no matter what you’re writing about, keep both your topic and audience in mind when choosing words.

Directions

- ☐ Rewrite each sentence in a concise yet descriptive way.
- ☐ Break down long phrases and ask yourself, "What is this trying to say? 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 won't 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 COLUMN 1 to check your realistic paragraph and use COLUMN 2 to check your *exaggerated* paragraph.

CONTENT

1 2

- ☐ ☐ Are my topic and choice of words appropriate for my audience?
- ☐ ☒ Does the first paragraph accurately and realistically describe the run-down resort?
- ☒ ☐ Does the second paragraph overstate, exaggerate, and overemphasize the features of the resort?
- ☐ ☐ Do all sentences support my topic sentence? (No "carrots in my cookie jar")
- ☐ ☐ Does the content flow smoothly? Are the details organized and easy to follow?
- ☐ ☐ Does each title capture the essence of its related composition?

STYLE

1 2

- ☐ ☐ Did I set the stage for each paragraph with a strong topic sentence?
- ☐ ☐ In **each** paragraph, did I use no more than **one** "to be" word? **Circle** (to be) words in **red**.
- ☐ ☐ Did I choose appropriate synonyms that fit the context of the sentence? **Underline** repeated words in blue.
- ☐ ☐ Did I appeal to the senses and emotions with vivid, concrete words? **Underline** weak words in green.
- ☐ ☐ Did I use the same tense throughout each paragraph?
- ☐ ☐ Have I correctly used these sentence variations once in **each** paragraph?
 - ___ began with paired adjectives
 - ___ began with a past or present participle
 - ___ began with an -ly adverb
 - ___ included an appositive
 - ___ began with a prepositional phrase
 - ___ included a simile (one only)
 - ___ began with a subordinate conjunction (*although, as, because, if, since, though, unless, when, where, while*)
- ☐ ☐ In **each** paragraph, have I included at least one subject-verb sentence?
- ☐ ☐ In **each** paragraph, have I included one sentence of six words or fewer?
- ☐ ☐ Did I write concisely by removing unnecessary words, phrases, or sentences?
- ☐ ☐ Did I write a strong closing sentence in Paragraph 1? Did I make an emotional appeal in Paragraph 2?

MECHANICS

1 2

- ☐ ☐ Did I put my name and date in the upper right-hand corner?
- ☐ ☐ Is **each** paragraph 7-9 sentences long? How many? 1st ____ 2nd ____
- ☐ ☐ Did I indent, leave margins, and skip every other line?
- ☐ ☐ Did I use good spacing between words and sentences?
- ☐ ☐ Did I double-check my spelling? **Circle** suspected words; **look up** and make changes
- ☐ ☐ Did I double-check capitalization and punctuation? Have I corrected any errors??
- ☐ ☐ Did I use complete sentences? Did I check for run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers?
- ☐ ☐ Did I correctly use this Checklist along with colored pencils? Did I **make corrections** before revising?
- ☐ **BEFORE TURNING IN MY WORK:** Did I staple my papers together in this order: Brainstorming on the bottom, "sloppy copy" on top of that, neatly rewritten copy next, and this Checklist on top?

Name _____

Subject Exaggeration (Realistic)

Lesson 20(1): Teacher Writing Skills Checklist

CONTENT

OK Needs improvement

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Topic and choice of words are appropriate for the audience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Followed instructions for this assignment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Paragraph accurately and realistically describes the run-down resort |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All sentences support topic sentence (no "carrots in your cookie jar") |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Content flows smoothly; details are organized and easy to follow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Title captures the essence of the paragraph |

STYLE

OK Needs improvement

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong topic sentence that introduces the composition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used no more than one "to be" word |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Chose context-appropriate synonyms for repeated main words |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Appealed to the senses and emotions with concrete, vivid vocabulary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Removed or replaced weak words |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Consistently used the same tense throughout the composition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Correctly used the following sentence variations once each |
| | | ___began with paired adjectives ___began with a past or present participle |
| | | ___began with an -ly adverb ___used an appositive |
| | | ___began with a prepositional phrase ___included a simile (one only) |
| | | ___began with a subordinate conjunction (<i>although, as, because, if, since, though, unless, when, where, while</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Included one or more subject-verb sentences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Included a sentence of six words or fewer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wrote concisely, avoiding unnecessary words, phrases, or sentences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong closing sentence that wraps up the composition |

MECHANICS

OK needs improvement

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Name and date in the upper right-hand corner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Followed proper page format (indentation, margins, skipped lines, good spacing) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Paragraph is 7-9 sentences long |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Double-checked spelling, capitalization, punctuation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used complete sentences. Avoided run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Correctly used checklist and colored pencils, circling and underlining as directed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Included brainstorming sheet, all drafts of this composition, and your checklist All |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | papers stapled together in proper order |

Comments _____