



Observation Essay: What Do You See and How Do You See It?

Write an essay that describes and interprets a scene that you visit and observe carefully. Use vivid, detailed, sensory description that helps a reader imagine what you observe. Include discussion of an interesting or insightful way of understanding this scene. To achieve harmony between observation (what you see) and interpretation (how you see it) emphasize elements of the scene in your description that highlight your interpretation.

Critical thinking: Most students discover or clarify their interpretation of the scene *while drafting their essay*. Be prepared to make significant changes as your interpretation (your subjective way of seeing the observation) shifts or comes into sharpened focus during the writing process.

Special note on structure: To meet the goals of the assignment, you are encouraged to divide your essay into two sections. First, emphasize objective description as you present sensory details that help a reader imagine being right there, taking in the observation for themselves. Afterward, shift to discussion of your interpretation of the scene, emphasizing a unique and interesting perspective. In this portion of your essay, help the reader understand why you brought them to this scene (in their imaginations) to observe along with you.

Special note on perspective: While you may occasionally refer to yourself to emphasize your observational perspective (e.g., *As I looked out from the hilltop*), avoid observing yourself as part of the scene. As the observer, strive to deemphasize yourself in the essay. Instead, keep the reader focused on the elements of the scene that will help them “get” your interpretation.

Questions to ask while working on your essay:

- Where can I go to observe a scene that I'll have a strong or interesting reaction to?
- Can I describe this scene adequately in a three-to-four-page essay?
- What point would I make if I were pointing out this scene to a friend?
- Should I begin my essay mysteriously to engage the reader's curiosity?
- Which words help a reader imagine the scene through their senses?
- What details will my reader need in order to imagine observing the scene for themselves?
- How do I feel about or make sense of this scene?
- Will my reader “get” my way of understanding the scene?
- Have I emphasized the details that support my point or interpretation?
- Have I proofread carefully, especially for errors that surfaced in my first paper?

Formatting: follow guidelines in the “Formatting Your Essay” located in Handouts.

Length expectation: 750-1000 words.

Total Possible Points: 125