Communicative English Language Skill II

Lecture 6

Writing: Descriptive and Narrative Texts

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Welcome and Introduction

Hello everyone: welcome to our Sixth Lecture, focused on Writing Skills.

Today we'll study two paragraph modes: descriptive and narrative texts.

Building on Lecture 3, we will use: Clear topic sentence; Relevant supporting details; Strong concluding sentence.Unity, coherence, & adequate development

Now, we apply the same principles to write descriptive or narrative paragraphs by:

- ✓ focusing on one main idea
- ✓ organizing details logically
- ✓ using clear transitions

While writing, we will review key tenses: Present Perfect and Past Simple, to place events correctly: whether describing an experience or telling a story.

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Today's Core Keywords

As core keywords, the following concepts will be introduced in the lecture:

- Description, Narration, Creativity
- Description: “Painting a picture with words” → define subjects precisely
- Narration: “Movement of events through time” → explain processes + history of discoveries
- Creativity: originality in scientific and social reporting → spot connections others may miss
- Big idea: These terms are not only for writers—they matter for scientists, engineers, and social researchers

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Lesson Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between descriptive and narrative structures
- Apply descriptive techniques to scientific phenomena
- Construct narrative reports based on research processes
- Integrate creativity into formal academic writing

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Why Writing Matters for Scientists

Remember discoveries aren't complete until they're communicated

- Writing is the "bridge": from experiment/observation → understanding and impact
- Communicating complex data: helps reach a wider audience
- Professional reporting role: strong writing supports career growth in science
- Reproducibility: clear description enables other scientists to repeat their work
- Human side of science: narrative helps people understand meaning and significance, not just results

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Defining Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing = answering “What…?”

What does it look like, feel like, or act like?

In science: use technical description → objective and precise

Also possible: impressionistic description → show importance / “feel”

Think of description as: a photograph captured in words

Focus on “What” and “How”

Types to remember:

Static vs. dynamic description

Technical vs. impressionistic details

Main goal: create a clear mental image for the reader

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Features of a Good Description

A good description isn't just a list of words. It requires organization and precise language.

- Sensory Details (Sight, Sound, Smell, Touch, Taste)
- Nouns and Noun phrases: scientific description uses complex noun phrases to pack information efficiently
- Spatial Organization (Top to bottom, left to right)
- Precise Adjectives/Adjectival Density: qualifying adjectives build a precise mental picture & impression
- Dominance of stative verbs
- Spatial & qualitative prepositions

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Descriptive Language in Science

In scientific description, we prioritize denotation—the literal dictionary meaning. If Dr. Lemma says Endod kills snails at a "dilution of 15-30 ppm," that is a precise, descriptive fact. It is much more useful than saying "it is very strong." We use numbers and specific units to provide a clear, undeniable picture of the subject's properties.

- Using Denotative meaning for accuracy
- Avoiding vague intensifiers (e.g., "very," "really")
- Using quantitative data (e.g., "15-30 ppm")
- Comparison and Contrast as descriptive tools

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Describing the "Problem": Bilharzia

Description is also used to define a problem. Look at how your module describes Bilharzia. It isn't just "a disease." It is described as a "debilitating disease" that causes "tissue damage" and "malfunctions of the bladder." By describing the physical impact on the human body, the writer convinces us of the urgency of the scientific research.

- The Parasite: A microscopic view
- The Host: Water snails
- Symptoms: Internal bleeding, energy sapping
- The Context: Poor rural communities

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Transitioning to Narrative Writing

While description tells us what things are, narration tells us what “happened”. In Unit II of your module, we don't just get a description of Endod; we get the story of its discovery. This is narration. It moves through time. Every scientific breakthrough has a narrative—a beginning, a middle, and an end. While description focuses on the "what" and "where" (spatial/qualitative), narration focuses on the "when" and "how"(temporal/sequential).

- From "What it is" to "What happened": the sequence of events, the concept of "Discovery" as a story, narrative as the framework for scientific history

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Elements of a Narrative

A narrative requires these five elements narrative arc: Module case: Dr. Lemma

- Setting: where & when (e.g., streams of Adwa, 1960s)
- Character: who is involved (e.g., the researcher, Dr. Aklilu Lemma)
- Plot: sequence of events observation of dead snails
- Conflict: the problem to be solved (e.g., Bilharzia parasite/spread)
- Resolution: development of a local, low-cost pesticide
- Writing tip: when you write your own reports, look for the narrative arc in your work

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The "Accidental" Discovery (A Narrative Lesson)

Your module mentions that Dr. Lemma's work started "almost by accident." This is a perfect narrative hook. "While conducting a survey... he found a large number of dead snails." Notice the use of time markers. First, he was doing a survey. Then, he noticed something strange (Skills II, p.23).

This sequence is what keeps a reader interested in a scientific report

- Starting with an observation
- The chronological "Flow" of events
- "While conducting a survey... he found..."
- The role of curiosity in narrative progression

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Chronological Order in Writing

Chronology is the backbone of narration. When describing the life cycle of the Bilharzia parasite, we must be chronological. Eggs are excreted; they reach water; they hatch into an intermediate form; they seek a snail (Skills II, p. 22). If we mix up this order, the science becomes nonsense. Narrative structure ensures that the process is logical and easy to follow.

- Use of transition words (First, Then, Next, Finally)
- Flashbacks vs. Linear progression
- The importance of time-stamps in scientific reporting
- Narrating the "Life Cycle" of a parasite

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Merging Description and Narration

Description and narration are usually combined (hybrid writing). Most academic writing needs both:

Describe the equipment/subject (description); Explain how it was used (narration)

Endod case (idea): describe the berries' appearance; then narrate how villagers use them as soap

→ gives a full picture of the research

Hybrid structure: describing the subject + narrating the action

Example (hybrid): Describe the endod berry while explaining how it is ground. together they help you create a comprehensive "report"

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Objective vs. Subjective Narrative

As university students, you must learn to balance objectivity and subjectivity. While a lab report should be objective, a grant proposal or a news article about your research might need a bit of subjective narration to show the human impact. Notice how the text on Dr. Lemma mentions that the results were "encouraging." That is a slightly subjective word, but it is backed up by objective data.

- Objective: "The snails died after the application."
- Subjective: "It was a tragic sight to see the infected children."
- Finding the balance in scientific communication
- Using "Person" (First person vs. Third person)

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Grammar for Narration: The Past Tenses

The grammar gained so far is essential here. When we narrate Dr. Lemma's discovery, we use the Past Simple for his discoveries. We use the Past Continuous to set the scene: "He was walking along the stream." We use the Past Perfect to describe traditions that existed before he arrived: "Villagers had used Endod for generations." Correct tenses keep your story clear.

- Past Simple: The main events (e.g., "He found...")
- Past Continuous: Background actions (e.g., "While he was surveying...")
- Past Perfect: Actions before the main events (e.g., "The villagers had used...")

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Passive Voice in Description and Process

In lecture 4, we studied the Passive Voice. This is a powerful tool for descriptive and narrative writing. In a process description, we often care more about the object than the person. "The endod is applied along stream banks." It doesn't matter “who” applies it; what matters is the “action” and the “substance”. Passive voice provides that academic "distance" and neutrality.

- Focusing on the action, not the actor
- "The berries are ground..." vs. "The villagers grind the berries."
- When to use Passive for scientific "Neutrality"

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Creativity in Problem-Solving Reports

Creativity isn't just about flowery language. It’s about the “approach”. Dr. Lemma’s solution was creative because it was simple and local. The writer Mike Muller reflects this by calling Bilharzia an "insidious enemy." This creative choice of words makes the parasite sound like a villain in a story, which helps the reader understand why the research is a "battle."

- Defining the "Insidious Enemy" (Bilharzia)
- The "Grassroots" metaphor
- Engaging the community through creative education
- How writing reflects the "Innovation" of the scientist

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Descriptive Detail: Quantitative Data

Never underestimate the descriptive power of a number. When we say the infection dropped from 50% to 15%, that is a narrative of success told through descriptive data. It tells a story of improvement more clearly than a thousand adjectives could. In your writing, always look for the data that "describes" your progress.

- Dilution levels: 15-30 ppm
- Decline in infection: 50% to 15%
- Population size: 20,000 people
- The descriptive power of statistics

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Structure of a Descriptive Paragraph

Let’s get practical. A descriptive paragraph should start with a clear topic sentence. For example: "The Endod plant is a versatile resource in Northern Ethiopia." The following sentences should provide the details—the berries, the toxicity levels, the growth patterns. Finally, conclude by summarizing why this description matters.

- Topic Sentence: Introducing the subject
- Supporting Sentences: Sensory and technical details
- Concluding Sentence: Reinforcing the dominant impression

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Structure of a Narrative Paragraph

A narrative paragraph is different. It’s about movement. Start with the "hook"-the moment the research began. Follow the steps of the investigation. The "climax" is that moment of realization: "He found dead snails where the villagers washed clothes." Then, show the result: "This observation led to a decade of laboratory research."

- The "Hook": Grabbing the reader's attention
- The Sequence: Linking events through time
- The "Climax": The most important moment (The discovery)
- The Conclusion: The result of the sequence

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Descriptive Precision: Denotation vs. Connotation

As you may remember, words have denotative and connotative meanings. In scientific writing, we stay close to denotation. However, when we write to "attract tourists" or "persuade policy makers," we might use positive connotations. We describe the Ethiopian landscape as "lush" or "beautiful" rather than just "green." This choice is a creative act.

- Denotation: "Endod kills snails." (Literal)
- Connotation: "Endod is a lifesaver." (Emotional)
- Choosing words based on the target audience
- Avoiding "Offensive" or "Ambiguous" connotations

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The Role of "Place" in Narration

In Dr. Lemma’s story, the setting changes. It moves from the streams of Adwa to the Stanford Research Institute in California. This movement between locations is a key part of the narrative. It shows the journey from a local observation to a global scientific validation. When you narrate your research, include the "where" to give your story context.

- Setting the scene: Adwa vs. California
- The contrast between field work and lab work
- How location influences the "Story" of science
- The "Global" vs. "Local" narrative

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Creativity: The Power of Simplicity

There is a creative elegance in simplicity. The module describes how the project uses "watering cans" and "mills used for grinding chili peppers." This description is powerful because it shows that science doesn't always need million-dollar equipment. Narrating this "low-tech" process is a way of showing the creativity of the Ethiopian people.

- Describing the "Simplicity" of the Adwa project
- Using watering cans and chili pepper mills
- Narrating a "Self-help" form of health control
- Why "Complex" isn't always "Better" in writing

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Using Adjectives Effectively

Adjectives are the tools of description. But be careful! In academic writing, we avoid "empty" adjectives. Don't say the results were "good." Say they were "statistically significant" or "encouraging." Use adjective s like "insidious" to describe the parasite or "abundant" to describe the snail population. These words provide more information to the reader.

- Avoid "Empty" adjectives (good, bad, nice)
- Use "Informative" adjectives (deceptive, debilitating, abundant)
- How adjectives change the "Feel" of a description
- Adjective order in English

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Narrating the Future: "Speculations"

Narration isn't just about the past. We can narrate the future! This is what we call "speculation." In Unit II, we look at the future of science. "What will happen if every village uses Endod?" We use the future tense to narrate a potential reality. This is a creative exercise that helps us set goals for our research.

- Using the Future Tense in narrative (Unit II focus)
- Predicting outcomes of scientific research
- "What will happen if we use Endod?"
- The "Projective Conclusion" (Hindsight and Foresight)

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Creativity: Avoiding the "Cliché"

Creativity requires avoiding clichés. Don't say "the discovery was a dream come true." That's a cliché. Instead, be descriptive: "The discovery provided a long-sought solution to a generational health crisis." Originality in your choice of words shows that you have thought deeply about your subject.

- What is a cliché? (Overused phrases)
- Finding original ways to describe common things
- The "Academic" vs. "Journalistic" voice
- Exercises in original expression

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Process Narration: Garment Production

Even something as simple as garment production requires narrative skills. You must describe each step in order. If you describe the "sewing" before the "cutting," the narrative fails. This "Process Narration" is a core skill for any professional career, whether in a factory or a research lab.

- Source: Unit I (Life Skills)
- Describing the "Steps" in a process
- Using sequence markers (First, Second, Thirdly)
- How narration explains "How things are made"

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The Descriptive Power of Comparison

Comparison is a key descriptive tool. When the author compares the River Murray to the Mississippi, we immediately understand its size and importance. When we compare Endod to commercial pesticides, we highlight its benefits (low cost, low toxicity). Contrast allows us to describe what makes our subject unique.

- Comparing Bilharzia to Malaria
- Comparing the Murray River to the Mississippi
- Using "Like" and "As" (Similes) in academic context
- Highlighting "Uniqueness" through contrast

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The Descriptive Power of Verbs

Verbs are not just for action; they are for description too. Instead of saying the water level was "low," say it "plummeted." This verb describes the “speed” and “severity” of the change. In your narratives, choose verbs that describe the “manner” of the action. This is where your creativity as a writer comes in.

- Static verbs: be, have, seem (for description)
- Action verbs: ground, applied, dropped, plummeted (for narration)
- Precise verbs: "The water “plummeted" vs. "The water went down"
- Choosing strong verbs for impact

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Narrating "Field Trials"

When you narrate a field trial, you are telling the story of a test. You start with the "Idea" (1969 trial), move to the "Action" (application of Endod), and then to the "Result" (preliminary survey in 1971). This narrative structure proves that your scientific method was sound and your results are valid.

- The 1969 Adwa field trial
- Setting up the experiment
- Observing the "Incidence of infection"
- Describing the "Encouraging" decline in rates

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Creativity: Personification and Metaphor

Can we use personification in science? Yes! By calling Bilharzia an "enemy," we give the research a narrative goal. By calling Africa the "cradle of mankind," we describe its importance through a powerful metaphor. These creative choices make your writing memorable without sacrificing scientific accuracy.

- "A harder and more insidious enemy" (The parasite)
- "The cradle of mankind" (Africa)
- "Garden of Eden" (Wetlands)
- Using literary devices in non-fiction

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Writing "Conclusions"

In a narrative about a discovery, a "Retrospective Conclusion" is perfect. In a descriptive report about an environmental problem, a "Projective Conclusion" is better— it tells the reader what might happen if we don't act.

- Embedded Conclusion (Narrative flow)
- Retrospective Conclusion (Hindsight/Reflection)
- Projective Conclusion (Future outlook)
- Reviewing the types of conclusions from Module I

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Clarity and Conciseness

Description doesn't mean "long-winded." The best descriptions are concise. Use one strong word instead of three weak ones. Notice how your module is written. It is packed with information but doesn't waste words. This is a skill you must practice: being descriptive and narrative while staying brief.

- Avoid "Wordiness"
- "In Adwa and elsewhere..." vs. "In the town of Adwa and in various other places..."
- The rule of "Economy of Language"
- Editing for impact

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The Importance of "Point of View"

Who is telling the story? In your module, the author uses a third-person perspective to talk about Dr. Lemma. This provides an objective, authoritative tone. However, in your own lab journals, you migh t use the first person. Just be sure to stay consistent. Don't switch between "I" and "The researcher" in the same paragraph.

- First Person: "I observed..." (Personal research)
- Third Person: "Dr. Lemma found..." (Objective report)
- The "Authorial Voice" in academic writing
- Consistency in perspective

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Descriptive Detail: The Endod Bush

Let's return to the Endod bush one last time. Notice how the description is both visual ("bush used as a hedge") and functional ("ground berries used as detergent"). A complete description should tell us not just what something is, but what it “does”. This is the key to effective scientific writing.

- Phytolacca dodecandra
- Used as a hedge
- Ground berries as detergent
- Visual and functional description combined

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Revision: The Final Creative Act

Writing is rewriting. The most creative part of the process is revision. Read your descriptive paragraphs aloud—do they create a clear image? Check your narratives—is the order of events logical? It is also good to get feedback from others; getting feedback from a peer is the best way to see if your "creativity" is actually communicating your "science."

- Reading your work aloud
- Checking for descriptive precision
- Ensuring narrative "Flow"
- The importance of peer feedback

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Summary and Closing

Description	Narration
What	Then/sequence
objectivity, sensory detail, spatial order	chronology, plot, conflict → resolution

- ✓Description + Narration = one whole
- ✓Creativity adds impact → turns reports into a story of discovery
- ✓Synergy (description + narration + creativity) strengthens scientific writing
- ✓Writing is a life skill: advocacy, documenting indigenous knowledge, career communication
- ✓Remember: You are the master of your destiny → your writing shapes your future

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Closing

- For any question, please reach out to me:
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