Description

One of the biggest misconceptions about good writing in general and description specifically is that the more ornate and flowery the writing is the better. Anyone who has read this kind of wordy, overwrought writing knows that too much description can distract the reader from the topic and bore them so much that they don’t want to keep reading.

Description is important in writing, but you should use your audience as your guide as you describe. Use detailed description to show your audience your expertise about a topic. Know your audience well enough to know what they already know about a topic. Don’t bore them with details they are familiar with. Try to use concrete language that paints a picture in their head instead of using abstractions that tell them how to feel. Showing the reader how the air smells after a summer rainstorm is always going to be more interesting than telling them that it was damp.

Let your audience be your guide with description. Your goal as a writer is to take them to a place that they have never seen before or help them to see a place they know in a new way. You don’t have to write about skydiving or Tahiti to accomplish this. Show them that they may have missed something in everyday topics by the way that you carefully observe and describe them.

See George Orwell’s Politics and the English Language.