

Objective, Subjective, Figurative Description

Objective description is primarily factual, omitting any attention to the writer, especially with regards to the writer's feelings. Imagine that a robotic camera is observing the subject; such a camera has absolutely no attachment or reaction to what is being observed.

Subjective description, on the other hand, includes attention to both the subject described and the writer's reactions (internal, personal) to that subject.

Figurative description relies on creating likenesses between objects, often through simile (e.g. like a snowflake...or fragile as a snowflake...) or metaphor. Such likenesses allow the reader to perceive the object more precisely.

An objective sample:

The kitchen table is rectangular, seventy-two inches long and thirty inches wide. Made of a two-inch-thick piece of oak, its top is covered with a waxy oilcloth patterned in dark red and blue squares against a white background. In the right corner, close to the wall, a square blue ceramic tile serves as the protective base for a brown earthenware teapot. A single white placemat has been set to the left of the tile, with a knife and fork on either side of a white dinner plate, around nine inches in diameter. On the plate are two thick pieces of steak.

(Notice how "objective" the narrator in the piece is; his or her eyes scan the scene, but there is no emotional response provoked by the scene).

A subjective sample:

Our lives at home converged around the pleasantly-shaped kitchen table. It was the magnet that drew our family together quite warmly. Cut from the sturdiest oak, the table was tough, smooth, and long enough for my mother, my two sisters, and me to work or play on at the same time. Our favorite light blue ceramic tile, stationed in the right corner, was the table's sole defense against the ravages of everything from a steaming teapot to the latest red-hot gadget from the Sears catalogue. More often than not, however, the heat would spread quickly beyond the small tile and onto the checkered oilcloth, which just as quickly exuded a rank and sour odor. Yet no matter how intensely the four of us competed for elbow room at the table, none dared venture near the lone dinner place arranged securely to the left of the tile. There was no telling when HE would get home from work, but, when he did, he expected the food to be ready--steaming hot. He liked to eat right away--steak mostly--two bloody but thick pieces.