



WRITING PROJECTS

Practical Lessons Based on Classical Methods

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SAMPLE EXTRACT: DESCRIPTIONS

Now that you have planned your description, it is time to think about the style you will use. That means working on your sentence patterns and diction.

Sentence patterns

Look again at Dickens' description of London. Sentence patterns play an important role in the passage. Three important features of the sentence style are *fragments*, *repetitions* and *parallels*.

1 Fragments

A striking feature of Dickens' style is the use of sentence *fragments*. These are sentences that have no main verb. Compare these fragments from the passage with the full sentences we would normally expect to read.

Fragment

Implacable November weather.

Fog everywhere.

Dogs undistinguishable in mire.

Full sentence

The November weather was implacable.

The fog was everywhere.

Dogs were undistinguishable in the mire.

The use of fragments makes the passage feel like a list of notes or jottings. This is a trick Dickens learned as a newspaper reporter making rapid notes about events. It creates an impression of direct observation.

2 Repetition of sentence openings

Dickens starts many of his descriptive sentences with the same key word. In this passage, the word *fog* is used at the beginning of ten sentences or clauses in a row:

Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deified among the tiers of shipping. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights...

This technique of repeating a word at the start of each sentence is called *anaphora*. Repetition of this kind draws attention to an idea and gives it additional emphasis.

Activity 12

The paragraph below describes a hot day in the city. Practice using *anaphora* to emphasise the sunshine. Rewrite the paragraph so that each sentence begins with the word *Sun*. You will need to convert some of the sentences to fragments.

Sun on the downtown plazas and on the uptown parks. There was sun reflected like a glowing rivet in the dark glasses of construction workers. More sun was bouncing off chrome chairs and tables in the sidewalk cafes. Between the oily waves in the boat harbour, the sun was wobbling like a poaching egg.

(Solution page 35)



Now go back to your own draft description and improve it. Use repetition to emphasise your key idea in one paragraph. Use fragments to create an impression of observational detail.