Observing a Scene

Responding to an Image
This scene might look and feel quite different to different observers, depending on their vantage points, emotions, and experiences. In this image, what prominent element attracts your attention? Who are the observers? Which details might be important for them? Although visual details are central, what other senses and emotions might come into play?
Most writers begin to write by recalling what they know. Then they look around and add what they observe. Some writing consists almost entirely of observation—a reporter's eyewitness account of a fire, a clinical report by a nurse detailing a patient's condition, a scientist's account of a laboratory experiment, a traveler's blog or photo essay. In fact, observation plays a large role in any writing that describes a person, place, or thing. Observation also provides support, details to make a point clear or convincing. For example, a case study might report information from interviews and analyze artifacts—whether ancient bowls, new playground equipment, or decades of airport records. However, to make its abstractions and statistics more vivid, it also might integrate compelling observation.

If you need more to write about, open your eyes—and your other senses. Take in what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. As you write, report your observations in concrete detail. Of course, you can't record everything your senses bring you. You must be selective based on what's important and relevant for your purpose and audience. To make a football game come alive for readers of your college newspaper, you might mention the overcast cold weather and the spicy smell of bratwurst. But if your purpose is primarily to explain which team won and why, you might stress the muddy playing field, the most spectacular plays, and the players who scored.

### Why Observing a Scene Matters

#### In a College Course
- You observe and report compelling information from field trips in sociology, criminal justice, or anthropology as well as impressions of a play, a concert, an exhibit, or a historical site for a humanities class.
- You observe clinical practices in health or education, habitats for plants and animals, the changing night sky, or lab experiments to report accurate information and to improve your own future practice.

#### In the Workplace
- You observe and analyze to lend credibility to your case study as a nurse, teacher, or social worker or to your site report as an engineer or architect.

#### In Your Community
- You observe, photograph, and report on hazards (a dangerous intersection, a poorly lighted park, a run-down building), needs (a soccer arena, a performing arts center), or disasters (an accident, a crime scene, a flood) to motivate action by authorities or fellow citizens.

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When have you included observations in your writing? How did these observations contribute to your writing? In what situations might you use observation in future writing?
Learning from Other Writers

Here are two essays by writers who observe their surroundings and reflect on their observations. As you begin to analyze the first reading, look at the notes in the margin. They identify features such as the main impression created in the observation and stated in the thesis, the first of the locations observed, and the supporting details that describe the location.

As You Read These Observations

As you read these essays, ask yourself the following questions:

2. What senses does each writer rely on? What sensory images does each develop? Find some striking passages in which the writer reports observations. What makes these passages memorable to you?
3. Why does the writer use observation? What conclusion does the writer draw from reflecting on the observations?

Eric Liu

The Chinatown Idea

Eric Liu is an educator, lecturer, and author of Guiding Lights (2004), a book about mentorship. In this selection from The Accidental Asian (1998), he describes a childhood visit to Chinatown in New York City.

Another family outing, one of our occasional excursions to the city. It was a Saturday. I was twelve. I remember only vaguely what we did during the day—Fifth Avenue, perhaps, the museums, Central Park, Carnegie Hall. But I recall with precision going to Chinatown as night fell.

We parked on a side street, a dim, winding way cluttered with Chinese placards and congested with slumbering Buicks and Chevys. The license plates—NEW YORK, EMPIRE STATE—seemed incongruous here, foreign. We walked a few blocks to East Broadway. Soon we were wading through thick crowds on the sidewalk, passing through belts of aroma: sweat and breath, old perfume, spareribs. It was late autumn and chilly enough to numb my cheeks, but the bustle all around gave the place an electric warmth. Though it was evening, the scene was lit like a stage, thanks to the aluminum lamps hanging from every produce stand. Peddlers lined the street, selling steamed buns and chicken feet and imitation Gucci bags. Some shoppers moved along slowly. Others stopped at each stall, inspecting the greens, negotiating the price of fish, talking loudly. I strained to make sense of the chopped-off twangs of

placards: Posters, signs.
Cantonese coming from every direction, but there were more tones than I knew: my ear was inadequate; nothing was intelligible.

This was the first time I had been in Chinatown after dark. Mom held Andrea’s hand as we walked and asked me to stay close. People bumped us, brushed past, as if we were invisible. I felt on guard, alert. I craned my neck as we walked past a kiosk carrying a Chinese edition of Playboy. I glanced sidelong at the teenage ruffians on the corner. They affected an air of menace with their smokes and leather jackets, but their feathery almost-mustaches and overpermed hair made them look a bit ridiculous. Nevertheless, I kept my distance. I kept an eye on the sidewalk, too, so that I wouldn’t soil my shoes in the streams of putrid water that trickled down from the alleyways and into the parapet of trash bags piled up on the curb.

I remember going into two stores that night. One was the Far Eastern Bookstore. It was on the second floor of an old building. As we entered, the sounds of the street fell away. The room was spare and fluorescent. It looked like an earnest community library, crowded with rows of chest-high shelves. In the narrow aisles between shelves, patrons sat cross-legged on the floor, reading intently. If they spoke at all it was in a murmur. Mom and Dad each found an absorbing book. They read standing up. My sister and I, meanwhile, wandered restlessly through the stacks, scanning the spines for stray English words or Chinese phrases we might recognize. I ended up in children’s books and leafed through an illustrated story about the three tigers. I couldn’t read it. Before long, I was tugging on Dad’s coat to take us somewhere else.

The other shop, a market called Golden Gate, I liked much more. It was noisy. The shoppers swarmed about in a frenzy. On the ground level was an emporium of Chinese nonperishables: dried mushrooms, spiced beef, seaweed, shredded pork. Open crates of hoisin sauce and sesame chili paste. Sweets, like milky White Rabbit chews, coconut candies, rolls of sour “haw flakes.” Bags of Chinese peanuts, watermelon seeds. Down a narrow flight of stairs was a storehouse of rice cookers, ivory chopsticks, crockery, woks that hung from the wall. My mother carefully picked out a set of rice bowls and serving platters. I followed her to the long checkout line, carrying a basket full of groceries we wouldn’t find in Poughkeepsie. I watched with wonder as the cashier tallied up totals with an abacus.

We had come to this store, and to Chinatown itself, to replenish our supply of things Chinese: food and wares, and something else as well. We had ventured here from the colorless outer suburbs to touch the source, to dip into a pool of undiluted Chineseness. It was easier for my parents, of course, since they could decode the signs and communicate. But even I, whose bond to his ancestral culture had frayed down to the inner cord of appetite—even I could feel somehow fortified by a trip to Chinatown.

**kiosk**: Booth. **putrid**: Rotten; decaying. **parapet**: Wall, as on a castle. **emporium**: Marketplace. **hoisin sauce**: A sweet brown sauce that is a popular Chinese condiment.
Yet we knew that we couldn’t stay long—and that we didn’t really want to. We were Chinese, but we were still outsiders. When any peddler addressed us in Cantonese, that became obvious enough. They seemed so familiar and so different, these Chinatown Chinese. Like a reflection distorted just so. Their faces were another brand of Chinese, rougher-hewn. I was fascinated by them. I liked being connected to them. But was it because of what we shared—or what we did not? I began that night to distinguish between my world and theirs.

It was that night, too, as we were making our way down East Broadway, that out of the blur of Chinese faces emerged one that we knew. It was Po-Po’s* face. We saw her just an instant before she saw us. There was surprise in her eyes, then hurt, when she peered up from her parka. Everyone hugged and smiled, but this was embarrassing. Mom began to explain: we’d been uptown, had come to Chinatown on a whim, hadn’t wanted to barge in on her unannounced. Po-Po nodded. We made some small talk. But the realization that her daily routine was our tourist’s jaunt,* that there was more than just a hundred miles between us, consumed the backs of our minds like a flame to paper. We lingered for a minute, standing still as the human current flowed past, and then we went our separate ways.

Afterward, during the endless drive home, we didn’t talk about bumping into Po-Po. We didn’t talk about much of anything. I looked intently through the window as we drove out of Chinatown and sped up the FDR Drive, then over the bridge. Manhattan turned into the Bronx, the Bronx into Yonkers, and the seams of the parkway clicked along in soothing intervals as we cruised northward to Dutchess County. I slipped into a deep, open-mouthed slumber,

Po-Po: The narrator’s grandmother.  
*jaunt: Trip, outing.
not awakening until we were back in Merrywood, our development, our own safe enclave. I remember the comforting sensation of being home: the sky was clear and starry, the lawn a moon-bathed carpet. We pulled into our smooth blacktop driveway. Silence. It was late, perhaps later than I’d ever stayed up. Still, before I went to bed, I made myself take a shower.

Questions to Start You Thinking

Meaning
1. Why do Liu and his family go to Chinatown?
2. How do Liu and his family feel when they encounter Po-Po? What observations and descriptions lead you to that conclusion?
3. What is the significance of the last sentence? How does it capture the essence of Liu’s Chinatown experience?

Writing Strategies
4. In which paragraphs or sections does the writer’s use of sensory details capture the look, feel, or smell of Chinatown? In general, how successfully has Liu included various types of observations and details?
5. How does Liu organize his observations? Is this organization effective? Why or why not?
6. Which of the observations and events in this essay most clearly reveal that Liu considers himself to be a “tourist”?

Alea Eyre

Stockholm

For her first-year composition class, Alea Eyre records her introduction to an unfamiliar location.

The amount of noise and movement bustling around me was almost electrifying. As soon as I stepped off the plane ramp, I was enveloped into a brand new world. I let all my heightened senses work together to take in this new experience. Fear and elation collided in my head as I navigated this new adventure by myself. I was thirteen years old and just taking the final steps of a lonely twenty-six-hour journey across the world from Hawaii to Sweden.

I had never seen so many white folks in one place. Hundreds crowded and rushed to be somewhere. The busy airport felt like a culture shock but not in a bad way. Blonde hair whipped past me, snuggled in caps and scarves. Skin tucked in coats and jeans appeared so shockingly white it almost blinded me. Delicate yet tall and sturdy people zipped around me as if they had to attend to an emergency.

A music-like language danced around my ears, exciting me as I drew closer to the baggage claim. The sound was so familiar yet seemed so distant. I had heard it

When have you had similar surprises in a new environment?
What kinds of places does this building bring to mind?

When have you been observed as well as observer?

inconsistently since childhood with the coming and going of my three half sisters. It unfurled off native speakers' tongues, rising and falling in artistic tones. For the past few months, I had studied my Swedish language book diligently, attempting to match my untrained tongue to the rolling R's and foreign sounds. On paper, the language looked silly, complicated, and unpronounceable. When spoken correctly, it sounded magical and delighted the ears. As I walked swiftly, trying to keep up with the general pace of this international airport, my ears stayed perked up, catching bits and pieces of conversations.

The building was cavernous and had modern wooden architecture that accentuated every corner. Floor to ceiling windows brightened each area, letting in ample light and a view of the dreary early spring surroundings. I felt my eyes widen as I viewed the melting, slushy brown snow and bright green grass peeking up beneath it. Endless birch trees spread before me, and vibrant flowers dotted their roots. Everything inside and out felt so clean and new; even all of the people looked fresh and well dressed. The true Europeans that I had read about for so long were now displayed up close. Pale as they were, none of them looked as if they were sick, overweight, or druggies. I was taken aback, used to the vivid rainbow of shapes, colors, sizes, and overall variety of my Honolulu neighborhood. Everything there felt dirty and unpredictable, but here in Stockholm, everything felt like a lily-white world.

As I neared the head of the line at customs, sets of eyes from every direction lingered on me. I was still a child, traveling by myself and sticking out against the array of white with my thick dark hair and almond-colored skin. I figured that my features kept them guessing. I was obviously not white, black, or Middle Eastern, but a mix of many different races and cultures that were completely foreign to them. Even back home, people could never guess what my blood combination was. I soon learned that Sweden has extremely strict immigration rules, and hardly anybody can get in. The country took in some Middle Eastern refugees during past wars, but other than that, blonde-haired blue-eyed Swedes turn up around every corner.

With my passport stamped and luggage in tow, I descended down a steep escalator, sandwiched in among a family of five. Listening intently to the lilt of their language, I tried to pick up on what they were discussing. Only able to translate a few simple words, I felt discouraged. Exhaustion was creeping up on me both mentally and physically as the initial adrenaline started to wear off. The flights to get here were lengthy and cramped, while the layovers were stressful and rushed. Jet lag settled in and clouded my already foggy head. I needed the luxury of rejuvenating sleep as soon as possible.

Finally, the escalator neared the ground floor. I surveyed the crowd anxiously, winding my way through the masses of people. My sister was supposed to be here somewhere, ready to begin a five-month-long period of dealing with my adolescent
Learning from Other Writers

hormones. I came here to live and learn, go to a Swedish school, and be immersed in a foreign culture. I spotted her, all the way at the end of the floor, near the sets of doors that led to this new world. She stood there, completely still and silent, but smiling and relieved that I actually made it. Her belly filled out the coat she wore, blossoming with her first child. Her hair was long and silky, and her eyes bright and earnest. She glowed with happiness, now looking like a mother. I fell into her arms, feeling ecstatic after not seeing her for years. We left the airport together, beaming as we walked through the crisp, freezing air. As we neared the car, I reached down and touched the melting snow. My virgin hands explored this new texture, and my nerves tingled. Feeling content, I slid into the car and prepared myself for the exciting journey ahead of me.

Questions to Start You Thinking

Meaning
1. What is Eyre's response to the scene at the Stockholm airport?
2. What is the point of the overall impression Eyre creates? What does that impression reveal about her?
3. In paragraph 7, what does Eyre mean when she says she prepared herself “for the exciting journey ahead”?

Writing Strategies
4. How does contrasting Honolulu and Stockholm contribute to the vivid impression of the scene Eyre observes?
5. Which sense does Eyre use most effectively? Point to a few examples that support your choice.
6. How does Eyre convey motion and movement? What does this activity contribute to her observation?
7. Using highlighters or marginal notes, identify the essay’s introduction, thesis, major vantage points for observation, details supporting each part of the observation, and conclusion. How effective is this organization?

Multiple Photographers

Observing the Titanic: Past and Present

On its maiden voyage in 1912, the Titanic hit an iceberg and sank within three hours, killing more than 1,500 people on board. The wreck was discovered in 1985 by Robert Ballard, at a depth of two miles beneath the Atlantic’s surface, and has been visited by many, including filmmaker James

How have you responded to the sights, sounds, and emotions that the writer has described?
For an interactive Learning by Doing activity on scenes from the news, go to Chapter 5: bedfordstmartins.com/concisebedguide.

Part Two • Chapter 5 Observing a Scene

Cameron. To click through a series of photos that contrasts images of the ship when it was first built with images of its remains, go to Chapter 5: bedfordstmartins.com/concisebedguide.

The Titanic, 1912.

Learning by Writing

The Assignment: Observing a Scene

Observe a place near your campus, home, or job and the people who frequent it. Then write a paper that describes the place, the people, and their actions so as to convey the spirit of the place and offer some insight into its impact on the people.

This assignment is meant to start you observing closely enough that you go beyond the obvious. Go somewhere nearby, and station yourself where you can mingle with the people there. Open all your senses so that you see, smell, taste, hear, and feel. Jot down what you immediately notice, especially the atmosphere and its effect on the people there. Take notes describing the location, people, actions, and events you see. Then use your observations to convey the spirit of the scene. What is your main impression of the place? Of the people there? Of the relationship between people and
place? Your purpose is not only to describe the scene but also to express thoughts and feelings connected with what you observe.

Three student writers wrote about these observations:

One student, who works nights in the emergency room, observed the scene and the community that abruptly forms when an accident victim arrives: medical staff, patient, friends, and relatives.

Another observed a bar mitzvah celebration that reunited a family for the first time in many years.

Another observed the activity in the bleachers in a baseball stadium before, during, and after a game.

When you select the scene you wish to observe, find out from the person in charge whether you'll need to request permission to observe there, as you might at a school, business, or other restricted or privately owned site.

**Facing the Challenge Observing a Scene**

The major challenge writers face when writing from observation is to select compelling details that convey an engaging main impression of a scene. As we experience the world, we are bombarded by sensory details, but our task as writers is to choose those that bring a subject alive for readers. For example, describing an oak as “a big tree with green leaves” is too vague to help readers envision the tree or grasp its unique qualities. Consider:

- What colors, shapes, and sizes do you see?
- What tones, pitches, and rhythms do you hear?
- What textures, grains, and physical features do you feel?
- What fragrances and odors do you smell?
- What sweet, spicy, or other flavors do you taste?

After recording the details that define the scene, ask two more questions:

- What overall main impression do these details establish?
- Which specific details will best show the spirit of this scene to a reader?

Your answers will help you decide which details to include in your paper.
Generating Ideas

Although setting down observations might seem cut-and-dried, to many writers it is true discovery. Here are some ways to generate such observations.

**Brainstorm.** First, you need to find a scene to observe. What places interest you? Which are memorable? Start brainstorming—listing rapidly any ideas that come to mind. Here are a few questions to help you start your list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCOVERY CHECKLIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗ Where do people gather for some event or performance (a stadium, a church, a theater, an auditorium)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Where do people meet for some activity (a gym, a classroom)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Where do crowds form while people are getting things or services (a shopping mall, a dining hall or student union, a dentist’s waiting room)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Where do people pause on their way to yet another destination (a light-rail station, a bus or subway station, an airport, a restaurant on the toll road)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Where do people go for recreation or relaxation (an arcade, a ballpark)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Where do people gather (a fire, a party, a wedding, a graduation, an audition)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Get Out and Look.** If nothing on your list strikes you as compelling, plunge into the world to see what you see. Visit a city street or country hillside, a campus building or practice field, a contest, a lively scene—a mall, an airport, a fast-food restaurant, a student hangout—or a scene with only a few people sunbathing, walking dogs, or tossing Frisbees. Observe for a while, and then mix and move to gain different views.

**Record Your Observations.** Alea Eyre’s essay “Stockholm” began with some notes about her vivid memories of her trip. She was able to mine those memories for details to bring her subject to life.

Your notes on a subject—or tentative subject—can be taken in any order or methodically. To draw up an “observation sheet,” fold a sheet of paper in half lengthwise. Label the left column “Objective,” and impartially list what you see, like a zoologist looking at a new species of moth. Label the right column “Subjective,” and list your thoughts and feelings about what you observe. The quality of your paper will depend in large part on the truthfulness and accuracy of your observations. Your objective notes will trigger more subjective ones.
Objective

The ticket holders form a line on the weathered sidewalk outside the old brick hall, standing two or three deep all the way down the block.

Groups of friends talk, a few couples hug, and some guys burst out in staccato laughter as they joke.

Everyone shuffles forward when the doors open, looking around at the crowd and edging toward the entrance.

Subjective

This place has seen concerts of all kinds — you can feel the history as you wait, as if the hall protects the crowds and the music.

The crowd seems relaxed and friendly, all waiting to hear their favorite group.

The excitement and energy grow with the wait, but it’s the concert ritual — the prelude to a perfect night.
Part Two  Chapter 5 Observing a Scene

Include a Range of Images. Have you captured not just sights but sounds, textures, odors? Have you observed from several vantage points or on several occasions to deepen your impressions? Have you added sketches or doodles to your notes, perhaps drawing the features or shape of the place? Can you begin writing as you continue to observe? Have you noticed how other writers use *images*, evoking sensory experience, to record what they sense? In the memoir *Northern Farm* (New York: Rinehart, 1948), naturalist Henry Beston describes a remarkable sound: "the voice of ice," the midwinter sound of a whole frozen pond settling and expanding in its bed.

Sometimes there was a sort of hollow oboe sound, and sometimes a groan with a delicate undertone of thunder.... Just as I turned to go, there came from below one curious and sinister crack which ran off into a sound like the whine of a giant whip of steel lashed through the moonlit air.

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Learning by Doing  Enriching Sensory Detail

Review the detail in your observation notes. Because observers often note first what they see, mark references to other senses by underlining sounds, circling smells, and boxing textures or by adding different color highlights to your file. (Mark taste, too, if appropriate.) Compare your coverage with that of a classmate or small group, either in class or online. Add more variety from memory, or list what you want to observe when you return to the scene to listen, sniff, taste, or touch. (You can also use this activity to analyze sensory details in paragraphs from the two essays opening this chapter.)

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Planning, Drafting, and Developing

After recording your observations, look over your notes, circling whatever looks useful. Maybe you can rewrite your notes into a draft, throwing out details that don't matter, leaving those that do. Maybe you'll need a plan to help you organize all the observations, laying them out graphically or in a simple scratch outline.

Start with a Main Impression or Thesis. What main insight or impression do you want to convey? Answering this question will help you decide which details to include, which to omit, and how to avoid a dry list of facts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE OBSERVED</th>
<th>Smalley Green after lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAIN IMPRESSION</td>
<td>relaxing activity is good after a morning of classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKING THESIS</td>
<td>After their morning classes, students have fun relaxing on Smalley Green with their dogs and Frisbees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organize to Show Your Audience Your Point. How do you map out a series of observations? Your choice depends on your purpose and the main impression you want to create. Whatever your choice, add transitions—words or phrases to guide the reader from one vantage point, location, or idea to the next. Consider options such as those shown on the next page.

As you create your “picture,” you bring a place to life using the details that capture its spirit. If your instructor approves, consider whether adding a photograph, sketch, diagram, or other illustration—with a caption—would enhance your written observation.

**Learning by Doing **

Experimenting with Organization

Take a second look at the arrangement of the details in your observation. Select a different yet promising sequence, and test it by outlining your draft (or reorganizing another file) in that order. Ask classmates for reactions as you consider which sequence most effectively conveys your main impression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPATIAL MOVEMENT</th>
<th>top</th>
<th>left</th>
<th>near</th>
<th>center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bottom</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>far</td>
<td>edge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROMINENT FEATURES</th>
<th>least: Sunday suit, light blue blouse, dramatic flowered hat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>most: Grandma’s sharp eyes, spotting the best in others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIFIC DETAILS TO GENERAL IMPRESSION</th>
<th>souvenir sellers calling, small waves slapping tour boats, and pungent fish frying on Fisherman’s Wharf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In all this commotion, a visitor sees the wharf’s vitality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON AND ORDINARY TO UNUSUAL FEATURES</th>
<th>mounds of bright leaves, crisp fall air, children bouncing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the sheer joy of every moment at the playground across from the pediatric cancer center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sequential Organization of Details
Revising and Editing

Your revising, editing, and proofreading will be easier if you have accurate notes on your observations. But what if you don’t have enough detail for your draft? If you have doubts, go back to the scene to take more notes.

Focus on a Main Impression or Thesis. As you begin to revise, have a friend read your observation, or read it yourself as if you had never seen the place you observed. Note gaps that would puzzle a reader, restate the spirit of the place, or sharpen the description of the main impression you want to convey in your thesis.

WORKING THESIS After morning classes, students have fun relaxing on Smalley Green with their dogs and Frisbees.
REVISED THESIS When students, dogs, and Frisbees accumulate on Smalley Green after lunch, they show how much campus learning takes place outside of class.

Learning by Doing ⬤ Strengthening Your Main Impression

Complete these two sentences: The main impression that I want to show my audience is ______________. The main insight that I want to share is ______________. Exchange sentences with a classmate or small group, and then each read aloud that draft while the others listen for the impression and insight the writer wants to convey. After each reading, discuss revision options with the writer—cuts, additions, changes—to strengthen that impression.

Add Relevant and Powerful Details. Next, check your selection of details. Does each detail contribute to your main impression? Should any details be dropped or added? Should any be rearranged so that your organization, moving point to point, is clearer? Could any observations be described more vividly, powerfully, or concretely? Could any vague words such as very, really, great, or beautiful be replaced with more specific words? (As you spot too much repetition of certain words, use your software’s Edit-Find function to locate them so you can reword for variety.)

Peer Response ⬤ Observing a Scene

Let a classmate or friend respond to your draft, suggesting how to use detail to convey your main impression more powerfully. Ask your peer editor to answer questions such as these about writing from observation:

• What main insight or impression do you carry away from this draft?
• Which sense does the writer use particularly well? Are any senses neglected?
• Can you see and feel what the writer experienced? Would more detail be more compelling? Put check marks wherever you want more details.

• How well has the writer used evidence from the senses to build a main impression? Which sensory impressions contribute most strongly to the overall picture? Which seem superfluous?

• If this paper were yours, what is the one thing you would be sure to work on before handing it in?

To see where your draft could need work, consider these questions:

**REVISION CHECKLIST**

☐ Have you accomplished your purpose—to convey to readers your overall impression of your subject and to share some telling insight about it?

☐ What can you assume your readers know? What do they need to be told?

☐ Have you gathered enough observations to describe your subject? Have you observed with all your senses when possible—even smell and taste?

☐ Have you been selective, including details that effectively support your overall impression?

☐ Which observations might need to be checked for accuracy? Which might need to be checked for richness or fullness?

☐ Is your organizational pattern the most effective for your subject? Is it easy for readers to follow? Would another pattern work better?

After you have revised your essay, edit and proofread it. Carefully check the grammar, word choice, punctuation, and mechanics—and then correct any problems. If you have added details while revising, consider whether they have been sufficiently blended with the ideas already there. Here are some questions to get you started:

**EDITING CHECKLIST**

☐ Is your sentence structure correct? Have you avoided writing fragments, comma splices, and fused sentences?  

☐ Have you used an adjective when you describe a noun or pronoun? Have you used an adverb when you describe a verb, adjective, or adverb? Have you used the correct form to compare two or more things?