
UNIT 21 DESCRIPTIVE COMPOSITION - 3

DESCRIBING CONDITIONS AND PROCESSES

Structure

21.0 Objectives

21.1 Introduction

21.2 Describing Conditions

21.3 Describing Processes

21.3.1 How things are made

21.3.2 How instruments and apparatus are to be used

21.3.3 How to apply for a passport or a post

21.4 Let Us Sum Up

21.5 Key Words

21.6 Suggested Reading

21.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will learn how to describe

- conditions, and
- processes.

In other words, you will learn to describe the activities you see and the impressions you get about a place. You will also learn to describe how common machines and gadgets are to be used and how we apply for a passport or a post.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

You have seen in Unit 20 how we describe the outward appearance or look of a place—how a place stands in relation to its surroundings and what objects are seen in that place. In this unit, we shall see another aspect of a place—the general conditions there. When we look at the place, does it look tidy or untidy, orderly or disorderly? And in general we may consider whether the place gives an impression of wealth or poverty, health or disease, happiness or sadness.

Some of the situations in which you would need to describe the conditions of a place are:

- i) You are describing to a friend the conditions in the office where you work. You are not happy with the conditions and you point out the broken furniture and the dusty files. You also mention the lack of cooperation among the staff.
- ii) You return to your village school after many years and notice the improved condition. You describe it to an old class-mate.
- iii) You write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper. You want to draw the attention of the local government to the poor conditions in your area.
- iv) You are a newspaper reporter. You are sent to report on a slum and you describe the conditions there.

Remember that describing the conditions at a place must not be confused with narration. In a narration, we describe the activities relating to a particular event, but in a description we describe the general conditions that exist at a place.

In Section 21.3 you will learn how to describe processes. We have to use machines and gadgets every-day in our lives and we need to describe how they work. The situations may be like the following:

- i) You describe how to prepare a particular dish.
- ii) You describe how your tape-recorder works, to a friend who wants to borrow it.
- iii) An instruction manual describes how an appliance or machine works.
- iv) You advise your friend on how to apply for a passport or for a post.

21.2 DESCRIBING CONDITIONS

Read this passage. It is a description of a slum.

We parked our car at the road-side and walked down the left side of the road. In front of us was a row of tents made of soot-black pieces of cloth sewn together. Every time a big truck passed by on the highway, a cloud of dust rose and settled on the tents. In the background were the high-rise buildings of Bombay.

We had to cross over to the tents by jumping on boulders thrown into pools of slimy water. Mosquitoes and flies swarmed around us. The stench of night-soil came from the bushes. A wiry woman came out of a tent. She might have been only 30, but her wrinkled face and streaks of grey in her hair made her look older. A few naked, sickly children gathered around us curiously. Some other children were trying to keep the dogs away from their scraps of food.

“We come from ‘the Sarkar’”, we said.

The woman started and her blank eyes filled with hatred. She let out a stream of abuse and spat on the ground. “They took away our houses because they wanted to make a road in this area. Now what else do they want?”

Glossary

highway/¹haɪweɪ/: a broad main road, often leading from one town to another

high-rise/¹haɪraɪz/: built very high, usually with several floors

boulders/¹bəʊldəz/: large stones

slimy/¹slɪmɪ/: like partly liquid mud

swarmed/swɔːmd/: moved in large numbers

stench/stenʃ/: a strong bad smell

night soil/¹naɪtsɔɪl/: waste matter from the human bowels

streak/stri:k/: a thin line or band different from what surrounds it

started/¹sta:tɪd/: made a sudden movement out of fear or surprise

In the passage above, the following objects and persons are described. Their qualities are described too:

<i>Objects and Persons</i>	<i>Details</i>
tents	made of soot-black pieces of cloth; layer of dust on them
water	slimy
mosquitoes and flies	
night soil	gives off stench

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Contrasts in conditions

Now here are two small passages about two different hospitals. One is in a good condition and the other is in a very poor condition. Let's read them first. Then we shall point out the contrasts between them.

Passage 1

The nurses kept chatting away cheerfully to the patients. They cracked jokes with the older ones and tickled the children. There were ten beds on either side. Each of them was covered with a clean, white sheet. On the walls, there were pictures depicting stories from famous books. Bright sunlight came in through the large windows. In a corner, Asha, one of the nurses, kept fomenting a patient's swollen leg.

Exactly at 9.30 a.m., the doctor, followed by four house surgeons, entered. A wave of cheer ran through the ward. 'How are you?' and 'Namaste' were exchanged. There was a sense of relief on the faces of even the groaning patients.

Glossary

cracked jokes/'krækt 'dʒəʊks/: told jokes in a clever or amusing way

tickled/'tɪklɪd/: touched lightly with the finger to produce laughter

fomenting/'fəʊ'mentɪŋ/: putting a warm cloth or liquid on a part of the body to lessen pain

house surgeons/'haus,sɜ:dʒənz/: junior doctors completing hospital training and often living in the hospital

ward/wɔ:d/: a division in a hospital

Passage 2

It was already 11 a.m. None of the doctors had arrived yet. There were ten patients on broken cots. The unlucky ones were sprawling on the floor. The patients groaned and turned from side to side. The only attendant there scolded them for making such a noise. An earthen pot covered with cobwebs stood in the corner. When I peeped into it, I saw a film of dust floating. Soon a wind blew through the broken window panes. Rain trickled down through small gaps in the tiles of the roof.

Glossary

sprawl/sprɔ:l/: sit or lie with the arms and legs loosely spread

film/fɪlm/: a thin layer

trickled/'trɪklɪd/: flew in drops

First let us *contrast* the *objects* in the two hospitals.

Passage 1

beds covered with clean, white sheets

pictures on walls

Sunlight comes in through large windows.

Passage 2

broken cots

none mentioned

The wind blows through broken window panes and rain trickles through the roof.

Now contrast the *activities*.

Passage 1

The nurses chat cheerfully with patients.

All the patients have beds.

Asha fomented a patient's swollen leg.

The doctor arrives on time.

Passage 2

The attendant scolds patients.

The unlucky ones sprawl on the floor.

No service given.

No doctor arrives.

Now we can form our general impressions of the conditions in the two hospitals.

In the first, the atmosphere is cheerful and patients receive full care. In the second, patients are completely ignored and even scolded. In the first, the conditions are such that the patients have a feeling of relief. In the second, the condition of the patients is likely to worsen.

Self-check Exercise 2

Write two descriptive paragraphs. In the first, describe the improvements in water supply brought about in your locality by the government. In the second, describe a locality where the conditions are very poor. Write only 10 lines on each. Compare your answers with those given by us at the end of this unit.

(a)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(b)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Self-check Exercise 3

Read the following passage carefully and answer the questions given at the end of the passage. Use your dictionary if necessary. Check your answers with those given by us at the end of the unit.

Next morning I went with him to the cave to have a look at the musical notations he had discovered. We had to pass through the main cave and beyond it into a vault by a crumbling ladder. A fierce, terrifying place. Nothing on earth would have induced me to go to a spot like that, stuffy, fierce, and dark. "There may be cobras here," I said. He ignored my fears. "You should feel at home, then," he said and we laughed. And then he lit a lantern and showed me the wall on which he had scraped off the lime and discovered new pictures. They were the usual, grotesque, ancient paintings of various figures, but he managed to spell out the letters around them, and take them down as musical notations. It was nothing I could make out or make use of. They were abstract verses about some theories of an ancient musical system or some such thing. I said, "If these were about dancing, I could perhaps have tried—" He looked up sharply. The word "dance" always stung him. I was afraid to go on with the subject. But there squatting on the ancient floor, amidst cobwebs and bats, in that dim lantern light, I felt courage coming back. "Will you permit me to dance?"

(from R.K. Narayan: *The Guide*)

Tick (✓) the correct answer.

- 1) The place described in this passage was
 - a) a cave.
 - b) an artist's studio.
 - c) an old house.
- 2) The place was
 - a) well-kept.
 - b) old and decaying.
 - c) disorderly.
- 3) The feeling caused by this place was that of
 - a) cheerfulness.
 - b) fear.
 - c) mystery.
- 4) The paintings on the walls were about
 - a) dancing.
 - b) old secret magic.
 - c) music.
- 5) The cobwebs and bats in the place showed that
 - a) people still lived there.
 - b) people didn't live there any more.
 - c) animals lived there.
- 6) The place was usually
 - a) lit by a lantern.
 - b) lit by sunlight.
 - c) dark.

21.3 DESCRIBING PROCESSES

You often need to describe how things are made, and how different kinds of instruments and apparatus are to be used.

21.3.1 How things are made

Read this dialogue between two housewives. One of them is describing how 'onion dosai' is made.

- Salma : Kaveri, how do you prepare 'onion dosais'?
- Kaveri : Oh, that's very simple. Clean and wash 65 grams of rice and 35 grams of 'urad daal'. Soak them together in water for 3 to 4 hours. Grind some tamarind and one red chilli together and mix the paste with the 'daal' and rice. Grind all this together till you get a coarse paste. Grate 4 small onions and half a coconut, and mix them with the paste.
- Salma : Then?
- Kaveri : Heat a greased 'tava' or iron plate and spread a portion of the paste on it. Cover it with a lid for a minute and allow it to cook. After that turn it and fry the other side, adding some more oil, till you get a crisp and brown dosai.
- Salma : How many 'dosais' can one get from the quantity of paste you mentioned?
- Kaveri : About a dozen.

Glossary

- soak/səʊk/**: keep (something) in water to make it soft
- grind/grænd/**: crush into fine particles
- grate/ɡreɪt/**: rub (something, usually food) on a hard rough surface to break into small pieces
- tamarind/'tæməɪnd/**: the fruit of a tropical tree
- greased/ɡri:st/**: rubbed with oil

Note that in the description of the process of cooking, all the verbs used are in the *imperative form*:

clean, wash, soak, grind, mix, grate, heat, spread, cover, allow, turn, fry

Note the words and phrases used to indicate

- quantity** : 65 grams of rice
35 grams of 'urad daal'
4 small onions
half a coconut
- place** : soak them in water; spread a portion of the paste on it
- time** : for 3 to 4 hours
for a minute
- effect** : till you get a coarse paste
- sequence** : *After that* turn it and fry
- means** : Cover it *with a lid*.....

Self-check Exercise 4

Write a description of how Salma prepared the 'onion dosais'. Use the sentences from the dialogue above. Change the verbs into the simple past tense. Begin:

Salma cleaned and washed 65 gms. of rice and 35 gms. of 'urad daal'.

You may compare your description with that given at the end of this unit.

.....

.....

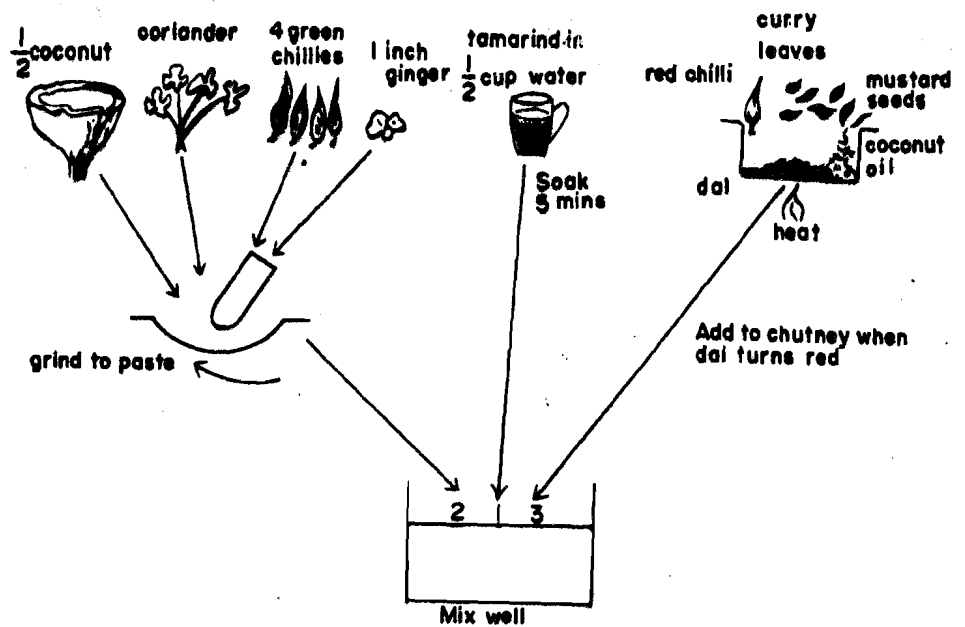
.....

.....

.....

Self-check Exercise 5

The diagram below shows the different stages in making coconut chutney. The arrows are used to show the direction of the process, and where the ingredients are added. The curved arrow shows movement.



(From Sarah Freeman: *Written Communication in English*, Orient Longman)

Following the diagram closely, try to describe in words how to make the chutney. Put numbers for the different stages in the process—1, 2, 3. You may compare your answer with that given at the end of this unit.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

21.3.2 How instruments and apparatus are to be used

Here is a passage from an instruction booklet that describes how to use a TV set. The booklet is given with the new TV set.

- i) Install the antenna firmly so that it does not bend or rotate in strong winds.
- ii) Fit the mains plug of the TV set tightly into the electric line socket.
- iii) Connect the antenna wire tightly to your TV set.
- iv) Make certain that the direction of the antenna is correct. Ask your service engineer about this.
- v) Now switch on your TV set.
- vi) Turn the large knob on the right to select the desired channel. For example Delhi A operates on Channel 4.
- vii) Adjust the controls for fine tuning, volume, tone, contrast and brightness to get the best reception.

Glossary

- install**/ɪn'stɔ:l/: fix in position for use
- rotate**/rəʊ'tet/: turn round a fixed point
- antenna**/æn'tenə/: aerial (= a wire, rod, or framework put up to receive radio or television broadcasts)
- socket**/'sɒkɪt/: an opening or hollow place that forms a holder, into which something fits
- reception**/rɪ'sepʃən/: the receiving of radio or television signals

The instructions above are given in the *imperative* form:
install, fit, connect, make certain, ask, switch on, turn, adjust.

But when we want to describe the process instead of giving instructions to the user, we use the *passive voice*. e.g.,

- Imperative: Install the antenna firmly.....
- Passive Voice: The antenna is installed firmly....

Self-check Exercise 6

Rewrite the instructions for the use of the TV set in the form of information about the process. Use the passive voice. Check your answer with that given at the end of this unit.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

21.3.3 How to apply for a passport or a post

Read the dialogue below:

- Victor : D'you know, Ravi, I've got a scholarship to go to the U.S.A. for studies in medicine?
Ravi : Congratulations!
Victor : You've already been abroad. Tell me how I can get a passport.
Ravi : First, get an application form from the Regional Passport Office at Calcutta. Fill in all the particulars.
Victor : What sort of particulars?
Ravi : You have to give details about your date of birth, place of birth, your parents, and educational qualifications. You also have to state the purpose of your visit abroad. You must get a letter from the university abroad giving you the scholarship. Attach this letter to your application. You must get your form signed by a government officer of the rank of a first class magistrate or above.
Victor : How long will it take to get the passport?
Ravi : Oh, about 2 months or so.

In the dialogue above, notice the use of

i) *imperatives*.

get an application form
fill in all the particulars
attach this letter to your application....

ii) *modals*

You have to give details.....
You have to state.....
You must get a letter.....
You must get your form signed.....

Self-check Exercise 7

Write a short dialogue between two friends. One is instructing the other on how to apply for a post. Compare your answer with that given by us at the end of the unit.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Activity

- i) Read the instructions given in a recipe book.
- ii) Read the instructions given with the domestic appliances you buy.
- iii) Read the instructions given at public places for the use of various facilities.

21.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have given you practice in describing

- the general conditions at a place,
- the process of making things, like items of food,
- the operation of common machines and apparatus, and
- the process of applying for a passport or a post.

21.5 KEY WORDS

con 'dition: the present state of things
'process: a series of operations
'instrument: implement or apparatus used in performing an action

- 'appa'ratus:** a set of instruments or other appliances put together for a purpose
- 'passport:** a government document to be carried by a traveller abroad, giving personal particulars
- slum:** a street of small, badly built, dirty, crowded houses
- 'contrast:** difference

21.6 SUGGESTED READING

R.K. Narayan: *The Guide*

21.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Objects

walls
twenty tables
ceiling
fan
plaster
chairs
papers

Details

splashed with 'paan' spittle
only five occupied
has cobwebs
rattled noisily
coming off
resting on three legs
piles of them covered with dust

Activities

The person I approached

He ignored me, walked away to open a cupboard, grunted, looked away, glared at me.

General Impressions

There is no discipline in the office. Many of the employees have not come in time or maybe they will not come at all. The one person who is present is not helpful. In fact, he is bad-tempered. The office has not been cleaned and it is not maintained properly. Papers are not stored or filed properly. On the whole there is no proper organization in the office.

Exercise 2

Specimen Answers

- a) Our area, Rajbari, has improved a lot since last year. The local government must be praised for this. Last year, the people here suffered because of water shortage in the summer. Now there are overhead storage tanks from which water is supplied to the houses. Hand-pumps have also been fitted at a number of places on the roads.
- b) The conditions in our locality, Rajbari, have become worse during the last five years and the local government pays no attention to our problems. In summer, the people have to walk a mile to the nearest well to fetch water. In the rains, the large holes on the roads get filled with water and children often fall into them. One of the two schools has closed down because of shortage of funds and the other is in a bad condition.

Exercise 3

- 1) a
- 2) b
- 3) b
- 4) c
- 5) b
- 6) c

Exercise 4

Salma cleaned and washed 65 grams of rice and 35 grams of 'urad daal'. She soaked them together in water for 3 to 4 hours. Then she ground some tamarind and one red chilli together and mixed the paste with the 'daal' and rice. After that, she ground all this together till she got a coarse paste. Then she grated 4 small onions and half a coconut and mixed them with the paste. She heated a greased 'tava' or iron plate and spread a portion of the paste on it. Then she covered it with a lid for a minute and allowed it to cook. After that she turned it and fried the other side, adding some more oil till she got a crisp and brown dosai. She made a dozen dosais altogether.

Exercise 5

- 1) Mix some tamarind in half a cup of water and let it soak for five minutes.
- 2) Take half a coconut, some coriander leaves, 4 green chillies and an inch of ginger, and grind them all to a paste.
- 3) Heat some coconut oil with some 'daal', red chillies, curry leaves and mustard seeds. Heat till the 'daal' turns red and then add it to the coconut paste and the tamarind water already prepared.
- 4) Mix well and your coconut chutney is ready.

Exercise 6

The antenna is firmly installed so that it does not bend or rotate in strong winds. Then the mains plug of the TV set is tightly fitted into the electric line socket. The antenna wire is tightly connected to the TV set. It should be made certain that the direction of the antenna is correct. The service engineer should be asked about this. Then the TV set is switched on. The large knob on the right is turned to select the desired channel. For example Delhi A operates on Channel 4. Finally, the controls for fine tuning, volume, tone, contrast and brightness are adjusted to get the best reception.

Exercise 7

- Ganesh : Manish, there was an advertisement today inviting applications for a teacher's post at the Government High School, Rampur. How do I apply for it?
- Manish : Write to the Secretary of the School for an application form. You must send a stamped envelope with your address on it. And the price of the form must be sent by a postal order. When you receive the form, fill in the details asked for. These will include your educational qualifications and work experience. You have to send attested copies of the certificates with the completed application form.
- Ganesh : Thank you.