Descriptive Writing: Who, What, When, & Where?

As a writer of description, you will need to zoom in on the details to develop your scene for your reader.

1. **WHO is describing the scene?**

   Establish a perspective from which to describe your subject (point of view).
   - Point of view shows the writer’s relationship to the subject, thereby establishing the perspective from which the subject is described.
   - The example below conveys the personal experience of the writer and the point of view is first person through his use of “I.”

2. **WHAT is the writer trying to say about this topic?**

   Emphasize a single point (dominant impression).
   - The dominant impression emerges from a pattern of details, often involving repetition of one idea with different particulars.
   - The details in the example below all surround and emphasize the experience of eating the ultimate form of food (dominant impression).

3. **WHEN and WHERE is this scene taking place?**

   Position the details for coherence (order).
   - Order the details so that the descriptive account develops spatially as well as chronologically (meaning in space and time).
   - In the example below, we are grounded in the experience because of the details about where and when the scene is taking place (i.e.; Sitting here in Harold’s Hefty Burger at midnight, I am convinced that I am eating the ultimate form of food).

Descriptive Writing Example: Sitting here in Harold’s Hefty Burgers at midnight, I am convinced that I am eating the ultimate form of food. The buns are feathery soft to the touch but heavy in the hand and soggy inside. As I take a full-mouth, no-nonsense bite, the melted cheese and juices cascade over my fingers and make little oil slicks on the vinyl table below. I stop chewing occasionally to flush down the rich, thick taste of animal fat with a swig from a chilled mug of fizzing root beer.