

Sketching Someone

Writing a Character Sketch

About the Lesson

“Sketching Someone” takes a straight-forward approach to teaching your students how to write a character sketch, offering directions for writing a character sketch, along with one example.

Targeted Learner Outcomes

The student will:

- learn what a character sketch is, and
- write a character sketch.

- 1** Have students read the eleven suggestions for writing a character sketch. Emphasize that the first is probably the most important, namely, the subject should be someone that the student knows quite well. Discuss with students the various steps to make sure they understand each.
- 2** The sample sketch is annotated to show how the young writer incorporated the elements mentioned in the lesson in his character sketch. Point out the annotations to students and discuss any questions they have.
- 3** After students have completed their first drafts, go over the main points about writing a character sketch. The purpose of a character sketch or profile is to allow the reader to feel that he or she has gotten to know the subject of the piece. It is not organized chronologically but should be organized by topics. The character sketch is informal in tone, and it benefits from quotes, humor, and anecdotes. The writer must first imagine what the person is like to know. What does he or she look like? Where does he or she live? Who are the subject’s friends?

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- 1** Writing a character sketch is like painting a portrait of someone. The writer's objective is to present the subject in words so that the reader gets a clear idea of the subject. The subject should be interesting and distinctive in some way, either in characteristics or actions. Readers should be told enough so that they feel that they have met the subject and almost know him or her.

Following are steps for writing a character sketch:

1. Select a person to write about. Choose an individual you know well who should be interesting to your readers.
2. List the subject's characteristics and accomplishments. Underline the most important ones for the kind of sketch you want to write. Each person has an enormous number of qualities, facts, and idiosyncrasies. Your careful selection of these details adds up to the portrait you are trying to create.
3. Decide how you want to portray your subject. Do you want to emphasize your subject's personality, appearance, or character? Simply giving an individual's accomplishments usually isn't enough to hold a reader's interest.
4. Keep your audience in mind. Who will read your sketch? Will your audience be sufficiently interested in your subject to keep reading?
5. Write your rough draft. Don't be too concerned with spelling, punctuation, or grammar at this stage. Leave plenty of space between the lines for corrections.
6. Read over your first draft silently and then read it aloud. Make obvious corrections. Put it aside and don't look at it for a few hours or a day.
7. Read your first draft again, putting yourself in the role of a reader. Does it read easily?

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8. Make the corrections and changes that you see should be made. Look for one kind of error or weakness at a time. Here are the main areas in which possible errors or weaknesses might occur:
 - **Mechanics:** Check your sketch for errors in punctuation, spelling, sentence construction, and grammar.
 - **Consistency:** Is there a logical order in terms of time, plan, importance, complexity, or step-by-step unfolding of the sketch?
 - **Clarity:** Have you given enough details so that a reader can picture your subject clearly?
 - **Development:** Are the main parts of the sketch put together logically? Does the material grow as the sketch develops?
 - **Total Effect:** Do you believe your readers will see, feel, and understand what you have written about your subject? If not, add or remove details so that they will.
9. Give the second draft to someone you respect and ask for frank comments.
10. After the trial reader has read your sketch critically, discuss it with him or her. Make sure you understand any criticisms or suggestions.
11. Rewrite your final draft in light of your trial reader's critique.



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- 2 This is an example of a character sketch that incorporates all the elements listed on the previous pages.

Grandpa, My Favorite Relative

Opening statement/facts	My favorite relative was a fighter pilot in World War II, and he's only 5'4" tall. But those 64 inches weigh a solid 185
Appearance/facts	pounds. Even though he is 79, you'd guess he couldn't be more than 65. Maybe he was blond when he was young, but now his
Personality trait	hair is silvery white. There's usually a twinkle in his eye and a half-smile on his face. He looks like a good-natured gnome.
Glimpse of subject	Grandpa cracks jokes all the time, but sometimes they aren't very funny. That's all right—he tries.
Personality trait/ examples	When I visit my grandparents, Grandpa is usually busy at his workbench in the garage. He can fix almost anything.
Personality trait	Once, when I was young, he fixed my train set when Dad couldn't. The other day he was able to fix the muffler on my
Personality traits	dad's car. He just works away at whatever he's doing, but when I ask him a question he likes to explain how things work.
Facts	Grandpa doesn't talk much about his experiences in World War II or about being a high school principal, and he doesn't try to give me advice. He's a great fisherman
Quote	because he's patient. Maybe that's why he has been married to Grandma for 51 years. During that time she went from being a flaming liberal to a diehard conservative. When someone
Summary statement/ example	asked Grandpa why he put up with Grandma's political shenanigans and occasionally bizarre behavior, he said: "Maybe it's because I love her." Even though he doesn't tell me what to do, I like to talk with Grandpa when I have a problem. He doesn't tell me I goofed or anything. Mostly he just listens. I guess that's why he's my favorite relative and one of my very favorite people.

- 3 After you have read the character sketch above and noted the eleven steps in writing one, you should be able to write a character sketch that gives your readers a good picture of someone you know. Jot down your ideas on a separate sheet of paper, then write your character sketch.