

# WriteGuide.com's Letter Writing Program

## Lesson One: *Imagery*

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**Imagery** is all about images, which are nothing more than pictures in a reader's mind. Since we're going to be talking about letter writing, it makes sense that we have to create these "pictures" by using words.

But before we talk about exactly *how* to use **imagery** in a letter we should probably talk a little bit about *why* we should use **imagery** in a letter.

Letter writing is more than just writing to a friend. It's about connecting with someone in a very personal, special way. You don't write a letter if you want to say "hello" to someone – that's what phone calls are for! When you write a letter your purpose should always be to *share a piece of yourself and your world*. People who simply "know each other" don't write letters to one another: *friends* write letters to one another. If you're using this program to write to a close friend then you already know what I'm talking about. And if it turns out that you don't know the person you're writing to very well at all, then the letters you're about to write to one another will make you very close indeed.

Let's get back to talking about **imagery**.

We already said that letter writing is about *sharing a piece of yourself and your world*. Well it just so happens that **imagery** is a tool that allows us to do just that: **imagery allows us to share pieces of ourselves and our worlds**. If you were getting to know someone for the first time and you knew you were going to be friends with that person, you'd probably bring him into your house. You'd show him your room, your dog, your favorite places, and some of your favorite things. You might play your favorite music for the person, or serve him up something extra-special tasty for lunch. And then, when the day was over, your friend would know a whole lot more about you than he did before.

But we're talking about writing letters, not bringing someone over to our houses for the afternoon. If we're going to share all those experiences with someone, then we need to use language in order to do it. Let me give you an example.

**Dear Friend,**

**Well, here we are: two strangers writing letters to one another. I guess if this is going to work I should start out by telling you a little bit about myself. I am 14 years old, and homeschooled. I live out in New Hampshire**

**in a town called Jackson. It's a tiny little place nestled deep in a valley surrounded by mountains. The mountains are absolutely huge. They tower over everything, and when the sun dips behind them it turns dark so fast you wouldn't believe it. There are caves and waterfalls all over the mountains, and me and my brothers have a great time exploring.**

**I have a dog named Ollie. He's a scraggly little fellow with long brown fur and floppy ears. He doesn't bark that much. Instead he walks around saying, "a-rrr-rrr-rrr-rrr-rrRR!" to everyone he sees. It's almost like he's talking. His favorite thing to do is to dig a hole in my mom's flowerbed and lay in it. The soft, damp earth keeps him cool, I guess. Then when he comes in the house he drags dirt all over the carpet, and Mom makes me get out the old Electrolux to clean up after him. That old vacuum is older than I am. It smells like the cellar and it makes this clinking sound whenever you wheel it anywhere. Then when you start it up it makes even more noise, and Ollie and our cat (whose name is Herman) go running for the back door.**

**I'll tell you a little more about myself now. My favorite food is...**

See how it's done? Now notice what I did: I described how some things *looked*, how some things *felt*, how some things *sound*, and how some things *smell*. If I continued on with the letter you'd eventually learn that the writer's favorite food is turkey sandwiches with lettuce, Swiss cheese, and tomatoes - and that he loves it when the tomatoes *taste* extra tangy.

When you write a letter that contains a lot of **imagery** what you're really doing is **using your five senses to describe the world around you**. Since most human beings rely on their eyes and ears to experience the world, we tend to use lots of imagery that deals with how things look and how they sound. When you write your letter you'll be using lots of sights and sounds, but you'll be making those sights and sounds a lot more powerful than you normally would. You'll also be using a fair amount of feelings, smells, and tastes in your letters as well.

Let's get specific. If you have something to describe there are two ways to use **imagery** to make the description more powerful. **First**, you simply **put the word in a sentence without describing it very much at all**. That's why when the sample letter describes the mountains it starts off by saying, "It's a tiny little place nestled deep in a valley surrounded by mountains." Take a look at the description of Ollie and the Electrolux and you'll see the same thing. Good descriptions start off short and simple.

**The second step** in using imagery to make a description more powerful is to **write a sentence that describes the object**. Take a look at these next few sentences and you'll see what I mean.

- A. It's a tiny little place nestled deep in a valley surrounded by mountains. The mountains are absolutely huge.**

- B. I have a dog named Ollie. He’s a scraggily little fellow with long brown fur and floppy ears.**
- C. Then when he comes in the house he drags dirt all over the carpet, and Mom makes me get out the old Electrolux to clean up after him. That old vacuum is older than I am.**

The pattern is the same throughout all three examples: the writer starts off by using the word in a sentence, and then he uses a second sentence to give some more details about it.

**The third step** in using **imagery** to make a description more powerful is to **use the object you’re describing in some sort of example**. Sometimes this involves only one sentence, but usually it involves two or three. Let’s expand the three examples from above so you can see the third step in action.

- A. It’s a tiny little place nestled deep in a valley surrounded by mountains. The mountains are absolutely huge. They tower over everything, and when the sun dips behind them it turns dark so fast you wouldn’t believe it. There are caves and waterfalls all over the mountains, and me and my brothers have a great time exploring.**
- B. I have a dog named Ollie. He’s a scraggily little fellow with long brown fur and floppy ears. He doesn’t bark that much. Instead he walks around saying, “a-rrr-rrr-rrr-rrRR!” to everyone he sees. It’s almost like he’s talking. His favorite thing to do is to dig a hole in my mom’s flowerbed and lay in it. The soft, damp earth keeps him cool, I guess.**
- C. Then when he comes in the house he drags dirt all over the carpet, and Mom makes me get out the old Electrolux to clean up after him. That old vacuum is older than I am. It smells like the cellar and it makes this clinking sound whenever you wheel it anywhere. Then when you start it up it makes even more noise, and Ollie and our cat (whose name is Herman) go running for the back door.**

You’ll notice that the third step is where the **imagery** really starts to get interesting. The third step is where you should try to insert as many sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical sensations as you can.

Now that you know how to use **imagery** in a letter, it’s time to write one on your own. In your first letter you should start off by introducing yourself, and then you should start talking about where you live, the people in your family, the things you like to do, and anything else that comes to mind. It’s OK to write a first draft so you can figure out what it is you want to say, and then to go back to put in the imagery. We all have our own writing styles, so whatever approach works best for you is fine.

In your letter you should include the following items:

- 1. Descriptions of at least five different objects, all of which are described using the three steps mentioned above.**
- 2. At least four examples of imagery that describe things in terms of how they sound.**
- 3. At least four examples of imagery that describe things in terms of how they feel.**
- 4. At least three examples of imagery that describe things in terms of how they smell.**
- 5. At least two examples of imagery that describe things in terms of how they taste.**

It's OK if some of those things overlap. For example, in one of the description of one of your five different objects you might also combine two different smells, and a sound. In fact, the more overlapping imagery you can create, the better! And if you're not sure about something you've written, you can always ask for feedback and help from a parent, friend, sibling, or someone else.

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