**Description/Illustration**Prepared by Theresa Yonker

Nearly all essays include some elements of description and illustration. They make your essay vivid, interesting, and clearer to the reader.

Description can make an event more vivid:

I will never forget my mother’s flashing eyes, narrowed lips, and furrowed   
 brow when she was angry.

Anger was present in my mother’s face.

The first example above is more interesting and vivid because it is more visually concrete.

Description can also make an event more clear.

The first sentence below is satisfactory, but description can clarify that mixture of emotions:

I love and fear the ocean at the same time.

The force of the waves crashing down upon the sand fills me with awe, but I   
 also know I could be flattened by their power.

Illustration is an example or specific instance that supports a point in a descriptive manner. Illustration also clarifies a point and makes it more vivid and interesting:

“The Method” is a technique of acting taught by a famous teacher of drama,   
 Lee Strasberg, in which actors use their own emotions, from their own   
 experiences for inspiration. Marilyn Monroe, a pupil of Strasberg’s, used to   
 dwell on memories of her sad childhood in order to call up the necessary   
 tears for a scene. Specifically, Monroe said she thought of being taken to a   
 home for orphans and left there by her mother. Such a memory invariably   
 resulted in tears, whatever the character she was playing.

The example of Marilyn Monroe illustrates “The Method,” and Monroe’s abandonment as a child illustrates the phrase “sad childhood.”

Remember that a reader can only get as much information as you provide. The more specific you are, the more the reader receives. Good description and illustration help you make your interpretation of a broad term like “nice” or “sad” more clear. If someone was setting you up on a blind date, wouldn’t you want to know more than that they were a “nice” person? Illustration and description answer the question: What do you mean?

**Assignment**

1. Revise one of your essays, adding description/illustration.
2. Choose one of the following two options, consciously incorporating description and illustration. Make sure you illustrate those emotions with examples and describe the place and your reactions vividly:  
   1. Some places have the power to raise within us deep emotional reactions. As a result, these places become symbolic of those emotions, and we often seek them out when we wish to experience those feelings. Such emotions as serenity and contentment or energy and excitement are enjoyable. On the other hand, sometimes a place may inspire a strong emotion that is unpleasant, such as fear, anxiety, or depression. For example, one person might find the isolation of the desert serene, while another might find its vast space lonely. Write about a place that inspires such strong emotion within you.
   2. Write about a person who has greatly influenced you. This person might have influenced you in a positive way by positive example. On the other hand, this person might have influenced you by negative example. For example, you might have been influenced by a friend who talks about selflessness and then practices that selflessness in some way. Or you might be influenced by a friend you see who is in trouble, acting in a way that convinces you to do the opposite. You might also be influenced by someone you do not know, such as an artist, writer, or musician you admire, a great figure from history, a sports star, or any other media figure who motivates you.