

CHAPTER 9

Descriptive Words I

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The right descriptive word can be worth diamonds in a composition. Of course, as Mark Twain said, it must be the right word, not its second cousin. Naturally, if you know thirty ways to describe a woman or a voice or a smile instead of only five ways, you have a wider selection and your chances of picking an effective word are much improved.

These descriptive words should be part of the stock-in-trade of any writer of themes or reader of literature. Study carefully the definitions at the beginning of each frame. Then fill in the blanks with words defined in that frame, unless other choices are offered.

COVER THIS STRIP ▼

EXERCISES

- affable** (af'ə-bəl): easy to talk to; amiable.

altruistic (al'trū-iz-'tik): unselfish; concerned for the welfare of others.

(b) ■ An *affable* professor is (a) hostile, (b) friendly. ()

(a) ■ An *altruistic* woman is one who sacrifices to help (a) others, (b) only herself. ()

■ We found Homer in a friendly, talkative mood, in fact, quite *af*_____.

■ Devoted to public charities, Straus was certainly *al*_____.

■ In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the executioner stands grim and silent, hardly an *af*_____ fellow. Then Sydney Carton gives his life—loses his head, in fact—to save a friend. What an *al*_____ deed!
- ambidextrous** (am'bə-dek'strəs): able to use both hands with equal ease.

aromatic (ar'ə-mat'ik): fragrant; spicy; sweet-smelling.

(b) ■ *Aromatic* plants are (a) odorless, (b) pleasantly scented. ()

■ A basketball player who shoots baskets with either hand is _____ [ambidextrous / paraplegic].

■ Wilma bats the baseball equally well from either side of the plate because she is *am*_____.

■ Her boudoir was *ar*_____ with subtle perfumes and incense.

■ At harvest these orchards are *ar*_____, and the owner hires a few fast, cheap, *am*_____ pickers.
- asinine** (as'ə-nīn'): stupid; silly; ass-like.

astute (ə-stūt'): shrewd; keen in judgment; cunning.

(a) ■ The baseball fan's *asinine* comments made it clear that he was (a) a knucklehead, (b) a deep thinker. ()

■ Our nation needs _____ [astute / asinine] diplomats.

astute

asinine

astute

asinine

- Not everyone is shrewd enough to make *as* _____ investments.
- Trusting the strange door-to-door salesman with all my savings was an *as* _____ thing to do.
- Even the most *ast* _____ student can make a mistake, but to keep repeating the same mistakes is *as* _____.

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. (e) | () 1. affable | a. very stupid |
| 2. (c) | () 2. altruistic | b. using both hands equally well |
| 3. (b) | () 3. ambidextrous | c. completely unselfish |
| 4. (f) | () 4. aromatic | d. keenly intelligent |
| 5. (a) | () 5. asinine | e. warm and friendly |
| 6. (d) | () 6. astute | f. sweet-scented |

7. **bawdy** (bô'dē): indecent; obscene.
 8. **bellicose** (bel'ə-kōs'): hostile; eager to fight; warlike.

(b)

bellicose

bellicose

bawdy

bawdy

bellicose

- *Bawdy* shows can be expected at (a) Sunday schools, (b) Las Vegas. ()
- World tension is increased when national leaders exchange _____ [affable / bellicose] remarks.
- Bouncing his knuckles off my nose seemed to me a *be* _____ gesture.
- The minister's daughter blushed at the *ba* _____ anecdote.
- When I tried to hush the drunken stranger who was singing a vulgar, *ba* _____ song in our church, he became quite *be* _____.

9. **berserk** (bər-sûrk'): crazed; in a destructive frenzy.
 10. **bizarre** (bi-zâr'): odd in appearance; grotesque; queer. (Don't confuse with *bazaar*—a market or sale.)

bizarre

- Halloween masks are usually _____ [bazaar / bizarre].

(a)

berserk

bizarre

bizarre

berserk

- People who go *berserk* belong in (a) asylums, (b) crowded buses. ()

- The brand-new straitjacket looks stylish on the man who went *ber* _____.

- The green wig gave my aunt a *bi* _____ appearance.

- The painting was so *bi* _____ that Twain thought it depicted a cat going _____ in a platter of tomatoes.

11. **buoyant** (boi'ənt): tending to float; light of spirit; cheerful.
 12. **buxom** (buk'səm): healthily plump; full-bosomed; attractive.

(a)

buxom

buxom

buoyant

buoyant

buxom

buoyant

- When drowning, grab a *buoyant* material, like (a) cork, (b) a lead pipe. ()

- The Flemish women painted by Rubens tend to be fleshy—that is, _____ [buxom / buoyant].

- After a week at the health spa, Amy lost her _____ *m* figure, and her step became _____ *nt*.

- The balloonist said that hydrogen was lighter and more _____ *nt* than helium, and that he got a bigger bang out of using it.

- The astronauts looked _____ *m* in their space suits, and they floated about in _____ *nt* weightlessness.

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. (b) | () 1. bawdy | a. tending to float; cheerful |
| 2. (d) | () 2. bellicose | b. off-color; indecent |
| 3. (f) | () 3. berserk | c. attractively plump |
| 4. (e) | () 4. bizarre | d. warlike; pugnacious |
| 5. (a) | () 5. buoyant | e. peculiar in appearance |
| 6. (c) | () 6. buxom | f. destructively enraged |

13. **cadaverous** (kə-dav'ər-əs): gaunt; haggard; corpse-like.

14. **candid**: frank; unprejudiced; outspoken.

(b)

candid

■ A *cadaverous* person should probably (a) reduce, (b) put on weight. ()

■ I want the unvarnished truth, so give me a _____ [candid / candied] report.

candid

■ The editor said that my poems stank. He was quite _____d.

cadaverous

■ After forty days of fasting, Maximilian looked pale and *cad*_____.

cadaverous

candid

■ The sick hermit was so wasted and _____ that, to be *can*_____, the doctor hardly knew whether to feed him or bury him.

15. **craven**: cowardly; timid; chicken-hearted.

16. **dastardly**: sneaky and mean; brutal.

(b)

■ It was *dastardly* of Punky Jones to (a) chase the cattle rustlers, (b) trip and rob the blind man. ()

(a)

■ It was *craven* of me (a) to flee from the dachshund, (b) to challenge the bully. ()

craven

■ Amid flying bullets one tends to develop a timid, even a *cr*_____ spirit.

dastardly

■ Beating his infants was *das*_____, even if they did pour syrup on his stamp collection.

dastardly, craven

■ Who painted the captain's horse blue? Private Jubbs did the *d*_____ deed, but he was too *cr*_____ to admit it.

17. **deft**: skilled and neat in action; adroit; dexterous.

18. **defunct** (di-fungkt'): dead; deceased; no longer existing.

(a)

■ One must be particularly *deft* to (a) do needlework, (b) ride escalators. ()

(a)

■ A *defunct* enterprise belongs to (a) the past, (b) the future. ()

deft

■ I found that to play Chopin's "Minute Waltz" in less than five minutes requires quick, *d*_____ fingers.

defunct

■ Alas, poor Yorick, whose skull I hold—he is _____ct.

deft, defunct

■ To walk across this boulevard of speeding cars, you must be _____ or soon you'll be _____.



QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

1. (d)

() 1. craven

a. mean, villainous

2. (f)

() 2. deft

b. haggard; like a corpse

3. (a)

() 3. dastardly

c. frank; open and sincere

4. (b)

() 4. cadaverous

d. cowardly; timid

5. (e)

() 5. defunct

e. dead; functioning no more

6. (c)

() 6. candid

f. skillful

19. **destitute** (des'ti-tōōt'): extremely poor; lacking the necessities of life.

20. **diabolic** (dī'ə-bol'ik): devilish, fiendish.

(a)

■ His *diabolic* ambition was to destroy (a) humankind, (b) disease. ()

(b)

■ The *destitute* have more than their share of (a) money, (b) poverty. ()

destitute

■ Her husband died three days after his insurance lapsed, and she was left *des*_____.

diabolic

■ King Edward IV plotted to have his brother Clarence stabbed and drowned in a barrel of wine. How *dia*_____!

destitute, diabolic

■ The melodrama dealt with a penniless old couple—absolutely *des*_____—the victims of a _____ villain who foreclosed on the mortgage.

21. **discreet**: prudent; tactful; careful not to talk or act unwisely.

22. **disenchanted**: set free from one's rosy illusions.

disenchanted

■ Those who expected to find fat gold nuggets lying on the Yukon snowbanks were quickly _____ [vindicated / disenchanted].

(a)

■ A *discreet* roommate (a) keeps a secret, (b) blabs about confidential matters. ()

- discreet ■ This juicy story should not be publicized, fellows, so please be *dis*_____.
- disenchanted ■ Those who trusted Stalin's promises were soon *dis*_____.
- discreet ■ After marriage William was less *dis*_____ in his drinking; and his bride, stumbling among his bottles, was _____ *ed*.
- disenchanted

23. **dogmatic** (dog-mat'ik): asserting opinions in a dictatorial way; positive; strongly opinionated.
24. **droll** (dröl): comical; quaintly amusing.

- (b) ■ A *droll* fellow at the circus is (a) the tiger, (b) the clown. ()
- (b) ■ Highly *dogmatic* conversationalists are usually (a) popular, (b) obnoxious. ()
- droll ■ The audience laughed at Will Rogers' *dr*_____ remarks.
- dogmatic ■ Military men often become opinionated and *dog*_____.
- dogmatic ■ Our landlord kept ordering us in *do*_____ fashion to clean our rooms; nor did he smile at Bill's *dr*_____ remark that the garbage disposal must have backfired.
- droll

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. (f) | () 1. destitute | a. losing one's romantic beliefs |
| 2. (c) | () 2. diabolic | b. prudent in speech and conduct |
| 3. (b) | () 3. discreet | c. fiendish; outrageously wicked |
| 4. (a) | () 4. disenchanted | d. comical; whimsically amusing |
| 5. (e) | () 5. dogmatic | e. opinionated; dictatorial |
| 6. (d) | () 6. droll | f. needy; penniless |

25. **dubious** (doo'bi-əs): doubtful; vague; skeptical; questionable.
26. **eccentric** (ik-sen'trik): odd; peculiar; unconventional; offcenter.

- The bearded gentleman skating around in the drugstore is thought to be rather _____ [eccentric / conventional].
- eccentric

- dubious ■ Although madman Columbus said the world was round, his listeners could see it was flat, and so they were naturally _____ [dubious / delusive].
- eccentric ■ Mrs. Doodle often takes her Flemish rabbit for a walk on a leash—another one of her *ec*_____ habits.
- dubious ■ The drug addict claimed he could fly from the hotel roof, but the police officers were *dub*_____.
- eccentric, dubious ■ The farmer decided that the nudists were either crazy or highly *ec*_____; he was *du*_____ about them.
27. **enigmatic** (en'ig-mat'ik): puzzling; perplexing; mysterious.
28. **erotic** (i-rot'ik): pertaining to sexual love; amatory.
- erotic ■ "Adult movies" are usually more _____ [prudish / erotic] than "family movies."
- (b) ■ We refer to Mona Lisa's smile as *enigmatic* because it is (a) dazzling, (b) puzzling. ()
- enigmatic ■ I was mystified by the *en*_____ warning.
- erotic ■ The sexy passages in *Tropic of Cancer* were so *er*_____ that they gave off blue smoke.
- erotic ■ If you cut all the *er*_____ passages from Noodle's last novel, the book would disappear. When asked why he wrote it, Noodle winked in *en*_____ fashion.
- enigmatic
29. **exorbitant** (ig-zôr'bə-tənt): extravagant; excessive in price; unreasonable.
30. **feasible** (fē'zə-bəl): capable of being done; practicable; suitable.
- exorbitant ■ Five dollars an egg, as paid by those early miners, would ordinarily seem _____ [cheap / exorbitant].
- not feasible ■ To build a bridge across the Pacific is at present _____ [feasible / not feasible].
- feasible ■ Your plan to feed the whole world is charitable, but is it *fea*_____?

exorbitant

- "Fifty dollars to clip my dog is an *ex* _____ fee—you've clipped me, too!"

exorbitant
feasible

- Gasoline prices rose to *ex* _____ levels, and Archy decided that riding a skateboard might be *fe* _____.

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. (f) | () 1. exorbitant | a. doubtful; skeptical |
| 2. (c) | () 2. feasible | b. mysterious |
| 3. (b) | () 3. enigmatic | c. practicable; reasonable |
| 4. (a) | () 4. dubious | d. having to do with sexual desire |
| 5. (d) | () 5. erotic | e. peculiar; having odd traits |
| 6. (e) | () 6. eccentric | f. too high-priced |

31. **fluent** (flōō'ənt): able to speak or write readily; flowing smoothly.

32. **frugal** (frōō'gəl): costing little; spending little; meager; scanty.

- A tongue-tied immigrant who learned English from a book will probably (a) be fluent, (b) not be fluent. ()

- A *frugal* meal (a) is cheap and plain, (b) contains fruit. ()

- On his tiny pension Mr. Snurd eked out a *fru* _____ existence.

- To make the debate squad you should be a *fl* _____ speaker.

- For thirty years the woman saved, suffered, lived a *fr* _____ life, for her dream was to become a lawyer and to deliver *fl* _____ speeches in court.

33. **furtive**: stealthy; sly; done in secret; clandestine.

34. **gullible** (gul'ə-bəl): easily cheated or tricked; credulous.

- Brooklyn Bridge has often been sold to the _____ [gullible / sophisticated] visitor.

furtive

- A stealthy gesture is said to be _____ [ambidextrous / furtive].

furtive

- Mike stole a *fur* _____ glance at the blonde.

gullible

- The con man got rich selling swampland to *gul* _____ investors.

gullible

- Nancy believed the handsome stranger's promises, for she was innocent and *g* _____; and she gave his hand a

furtive

f _____ squeeze.

35. **impeccable** (im-pek'ə-bəl): faultless; without sin or error.

36. **impromptu** (im-prompt'u): done on the spur of the moment; offhand.

impeccable

- Banks should hire employees of _____ [dubious / impeccable] honesty.

(a)

- *Impromptu* remarks are (a) spontaneous, (b) planned in advance. ()

impromptu

- Called on unexpectedly, Daniel Webster delivered a brilliant _____ *tu* talk.

impeccable

- Our eminent minister was presumably of *im* _____ moral character.

impromptu

- College freshmen must often quickly scribble an _____ *tu* theme in class; and naturally the professor feels insulted if the production is not brilliant and _____ *able*.

impeccable

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. (c) | () 1. fluent | a. sly; stealthy |
| 2. (e) | () 2. frugal | b. improvised; spur of the moment |
| 3. (a) | () 3. furtive | c. smooth flowing in speech |
| 4. (d) | () 4. gullible | d. easily swindled |
| 5. (f) | () 5. impeccable | e. meager and costing little |
| 6. (b) | () 6. impromptu | f. flawless |



REVIEW TEST

Write the word studied in this chapter that will complete the sentence.

- _____ 1. The waiter screamed and threw soup at us. He'd gone [ber-].
- _____ 2. My hungry uncle found his false teeth just as the banquet began, and his spirits were now [bu-].
- _____ 3. The widow distrusted Mr. Finn because of his [du-] reputation.
- _____ 4. Those who expected modern plumbing in Morocco were soon [dis-].
- _____ 5. Our lease had expired. It was as [def-] as Benedict Arnold.
- _____ 6. Nine dollars for a dish of prunes? Isn't that a bit [ex-]?
- _____ 7. The swindler had been talkative and friendly, an [af-] fellow.
- _____ 8. Discuss this untidy affair with no one. Try to be [dis-].
- _____ 9. Uncle Phil was an oddball; in fact, he was downright [ec-].
- _____ 10. He slipped into the vat of cologne and smelled quite [ar-].
- _____ 11. Was that an [imp-] speech, or had you rehearsed it for a week?
- _____ 12. Please be frank. I want your [ca-] opinion.
- _____ 13. The taxi driver swore and raised his fists in [bel-] fashion.
- _____ 14. She donated a kidney to save her sister. An [alt-] act!
- _____ 15. Don't stammer. With self-confidence you can be smooth and [fl-].
- _____ 16. The fire and flood left the old widow [des-].
- _____ 17. Tripping and robbing that feeble man was a [das-] act.
- _____ 18. Knute likes sexy soap operas, the more [er-] the better.

Matching. Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| () 19. asinine | a. capable of being done |
| () 20. deft | b. birdlike |
| () 21. bizarre | c. stupid as a donkey |
| () 22. diabolic | d. pertaining to washing canines |
| () 23. gullible | e. dextrous; skillful in action |
| () 24. dogmatic | f. a church money-raiser sale |
| () 25. feasible | g. easily fooled |
| | h. opinionated |
| | i. odd in appearance |
| | j. devilishly wicked |



KEY TO REVIEW TEST

Check your test answers with the following key. Deduct 4% per error from a possible 100%.

- | | | |
|------------------|----------------|---------|
| 1. berserk | 10. aromatic | 19. (c) |
| 2. buoyant | 11. impromptu | 20. (e) |
| 3. dubious | 12. candid | 21. (i) |
| 4. disenchanting | 13. bellicose | 22. (j) |
| 5. defunct | 14. altruistic | 23. (g) |
| 6. exorbitant | 15. fluent | 24. (h) |
| 7. affable | 16. destitute | 25. (a) |
| 8. discreet | 17. dastardly | |
| 9. eccentric | 18. erotic | |

Score _____ %



SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISE

Fill in the blank with the descriptive word that fits the definition.

Although these words were not defined in this chapter, you should recognize most of them.

Check your answers with the key at the end of the exercise. Use your dictionary to study any unknown words.

■ abstemious, articulate, astute, auspicious, bland

1. _____ mild; nonstimulating; insipid
2. _____ shrewd; clever; cunning
3. _____ temperate; eating and drinking sparingly
4. _____ favorable; propitious; of good omen
5. _____ able to express oneself well; clearly presented

■ caustic, compatible, copious, culpable, deferential

6. _____ able to get along well together
7. _____ very respectful; courteous
8. _____ at fault; deserving blame
9. _____ corrosive; stinging; sarcastic
10. _____ very plentiful; abundant

■ delectable, delusive, derisive, disgruntled, disoriented

11. _____ ridiculing; mocking
12. _____ disappointed; displeased; sulky
13. _____ misleading; false; deceptive
14. _____ delicious; enjoyable
15. _____ confused; out of adjustment to one's environment

■ dissident, dormant, dyspeptic, erudite, exotic

16. _____ strangely beautiful; foreign and fascinating
17. _____ grouchy and gloomy because of indigestion
18. _____ as if asleep; inactive
19. _____ not agreeing; differing; dissenting
20. _____ learned; scholarly

■ heinous, illicit, immaculate, imperturbable, impotent

21. _____ pure; flawless; completely clean
22. _____ atrocious; extremely wicked
23. _____ powerless; helpless; without virility
24. _____ calm; unruffled
25. _____ unlawful; improper



KEY TO SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISE

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. bland | 10. copious | 19. dissident |
| 2. astute | 11. derisive | 20. erudite |
| 3. abstemious | 12. disgruntled | 21. immaculate |
| 4. auspicious | 13. delusive | 22. heinous |
| 5. articulate | 14. delectable | 23. impotent |
| 6. compatible | 15. disoriented | 24. imperturbable |
| 7. deferential | 16. exotic | 25. illicit |
| 8. culpable | 17. dyspeptic | |
| 9. caustic | 18. dormant | |

Score: _____ %