

Duolingo picture description exercises and tips

The strategy of describing the picture.

Start by describing the overall scene or setting: the place and maybe time of day the picture was taken (day, night).

Then describe the detail.

Use words like “background” – the other people are **in the background**, and **moving away from the camera**.

It is useful to learn and practice standard expressions for this exercise: in the foreground, on the left, in the top right-hand corner, etc.

Here are twelve words/expressions you can use to describe a picture (the list has been prepared by Le Chat/Mistral, France’s AI platform):

1. **In the foreground**; The part of the picture that appears closest to the viewer.
2. **In the background**; The part of the picture that appears farthest from the viewer.
3. **On the left/right side**; Used to indicate the position of objects or people in the picture.
4. **At the top/bottom**; Refers to the highest or lowest part of the image.
5. **There is/are**; Used to describe the presence of objects or people in the picture.
6. **It looks like...**; Used to express an impression or guess about what something in the picture represents.
7. **The scene depicts...**; A formal way to describe what the picture shows or represents.
8. **The colors are vibrant/dull**; Describes the intensity or lack of intensity in the colors of the picture.
9. **The atmosphere is...**; Describes the overall mood or feeling conveyed by the picture.
10. **The main subject is...**; Identifies the primary focus or most important element in the picture.
11. **It seems to be...**; Used to make an educated guess about what is happening or what something is in the picture.
12. **The composition is...**; Refers to how the elements in the picture are arranged or organized.

Use the present simple

When you discuss the content of a picture, a book, a song or a video, etc. **use the present simple**, because the book or picture exists before and after you speak. You are describing a general truth.

In English, be very careful to conjugate **“there is”** and **“there are”**: there are trees in the background. There is a dog in the foreground.



The dog is prancing (jumping: to prance), maybe in a park. It's mainly grass, against the backdrop (the scene in the background) of a big mountain, that has clouds hanging in the top. And the dog is leashed (a leash is a chain attached to the collar, which the dog-owner holds to stop the dog running away).

The dog is looking to be taking a walk/ The dog appears/seems to be taking a walk.

There is a tree next to the dog, that is protected by a fence (on the right-hand side).

Behind, in the middle, we can see some muddy-looking round, which is not paved.

A paved road, or path is a road with tar, or perhaps cobblestones. The opposite is a dirt track: just a path on the ground. In front of the mountain, we see a line of tall trees.

The mountain is very steep and impressive.

Vocabulary:

A bicycle helmet

There is a log of greenery in the picture.

Sounds to be: this is more something spoken, or maybe an idea. "That sounds like a vey good idea". "Seems to be" is more general, and includes vision.

A steep slope is the opposite of a gentle slope: the gradient is strong or high.

A road in the centre



This a cloudy day. There is no sunlight.

The picture shows a path, on a *dyke* (a manmade separation between two bodies of water, or a kind of wall to hold back water).

The weather is grey and gloomy (sad, the opposite of sunny).

Here is a Zoom AI summary of our class:

Quick recap

The meeting began with a discussion about Muhammad's academic progress and plans to pursue a master's degree in computer science, followed by a review of Duolingo test preparation and technical difficulties

with sharing class materials. Nicholas welcomed new student Arwa and discussed her assigned homework while confirming other students' academic years and progress. The class then focused on practicing picture description exercises for the Duolingo English test, with Nicholas providing guidance on proper verb usage and vocabulary, concluding with a brief discussion about complementary class offerings.

Next steps

- Nicholas: Correct Toka's text that was sent this morning
- Nicholas: Correct Arwa's assignment that was received this morning
- Nicholas: Correct Aya's homework today
- Nicholas: Mark/correct students' work for tomorrow's three groups of students and hand them back
- Nicholas: Find and share the list of standard expressions for describing pictures (including positional phrases like "in the foreground," "top left-hand corner," etc.)
- Nicholas: Create a word list for standard expressions used in picture description exercises
- Nicholas: Put the vocabulary words from today's session on the Duolingo web page
- Nicholas: Send the web page link again to Toka and Muhammad
- Nicholas: Send an email to everybody about Amy's classes so they can join
- Arwa: Copy her text from PDF and put it into an email for easier correction by Nicholas

Summary

1. Academic Progress and Scholarship Plans

Nicholas and Muhammad discussed Muhammad's studies, confirming that he had finished his final exam and would start another semester on March 7th. Mohammed mentioned he was searching for a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in computer science. Nicholas inquired about Mohammed's academic progress and specialization, clarifying that he had not yet started his master's degree.

2. Duolingo Test Planning Discussion

The group discussed the Duolingo test exercises, with Marah planning to take it in April. Nicholas shared a web page for the classes and mentioned he would send the link to the participants. There was some technical difficulty with Nicholas's iPhone, but he managed to show the webpage to the group.

3. Class Introduction and Duolingo Practice

Nicholas welcomed Arwa to his class and discussed her assigned homework, which he planned to correct that day. He clarified that Arwa is a first-year student studying English education at IUG University. Nicholas also inquired about the other students' academic years and confirmed that Aya had completed her first semester. The class focused on practicing for the Duolingo test, and Nicholas introduced a webpage he created for the group, which includes class topics and other relevant information.

4. Describing Pictures for Duolingo

The class practiced describing pictures for the Duolingo English test, focusing on using specific expressions for describing positions and details in images. Nicholas guided students through exercises, emphasizing the importance of using the present simple tense and correct verb forms like "there is" and "there are." Students took turns describing pictures, with Nicholas providing feedback and additional vocabulary. The session concluded with a brief discussion about the complementary nature of the classes taught by Nicholas and Amy.