

EXAM TIPS

- 1 The person, place or event you describe can be real or imaginary. The advantage of choosing a real subject is that you do not have to imagine it (or him/her). The advantage of writing about an imaginary subject is that you can give it characteristics which will allow you to show off the sophisticated vocabulary you know.
- 2 The rubric may tell you to focus on a specific aspect of the place, person or event described, e.g.: *Describe a teacher you admire for his or her ability to interest students in his/her subject and for his/her approach to young people's problems.* Remember to take this aspect into account in your description.
- 3 Your description should have a clear structure. This might be for example:
 - a first a general impression, then the details;
 - b a mistaken first impression followed by a revised, more accurate view of the person or place;
 - c what the person or place looked like in the past and what he/she/it looks like now;
 - d chronological order in describing an event.
- 4 The style of the description should be consistent.
- 5 When describing a place it is worth concentrating on what is special about it, especially if a specific aspect is required by the rubric.
- 6 When describing a person do not list all the possible physical characteristics. It is better to concentrate on a few characteristic features, especially those which say something about his or her personality, e.g. the smile. When describing personality traits, remember to illustrate each one with an example of the person's behaviour. The topic may suggest the characteristics you will focus on.
- 7 A description of an event will be livelier and more interesting if it contains colours, smells, sounds and feelings.

examTASK

- 1 Describe a person your negative first impression of whom was wrong.

I remember how I first saw him. We were gathered in the big hall for some school event, and he was taller than everyone there. 'Who's that?' I asked my friend Miriam. 'Don't you know him? That's Chris, captain of the football team.'

He certainly looked like a footballer. Tall, muscular, with close-cropped hair, wearing some sort of sports outfit and trainers. Primitive macho, I thought, not my kind of person at all. Probably arrogant as well.

I couldn't have been more wrong, as I soon discovered. He was talking to his friend – about the latest match, I assumed, until I heard him mention the name of a little-known poet whom I was also reading. That's how I found out Chris is intelligent and well-read. Not only are his academic results outstanding, but he's also seriously into literature and cinema, and his conversation is fascinating.

Despite all his sporting and intellectual achievements, he's appealingly modest. Everything I know about those successes I've learned from other people, because he doesn't talk about them.

Most importantly, he's a gentle, considerate person, always careful not to hurt anyone's feelings. Thanks to his tact and mediating skills there are very few conflicts in the football team.

By getting to know Chris better, by talking to him and observing his interactions with people I've learned that my first impression of him was entirely mistaken. I'm glad I've had the opportunity to realise that and to gain such a wonderful friend.

INTRODUCTION: INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERSON BEING DESCRIBED (NAME, FUNCTION, HOW YOU KNOW THEM)

FIRST IMPRESSION: PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, FIRST OPINION (NEGATIVE AND FALSE)

TRANSITION FROM THE FALSE FIRST IMPRESSION TO THE TRUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERSON BEING DESCRIBED

PERSONALITY – CHARACTERISTICS SUPPORTED BY EXAMPLES

CONCLUSION: ALTERED (POSITIVE) OPINION WITH JUSTIFICATION

TASK ANALYSIS

- 2 Underline in the text:
 - a three characteristics the writer ascribed to Chris based on her first impression,
 - b five of Chris's true characteristics backed up with examples,
 - c phrases and sentences which refer to the first, false impression.
- 3 Which of the structures a–d described in tip 3 does the description follow?