

General Sequences for Describing Objects

Describing objects that are not fixed. By “not fixed” we mean things that are portable and unattached to any surface, such as accessories, small appliances, food items. The objects in the Science Lab demonstration are examples of things that are not fixed.

The amount and kind of information you give in describing an object depends on the purpose of your description. It also depends on how familiar your listener is with the object you describe. Your purpose and/or emphasis will affect the sequence you use, but in general, follow this sequence to describe how something looks:

- Give the name of the object and/or tell what material it’s made of (i.e., wood, metal, glass, plastic).
- Tell the color of the object or its parts, if relevant.
- Use a DCL to establish the basic shape and size of the object. Use non-manual behaviors to emphasize an unusual size or to contrast similar objects of different sizes.
- Using the basic shape as a reference point, use other DCLs to describe distinctive features, attachments, or designs.
- Use ICLs to indicate how the object or its attachments are handled or used, if relevant.

Describing fixed objects. Some objects have a “fixed” position, i.e., they may be attached to the ceiling or placed in a certain position on the floor and not normally moved around. For example, a floor lamp, bed, light fixture, refrigerator, and fire hydrant are considered fixed. The basic sequence for describing how something looks is the same (i.e., tell what it is or what it’s made of, tell the color if relevant, then describe the object). However, there are other conventions to follow for describing fixed objects. The sequence of your description depends on which of the following categories the object fits into:

- **Describe from bottom to top:** If the object is columnar and standing upright on the floor or ground, describe the basic shape from bottom to top, then add details. For example, to describe a floor lamp, begin by describing its base, then the pole, then describe the shape of its shade or top, and finally identify what kind of switch or pull-cord it has. Other objects in this category are a telephone pole, tree, stool, fire hydrant, street lamp.
- **Describe from top to bottom:** If the object is bulky and standing on the floor or ground, first describe the basic shape from top to bottom, then add details. For example, to describe a refrigerator, indicate the basic shape (with both hands in the B-handshape) starting with the top, then the sides. Then describe the type of door(s) it has with ICLs. Other objects in this category are a console TV, dresser, stove, table, boulder.
- **Describe from the ceiling down:** If the object is columnar and hanging from the ceiling, describe the object from the ceiling down, then add details. For example, to describe a hanging lamp, begin with the chain or cable that attaches the lamp to the ceiling, then describe the shape of the light fixture, and end with the pull-cord or switch. Other objects in this category are a hanging plant, mobile, icicles, stalactites in a cave.

Some objects that are, in fact, fixed or not portable are still described in neutral space. Objects that have an unusual shape, or that are too large to describe in their actual dimensions, are abstracted into a smaller size. For example, the basic shape of a sofa, rocking chair or sports car might all be described in neutral space, following the sequence for objects that are not fixed, and described from different perspectives to furnish details.

Determining Perspectives

One final consideration in describing objects is determining the proper perspective to describe it from. Below are the perspectives used for different kinds of objects:

- **Describe from the front:** If the object has a definite front and back, describe it as if you were standing in front of it. Objects in this category are a TV, typewriter, computer, radio, blender, dresser, VCR, sofa, headboard, TTY.
- **Describe in neutral space:** If the object has no definite front or back, describe it in neutral space. Objects in this category are a dining table, coffee table, toaster, pots and pans, basket, plant, lamp.
- **Describe from the rear:** If the object is usually handled from the rear, describe it as if you were using it, i.e., camcorder held on your shoulder, binoculars held up to your eyes. Other objects in this category are a camera, telescope, kaleidoscope, megaphone.
- **Describe from a sitting position:** If the object is usually seen from a sitting position, describe attachments (i.e., foot rest of a recliner, arm rests, turn signals on a steering wheel) as seen in that position. Objects in this category are a sofa, chair, car, bicycle.
- **Describe as if on your body:** If the object is used on a person's body, describe it as if you were wearing it. Objects in this category are clothing, eyeglasses, cap, gloves, uniform, mask.

Certain objects can also be described as seen from inside (for example, the description of the tent in the next videotaped activity). This is similar to describing a room from the perspective of the doorway, as you learned in Unit 13.