

Character Sketch Essay

A character in a character sketch is not a real person, but the single characteristic abstracted from an observation of many people. Among the useful details in a character sketch are the details of physical appearance, clothing, and personal belongings. In prose, these are clues to a character's personality. In addition to these, a writer may describe the "stage" in which the character moves about and lives—his or her room, home, place of work. In a character sketch, it is the telling, the representative detail, the vividness that count. It is more effective to make the reader see a character's modesty in action than to say merely that he is modest (*Writing Prose: Techniques and Purposes* 55-57).

Preparation

- Read the following examples of a character sketch:
"Rona", "Mr. Mackenzie", "Lord Steyne", and "Maria Insull"
- Pay special attention to the following features:
The **extended simile** about the Siamese cat in "Rona"

Most of the sentences in "Lord Steyne" are **loose sentences**: the main clause comes first and is followed by subordinate constructions adding further details.

In "Maria Insull" most of the sentences are **balanced sentences**: divided into two parts roughly equal in length with the pause or dividing point marked by a comma or semi-colon

Assignment

- Write a character sketch of 200-250 words.
- Include in your essay the following: an **extended simile**, a **loose sentence**, and a **balanced sentence**.
- Have a difference of at least 15 words between your longest sentence and shortest sentence.
- Follow MLA format

Suggestions for topics

- A character like Rona—a brilliant surface, hiding failure, loneliness, or waste
- Use one of these starters: "The bright sun fell on his face, which was dominated by a heavy, black beard." "She was a slight woman, middle-aged, with faded blonde hair." "The boy leaned against the front of a deserted store, a small, forlorn figure." "The girl seemed a typical teenager, dressed in sweater and jeans."
- Use one of these starters: "_____ had taught in high school for thirty years." "The owner of the _____ shop was about fifty years old." "_____ was sixteen."