

## Describing Pictures

Tags: Tags: [adjectives](#), [beginner](#), [intermediate](#), [kids](#), [prepositions of place](#), [present continuous](#), [there is/are](#)

In the Describing Pictures ESL activity, students practise describing a picture first as a class, then individually.

 1+  20-40 mins

 Projector (Optional); Magazines, Scissors and Glue (can be done as homework)

### Setup

There are two main steps you can use when practising describing a picture with your English class. The first is optional but can help students a lot – if you have a projector, project an image on the board for students to describe as a class. The second step is for students to choose and describe a picture from a magazine, individually.

For the first part, you will need an image with lots of different elements to describe. Your choice of image will be influenced by the vocabulary knowledge of your class. Here are some links to some suitable options:

[City Scene \(with names\)](#)

[City Scene \(inc. transport elements\)](#)

[Living Room Scene \(with names\)](#)

[Classroom Scene](#)

[Swimming Pool Scene \(good for present continuous\)](#)

[Winter Scene](#)

For the second part, you can either bring magazines in for the students to use, or ask them to find a picture for homework. If you do ask them to do it for homework, make sure they know their picture should have a number of different elements to describe.

## Activity

1. Project a picture on the board. Ask the students to work in pairs and write down sentences that describe elements of the picture, using the target language.
2. Elicit description sentences from the pairs, correcting where necessary. However, make sure you emphasise that the main/context elements of the picture should be included before the details. To do this, try and write the spoken sentences on the board in that order. Drawing a 'V' shape on the board can also help younger students with this concept.
3. If they haven't already, the students cut out their picture from a magazine and stick it in their notebook (or on a piece of paper).
4. Students write a description of their picture, using the target language.
5. Students swap their texts for a classmate to peer-correct.

As an optional extension, you could combine the Describing Pictures ESL activity with the [Picture Dictation](#) activity. Students read their description to a partner (who hasn't seen the original picture), who draws from that description. The students then compare the drawing with the original picture.

## Target Language

The Describing Pictures ESL activity practises a number of basic language topics. If you're teaching beginners you may just wish to focus on sentences with [there is/are](#) to list what's in the picture. [Prepositions of place](#) are another important element though too, with students describing both positions within the picture (at the top/bottom, in the middle, on the left/right etc.) and relative positions (in front of, behind etc.).

Students should of course practise using relevant [adjectives](#) as well; at lower levels look out for the common mistake of putting them after the noun, not before. Intermediate students should concentrate on using a variety of adjectives, and employing synonyms to avoid repetition.

With the right picture, you can practise descriptions of activities in the [present continuous](#) (e.g. *On the left a man is playing the guitar*). You could also use your choice of picture to match a specific vocabulary topic your class has been learning ([classroom objects](#), [furniture](#), [places in the city](#) etc.).

As mentioned above, the Describing Pictures ESL activity is a popular way to prepare for [exam questions of this form](#) – even if it's a speaking exam, writing this language is a very valuable first step in building students' knowledge and confidence. In this case students should focus on ordering their sentences appropriately and varying their language structures, not only the grammar above. For example, as well as there is/are sentences, students should use *The picture shows...*, *I can see...*, *Next to that...* etc., where appropriate.

Once your students are comfortable with describing a picture, try [Picture Dictation](#) for a fun warmer/review activity which uses the same language. For higher level students focused on speaking fluency, the [Box Of Lies](#) game is a great option.

For an activity in which students have to try and describe the elements of a picture from memory, see [Memory Scene](#).