

# Building a Scene

## Snapshots (Sketching a Person)



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Adapted from Barry Lane's *After THE END* (1993)



**Compare** and **contrast** the sentences below.

Jessica is tall and thin with long red hair.

Jessica is nearly six feet tall and built like a track star with long wavy fire-engine red locks framing her freckled face.



**“Writers are like photographers with giant zoom lenses**, observing life in incredibly fine detail, pulling back to make sweeping generalizations, then zooming in again to make those generalizations come alive with detail.”

– Barry Lane



### **What is a snapshot in writing?**

Writers have magic cameras they can point at the world to create snapshots containing smells and sounds as well as colors and light.

**Snapshot:** written description that captures sharp physical details—smells, sounds, colors, and light



### **Sketch a Person**

Writers often describe characters in a few sentences similar to the quick drawings artists make in their sketchbooks. The goal is to say as much as possible about a person with a few well chosen details.



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

She put her fingers up to her face, felt the wide nose and thin lip, the too-high forehead and tangled mass of frizzy hair.

– Scott Westerfeld, *Uglies*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

They were much too large to be insects. One of them lit nearby on a stem. It looked at them with two bright black eyes and, opening its mouth, which was pointed like a thorn, sent forth a little trill.

– Jeanne DuPrau, *City of Ember*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

She wore an off-white dress so long it covered her shoes. It had ruffles around the neck and cuffs and looked like it could have been her great-grandmother's wedding gown. Her hair was the color of sand. It fell to her shoulders. Something was strapped across her back. At first I thought it was a miniature guitar. I found out later it was a ukulele.

– Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*





### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

But even as they retreated, and before Pippin and Merry had reached the stair outside, a huge orc-chieftain, almost man-high, clad in black mail from head to foot, leaped into the chamber; behind him his followers clustered in the doorway. His broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red; he wielded a great spear.

– J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.

– J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

Harry looked nothing like the rest of the family. Uncle Vernon was large and neckless, with an enormous black mustache; Aunt Petunia was horse-faced and bony; Dudley was blond, pink, and porky. Harry, on the other hand, was small and skinny, with brilliant green eyes and jet-black hair that was always untidy. He wore round glasses, and on his forehead was a thin, lightning-shaped scar.

– J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

Professor Sprout was a squat little witch who wore a patched hat over her flyaway hair; there was usually a large amount of earth on her clothes and her fingernails would have made Aunt Petunia faint. Gilderoy Lockhart, however, was immaculate in sweeping robes of turquoise, his golden hair shining under a perfectly positioned turquoise hat with gold trimming.

– J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

Mr. Brunner was this middle-aged guy in a motorized wheelchair. He had thinning hair and a scruffy beard and a frayed tweed jacket, which always smelled like coffee. You wouldn't think he'd be cool, but he told stories and jokes and let us play games in class. He also had this awesome collection of Roman armor and weapons, so he was the only teacher whose class didn't put me to sleep.

– Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

Grover was an easy target. He was scrawny. He cried when he got frustrated. He must've been held back several grades, because he was the only sixth grader with acne and the start of a wispy beard on his chin. On top of all that, he was crippled. He had a note excusing him from PE for the rest of his life because he had some kind of muscular disease in his legs. He walked funny, like every step hurt him, but don't let that fool you. You should've seen him run when it was enchilada day in the cafeteria.

– Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

The man facing me was small, but porky. He had a red nose, big watery eyes, and curly hair so black it was almost purple. He looked like those paintings of baby angels—what do you call them, hubbubs? No, cherubs. That’s it. He looked like a cherub who’d turned middle-aged in a trailer park. He wore a tiger-pattern Hawaiian shirt, and he would’ve fit right in at one of Gabe’s poker parties, except I got the feeling this guy could’ve out-gambled even my step-father.

– Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*



### **Examples of sketching a person from literature:**

Edward in the sunlight was shocking. I couldn't get used to it, though I'd been staring at him all afternoon. His skin, despite the faint flush from yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn't sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal.

– Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*



## Building a Scene: Snapshots (Sketching a Person)



### **Practice writing snapshots**

Choose ONE picture prompt and write ONE snapshot in response. Practice “sketching” a person, revealing as much as possible about the person with a few well chosen details.

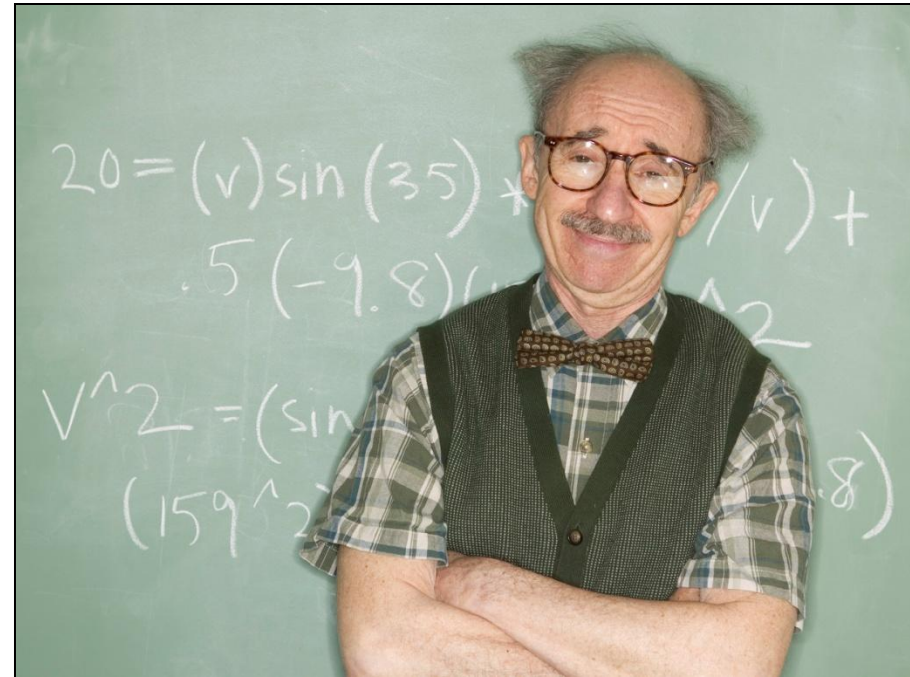


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### **Revise for snapshots**

Now that you have learned to “sketch” a person, apply this as a revision strategy to a piece of your own writing. Add snapshots to a descriptive paragraph you wrote about a person, creating a second draft.