



# A Brief Discussion on Character Description Training

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**Abstract.** This article focuses on the systematic training method of character description in writing teaching, pointing out that writing teaching emphasizes guiding students to use basic expression techniques to achieve effective written expression. Emphasis should be placed on mastering character description, with a particular focus on exploring the four core techniques of character description: portrait description emphasizes "conveying spirit through form", revealing the spiritual traits of the characters that need to be displayed, and avoiding superficial portrayal; Action description should carefully select verbs and relate them to psychology, oppose mechanical stacking, and advocate reflecting character personalities through typical behaviors; Dialogue description should match the character's identity and psychological state, and overcome pattern problems through situational training; Psychological description can be combined with scenery to enhance and break through shallow expression. In actual creation, flexible application should be made based on the characteristics of the literary style, ultimately achieving the core goal of shaping three-dimensional characters and deepening themes.

**Keywords:** Characterization; Writing; Teaching Research; Language

## 1 Introduction

The cultivation of core literacy in Chinese language is reflected in the four dimensions of "listening, speaking, reading, and writing" abilities. Among them, writing, as an important carrier of written expression, directly reflects students' language application ability and thinking quality, and is a key content of Chinese language teaching.

From the perspective of composition teaching, our goal is not to cultivate students into writers, but to enable them to smoothly express their observations, thoughts, and ideas through words, and to use common expressions as needed to complete the use of written language.<sup>1</sup>

As a fundamental expression technique in narrative texts, 'description' requires systematic training. For an essay of over 800 words, the author requires students to focus on mastering and using three descriptive techniques, namely character description, environment description, and detail description. This article focuses on proposing some opinions and suggestions on character description training, and discusses them with colleagues.

## 2 Characterization

In the context of literary creation, the concept of "character" carries specific connotations. "Ciyuan" defines it as "a person's character, appearance, and demeanor",<sup>2</sup> while "Cihai" and "Hanyu Da Cidian" uniformly define it as "the figure portrayed in literary and artistic works".<sup>3</sup> Both definitions essentially refer to the representation of character traits through concrete portrayal in words, that is, character portrayal.

Character description, as the core artistic technique for shaping character images in literary creation, requires a systematic approach to textual expression. There are various forms of character description, which can be directly described through the language of the narrator, introduced to each other through the characters in the work, described in terms of their external characteristics, or depicted in terms of their inner activities. In the basic education stage, character description focuses on four basic techniques: portrait description, action description, dialogue description, and psychological description.<sup>4</sup> Below, the author will describe the training of these four descriptive techniques separately.

### 2.1 Portrait Description

There is currently no clear and unified definition of "portrait description". The explanation of the entries in "Cihai" is simple, clear, and representative: "It refers to the specific descriptions made in literary works to showcase the inner world and personality traits of characters, including their appearance, posture, demeanor, facial expressions, movements, clothing, and other aspects".<sup>5</sup> From this, it can be seen that the key to portrait description lies in capturing the external characteristics of the character, and through these characteristics, allowing readers to glimpse their inner personality.

A common mistake in students' compositions is that portrait descriptions often become disconnected from the characters' inner personalities and become mere descriptions of their appearance - simply informing readers of what "my dad," "my mom," "my classmates," and "my friends" look like. The author once conducted a simple statistical analysis: in a narrative exercise about people, 73 out of 88 students (83%) used portrait description, but only 4 students (5%) were able to connect appearance with the inner spirit of the characters. This data indicates that although most students consciously use portrait descriptions to enrich the content of their essays, they have not yet mastered the essentials and urgently need improvement.

Students should understand through example analysis that portrait description is an important means of revealing a character's personality. Taking Xianglin's sister-in-law in the text "Blessings" as an example, the changes in her portrait description deeply reflect the changes in her mental state. Xianglin's sister-in-law started working as a female worker at the home of Mr. Lu Si. Although she had a lot of work to do, she was satisfied and gradually had a smile on her lips, and her face turned white and fat. This indicates that she is healthy, energetic, and full of hope for life; After becoming a beggar, her face was thin and emaciated, with a hint of yellow and black, and her previous sorrowful expression had disappeared, as if it were carved from wood; only the occasional round of her eyes could still indicate that she was a living creature.

This reflected her complete mental breakdown, numbness, despair, and complete despair. Through the comparison of portrait descriptions, the changes in the character's personality and destiny are clearly visible. The author uses the significant changes in Xianglin's face and eyes to deeply expose the process of feudal ethics' devastation of women and accuse the essence of feudal society's "cannibalism".<sup>6</sup>

Through teaching and explanation, help students understand the essence of "conveying spirit through form" in portrait description - that is, by depicting the external characteristics of characters to showcase their spiritual outlook and personality traits. This cognition will encourage students to consciously establish an organic connection between physical description and inner activities in writing, presenting emotional fluctuations through the dynamic changes of character images. Not only can this create vivid and lively character images, but it can also effectively avoid the drawbacks of stereotypical appearances.

## 2.2 Action Description

If portrait description is static characterization, then action description is dynamic behavioral expression. Action description is the depiction of a character's behavior and actions in a certain social relationship and environment. This descriptive method can effectively reveal the character's personality traits through the portrayal of behavior in a specific environment.

The prominent problem with action description in current student compositions is the disconnect between behavior and personality traits. For example, to write about his mother's love for him is to make a bowl of Fried Rice with eggs that he likes to eat. Then he starts to describe how his mother beat eggs, pour oil, fried eggs, stir fry, and so on. After a set of actions, the composition is about to be completed, which not only fails to reflect the feelings of the characters, but also reduces the vivid mother's love to the operation manual of "cooking robot".

Teachers need to guide students to clarify that the behavior and demeanor of characters in an essay must be an extension of their inner activities or personality traits, and should reflect their moral character and spiritual world. Taking the example of the new bride in the text "Lily Flower", after the correspondent sacrificed herself, her comrade in arms took off the blanket on her body. "At this moment, the new bride's face turned pale, and she snatched the blanket and glared at them fiercely. She spread half of the blanket flat under the coffin and covered him with the other half." Through precise verbs such as "snatch," "stare," "spread," and "cover," this vividly expresses the new bride's inner emotions, conveying both grief and elevating the military and civilian situation.

To help students master the essentials of action description, targeted training is needed, which can be approached from the following three aspects:

Firstly, avoid continuous stacking actions and incorporate psychological or conversational descriptions. As mentioned above, the case of "Mom makes eggs and Fried Rice" is like a running account. How can articles have feelings? If it is changed to "When she suddenly remembered my favorite egg Fried Rice, I heard her gently humming the ballad of childhood that coaxed me to sleep when the oil pan was siz-

zling, and saw her wrist gently shaking, and the egg liquid bloomed golden sunflowers in the pan." The action description text should be appropriately reduced to make the action carry feelings, and the expression effect would be better.

Secondly, accurately extract verbs. Drawing on the descriptive style of "The Lily Flower", choose verbs that fit the characteristics of the characters, and use differences in actions to accurately reflect their personalities. For those who are described as irritable and prone to anger, they often "pound the table"; for those who are indecisive, they often "rub"; for those who are impatient, they can use "grab, throw, stomp"; for those who are gentle, they should use "caress, gather, and tuck".

Thirdly, cultivate the ability to observe and transform. Guide students to capture life details: the trembling calves of classmates after running 1500 meters, the subtle sliding of mirror frames when teachers grade homework, etc., reflecting the characteristics of characters through concrete actions.

### 2.3 Dialogue Description

Dialogue description is an important technique for expressing the thoughts and personalities of characters in a work through their mutual conversations. Although students are not unfamiliar with dialogue description and often use it, they often simply believe that as long as they add the word "say" after the character name, and then use colons and quotation marks, the dialogue description is completed. In fact, the key to dialogue description lies in the fact that the language of the characters must conform to their identity characteristics, including age, gender, occupation, upbringing, and other factors, which students are most likely to overlook.

Taking the text "The Necklace" as an example, Mathilde's image before the ball is a woman full of fantasy and vanity. When she received the dance invitation, she not only did not show the joy her husband was looking forward to, but also casually threw the invitation on the table and complained, "Why do I need this? Think about it for me." Her husband's comfort not only did not ease her emotions, but also deepened her dissatisfaction. These dialogues vividly demonstrate her capricious and arrogant personality traits. However, after losing her friend's necklace at the ball, Mathilde underwent a personality transformation. She bravely took on the responsibility and didn't hesitate to borrow money to buy a new necklace to repay her friend, and spent ten years living a difficult life to repay the debt. When she met Mrs. Loisel, who had lent her a necklace, in the park, her inner monologue and subsequent conversation fully demonstrated the openness, integrity, and maturity displayed in Mathilde's character after experiencing the hardships of life. The language expression of the same character has undergone significant changes at different stages of life.

Through the analysis of the example text in 'The Necklace', students can deeply understand that even the same person's way of speaking and tone can change with the change of identity. To help students master the skills of dialogue description, it is recommended to conduct training from the following two aspects:

Firstly, engage in conversation practice with friends. Teachers can set specific situations, such as discussing a current topic and requiring students to "speak" completely from the perspective and tone of friends. In the writing process, it is necessary

to incorporate detailed descriptions that reflect the personality of friends and form a unique language style. This method can effectively avoid the problem of repetitive dialogue between characters.

Secondly, engage in dialogue exercises with parents. Teachers can design typical scenarios, such as "mother's comfort after failing an exam" or "father's advice when sick", to help students understand their parents' way of speaking. The key is to ensure that the language conforms to the identity characteristics of parents and avoid being written in a childlike tone.

Through these targeted trainings, students are able to more accurately showcase the psychological activities and personality traits of characters through dialogue, shaping vivid and authentic character images, thus overcoming the problem of all characters speaking in a stereotyped manner with a tone and a state of mind lacking personality.

## 2.4 Psychological Description

Psychological description, as an important means of depicting characters, is a direct presentation of their inner feelings, thoughts, emotional fluctuations, and spiritual world. It deeply reveals the personality traits of characters by showcasing their inner monologues, emotional conflicts, and subconscious activities. However, in actual writing, compared to the three character description techniques mentioned above, students use psychological descriptions significantly less frequently, often only using simple expressions such as "thinking in their hearts" and hastily passing them by, failing to truly unleash the artistic expression of psychological descriptions.

Although 'thinking in the heart' does belong to the form of psychological description - as a way for characters to directly express their thoughts and activities - students often simplify it as an optional label style expression in writing, failing to truly showcase the rich inner world of the characters. Taking the text "Moonlight over the Lotus Pond" as an example, the brilliance of its opening "These days have been quite restless in my heart" lies not only in establishing a melancholic emotional tone for the entire text, but also in subtly reflecting the inner confusion of intellectuals after the failure of the 1927 Great Revolution. <sup>7</sup>Through the blending of natural imagery such as moonlight, lotus leaves, and lotus fragrance with psychological descriptions, Zhu Ziqing constructed a multi-layered inner landscape: it includes moments of tranquility and light joy obtained from temporarily deviating from the chaos of reality, as well as lingering melancholy and loneliness suppressed by reality, ultimately forming a complex and authentic portrayal of the soul.

Through the analysis of 'Moonlight over the Lotus Pond', students can master an important psychological description technique - using side effects such as scenery description and atmosphere creation to showcase the characters' inner world. In the training of psychological description writing, teachers can design a "campus stroll" scenario exercise: requiring students to carefully describe the scenery they see in a changing way, and then naturally transition to the corresponding psychological activities. Through this deliberate practice, students are able to organically integrate psychological descriptions into their essays, enhancing both the realism of character portrayal and the expressiveness of their compositions.

### 3 Conclusion

The author once mentioned the concept of "split writing training" in my work "A Brief Discussion on Detail Description Training", which breaks down "writing" into small "modules", trains students to write these small modules well, and then assembles them together. <sup>8</sup>This method is also applicable to character description training, with portrait description, action description, dialogue description, and psychological description being the four core modules. By training the writing skills of each module through the system and combining them organically according to creative needs, students can efficiently complete high-quality articles of around 800 words.

In article creation, not all four techniques of character description must be used, but should be flexibly combined according to actual needs. If in prose that emphasizes lyricism and freehand brushwork, portrait description and psychological description are usually the main focus, and character traits are displayed through appearance portrayal and inner monologue; If in narrative texts with strong narrative power, emphasis is placed on action description and language description, and plot development is promoted through behavioral details and dialogue communication. No matter what description method is used, the ultimate goal is to shape a three-dimensional and full character image, enhance the artistic appeal of the text, and deepen the thematic connotation of the work.

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