



The Link Family, "The Five Bedroom, Six Figure Rootless Life"

OBJECTIVE VS. SUBJECTIVE DESCRIPTION

Objective Description: words are "neutral" or "denotative" because they aren't likely to carry any emotional charge. They convey information but not much feeling about that information. They are neutral because they don't make you feel positive or negative about the subject they describe. Example: "There was a long line of traffic on 322 today, probably four miles long, and it took me 45 minutes to get from Rt. 1 to I-95." Do you get any indication of how this driver feels about the subject (the traffic)? Not really.

Subjective Description: words are positively or negatively charged, or "connotative," in that they do convey a good or bad impression of their subject. These words convey attitude, feeling, perspective, mood—a positive or negative charge. Example: "There was an endless line of traffic on Rt. 322 today; the road was clogged for four claustrophobic miles; I had to inch my way for 45 minutes before I got to I-95." No doubt how this driver feels about traffic.

Look closely at "The Five Bedroom, Six Figure Rootless Life." Notice how objective and subjective description are blended together to create an informative, expressive piece of writing.

What is objective and what is subjective in the following passage? (first page, top of 2nd column)

She dodges the orange barrels of road-widening crews spreading asphalt in a futile effort to keep up with a north Fulton County population that has swelled to 273,000 from 170,000 in the 90's, a decade when the city of Atlanta barely grew, to 416,000 from 394,000. Sidewalks start and stop. No one dares ride a bicycle or walk a dog. She crosses over Georgia 400, the clogged artery that pumps hundreds of thousands of commuters into Alpharetta's glass and brushed-metal office parks and, an hour's drive south, into downtown Atlanta.

She passes developments that from the air look like petri dishes of tadpoles, each head a cul-de-sac. In new subdivisions, signs in fancy script trumpet "price points," to show relos where to roost: Brookdale, \$300's; Wildwood, \$400's; Wolf Creek, \$300's to \$500's; Quail Hollow, \$500's; Inverness, \$600's to \$800's; White Columns, \$700's to \$1.5 million; Greystone, \$900's to \$4 million.

This is an observation of Alpharetta—it is factual in nature—you can recognize it as information that's been acquired by research. It's not impressionistic (with the exception of "No one dares ride a bicycle or walk a dog.") and Kilborne offers it in an objective tone.

This begins with another kind of observation that grows out of the writer's perspective on his subject. It is impressionistic in nature rather than factual (until you get to the price points). Subjective description always communicates more than information—it communicates feeling—Kilborne's feelings, his impressions. Without saying it directly, the writer implies by his choice of imagery (petri dishes, tadpoles, "roosting" birds) that Alpharetta seems to be a "dehumanized" environment.