

WRITING LESSON #1: Descriptive Journaling

Why is it important to include more than just pictures in the lifebook? Journaling is the HEART of the lifebook. Add depth and uniqueness to your children's stories by using descriptive words.

Vivid details and action verbs help your readers feel like they are standing "in the moment" that the photograph was taken.

I have taught hundreds of parents to write the text for lifebooks. **If you practice the writing lessons, your journaling can be extraordinary!** Your children will enjoy reading your wonderful descriptions of China and their early lives. Take time to practice-write with the three lessons in this book. You'll be pleased with the your end result!

The goal of descriptive journaling is to paint a picture with your words. When you remember the details of your own experience and write down those descriptive details, you will be preserving a moment in time. Use as many descriptions as possible when writing about your children and describing their birth country.

Rely on your five senses to help begin writing:

1. What do you remember hearing?
2. What did you see in the lens of the camera and what is NOT shown in the photograph?
3. Did the weather feel cold? humid? frigid? Did the new child feel warm and soft?
4. What smells or tastes can you remember? Foods, plants or flowers? Is the smell of a baby similar to another smell you know?

Tip: find a travel photo, a comfortable chair and a quiet spot to write.

Descriptive writing exercise:

Choose 1 to 3 photos from your trip to China (all from the same area or same theme).

Spend some time really looking at the photos.

*What do the photos "say" to you (emotionally)?

*What do you remember seeing most vividly?

Choose one thing to say about the photo.

Think about what you would like your child to know about these photos. Jot down one main point.

Write a rough sentence out for your main point. Don't worry about full sentences, punctuation, or spelling.

Write down specific, supporting details. Use lots of descriptive words. Consider using a paper or online thesaurus. Fill as many sticky notes as possible with descriptive phrases. Words to describe children: spunky, sweet, lively or adorable. Words to describe scenery: serene, chaotic, amazing, or fabulous, peaceful or magical.

Supporting sentences offer details about the main sentence. They give the reader descriptions that help to bring the photo alive.

Connect thoughts by making full sentences.

Each paragraph should focus on one main point, followed by a couple of detailed descriptions.

Refine your sentences; check your grammar and spelling. Try "spell check" on a word program.

You may want to try this exercise several times, using several single photos or small "groups" of photos. If you don't use them for the life book, you can save them for an album filled with travel photos.

Read the samples below and take note of the descriptions:

1. A description of a city in China filled with modern buildings. On the street level are many bike riders and cars:

Main point: “China is a country that is changing from old, traditional ways of living to new, modern city life.”

Supporting sentences: “I look at the big, fancy glass buildings that are so modern and reach toward the sky. At the same time, I see hundreds of people riding bikes in a traditional Chinese fashion, sharing the road with many, many new cars. The people are moving from the rural areas to cities to enjoy the new, modern way of living.”

2. A description of a rural area. The photos show fields, farm homes and small ponds:

Main point: “Between the large cities of Shanghai and Nanjing, there are still many traditional Chinese farming areas.”

Supporting sentences: “The green fields and fish ponds cover every inch of usable land. As I look at the photo I see the simple houses that farm families live in, and they appear to be nothing more than a cement shell of a house. The windows are simply openings, with no glass or protection from the outside. Small walking paths wind from home to home, village to village. The waterways that run through the small villages connect these farming communities to the outside world. In the country, the pace seems slow and peaceful. I’m sure the Chinese farmers have lived this way for hundreds of years.”

Writing is a skill that takes practice. If you aren’t an experienced writer, take the time to do this exercise before sitting down to write the text of the lifebook.

Use descriptions of scenery on the general China page or the province page. Use descriptions of people on the foster parent page or the adoption day pages.

Photos chosen to practice descriptive writing:

Main thought to journal about the photo:

Supporting descriptive notes: