

A Guide to Describing a Photo

Being able to describe a photo is a skill that you will need to develop in preparation for your GCSE Speaking test. So it is a good idea to start practising early. To secure a top mark, try following the steps below.

You will have time to prepare for this task, so use it wisely. Make some notes, you will be allowed to take these with you in the examination room.

Step 1: Gathering vocabulary

Always start by checking the name of the topic indicated on the photo. Look carefully at the photo and jot down all the relevant vocabulary you can think of to describe what you see (people, places, activities, colours, clothes, adjectives to describe feelings and emotions).

Step 2: Describing what you see

Start with a general overview of the photo: C'est une photo de/d'.....

Describe who you see (who the people are, how old they might be, what clothes they are wearing, where they are, what they are doing).

Describe the setting of the scene (a street, a building, a house, a room, a school, a hospital, etc.).

Step 3: Speculating about the scene

To make your description more interesting, try going from what you see to what you think is happening in the photo. Try drawing conclusions from the clues you see in the photo. For example, if there are people on the photo, what are they doing and why? How might they be feeling? What might they have just done? What might they be about to do? Finally, remember to always justify your points.

Step 4: Using high quality language

To secure a good mark, pay attention to the quality of the language you use. The higher the quality, the higher the mark. You therefore need to include a wide range of relevant and sophisticated vocabulary, detailed descriptions with carefully selected adjectives, opinions which are coherently justified and a broad range of grammatical structures (pronouns, relative clauses, verbs in a range of tenses, comparatives, superlatives, etc.).

Language Support

Introducing the Scene

c'est une photo de/d'.....	it is a photo of
la scène se déroule.....	the scene is happening/unfolding

Describing what you see

à gauche (de)	on the left (of)
à droite (de)	on the right (of)
à côté (de)	next to
devant	in front (of)
derrière	behind
sur	on
sous	under
au premier plan	in the foreground
au second plan/à l'arrière-plan	in the background
on voit	we see
on peut voir	we can see
on distingue	we see
on remarque	we notice
on voit (+ noun) qui (+ verb in the present tense)	we see (+ noun) who/that (+ verb in the present tense)

Structuring your description

d'abord	first
puis/ensuite	then
cependant/toutefois/en revanche/par contre	however
en plus/en outre/par ailleurs	besides
enfin	finally
par exemple	for example

Speculating about the scene

sûrement/certainement	most probably
probablement/sans doute	probably
peut-être	maybe
à mon avis	in my opinion
d'après moi/selon moi	according to me
....me semble (+ adjective)	...seems (+ adjective)
...me paraît (+ adjective)	...seems (+ adjective)
...montre...	...shows...
...suggère (que)....	...suggest (that)...
il semble que	it seems that
on dirait que	it looks like
je pense que	I think that
je crois que	I think (believe) that
peut-être que	maybe
cette photo a été prise	this photo was taken

il/elle doit avoir environ...ans	he/she must be...years old
il/elle a l'air de (+ infinitive)	he/she seems to (+ infinitive)
ils/elles ont l'air de (+ infinitive)	they seem to (+ infinitive)
il/elle a l'air (+ adjective)	he/she seems (+ adjective)
ils/elles ont l'air (+ adjective)	they seem (+ adjective)
il/elle veut	he/she wants
ils/elles veulent	they want
il/elle vient de (+ infinitive)	he/she has just (+ infinitive)
ils/elles viennent de (+ infinitive)	they have just (+ past infinitive)
il/elle va (+ infinitive)	he/she is going to (+ infinitive)
ils/elles vont (+ infinitive)	they are going to (+ infinitive)
il/elle est sur le point de (+ infinitive)	he/she is about to (+ infinitive)
ils/elles sont sur le point de (+ infinitive)	they are about to (+ infinitive)
il/elle s'apprête à (+ infinitive)	he/she is about to (+ infinitive)
ils/elles s'apprêtent à (+ infinitive)	they are about to (+ infinitive)
après avoir (+ past participle)	after having (+ past participle)
ayant bien examiné cette photo	having carefully studied/examined this photo

Justifying a view point and drawing conclusions

donc	therefore
par conséquent	consequently
puisque/comme	since/as
car/parce que	because
vu que	seeing that
étant donné que	given that
en fin de compte	at the end of the day