

## Engl 120: In-class Activity – Dinosaurs and Details

**Purpose:** To practice noticing, to practice writing with detail, and to practice communicating information clearly to an audience.

**Notes:** With a lot of my in-class activities, I like to give my students something tangible to work with, so they can think about and conceptualize writing and related activities in different ways. For many of my activities, I'll have notecards or small pieces of paper students can shuffle around and reorganize, for tasks like experimenting with sentence order or the order in which to present evidence in a paper. For this activity, I use model dinosaurs (though I think any kind of objects that are similar in size or type could be useful).

**First step:** Have each student select two model dinosaurs.

### Instructions for students:

You have been given two different dinosaurs. Pick *one* of the two dinosaurs to describe (and do not tell anyone which dinosaur you've picked!).

The goal is to write a description that will enable someone else to find the exact dinosaur you're describing in a group of many other dinosaurs—so you'll want to include as much detail as possible. Think: What can you say about this dinosaur that will give the person reading your description the best chance of finding it?

The description can be as long or as short as you like.

### You CANNOT:

- Use the term “dinosaur” or the names of any dinosaur species. (So, you can't say, “This is a Stegosaurus.”)
- Compare the dinosaur to any other dinosaurs. (So, you can't say, “It looks like a Triceratops but with more horns.”)
- Refer to any dinosaur movies, books, etc., that are well-known in popular culture. (So, you can't say, “This dinosaur ate a goat in *Jurassic Park*” or “This dinosaur looks like Littlefoot from *Land Before Time*.”)

### You CAN:

- Compare the dinosaurs to non-dinosaur animals or things. (So, you can say, “This creature looks like a rhinoceros” or “It has teeth like knives.”)

**Next:** After the students have written their descriptions, gather all the dinosaurs together on a central table. Then collect the descriptions, shuffle them, and hand them out to the students. Ensure that students will not get their own description, and, if possible, try to ensure that students will not get the descriptions of students sitting near them.

Have the students read their new descriptions, then try to find the matching dinosaur. Once a selection has been made, each student reads his or her new description aloud, then shows the dinosaur he or she selected. The original writer of the description then confirms whether the reader has made the right choice.

**End discussion:** Ask students to comment on the task. Was writing the description easy or hard? Why? What were they thinking as they were writing the descriptions? Why did they choose to include the details they did? What strategies that they used in this activity might they carry over to other kinds of writing?