A dominant impression results in a vivid mental picture of a person, place or object. SHOW the reader your dominant impression; don’t TELL the reader. Your impression of someone or something starts as a vague mental picture in your mind, but your mission is to take it to a high definition (HD), three dimensional (3D) picture for your reader using sensory words, details, and dialogue.

**Example of a weak dominant impression:**

It was hot in Africa. Even with the windows open, the bus was noisy and hot. The walls of the bus were grey. Each seat inside the bus held two people. The bus was full of people from different parts of Africa. The bus driver was an old man and was a bad driver. It was noisy, dusty, and there were flies. Some passengers worried they would be kicked off with their animals. The bus was really crowded, and things got worse as the day went on.

**Example of a strong dominant impression:**

Somalia. A plateau-like place situated at the end of the horn of Africa about the size of Texas. I remember one day in particular that was different from the rest. The summer sun beat down relentlessly on the parched, chapped earth. The air was hot, almost stagnant. The steamy breeze from the open windows of the bus did little to ease the discomfort. Dust sputtered out from underneath the tires, making tinkling sounds against the fender, leaving a cloudy trail nearly a mile in length behind it. People swatted the buzzing flies from their faces; others shushed their goats, afraid they would be kicked off for the noise. It was half past three and already the bus had reached its full capacity, unusual for this time of day. Little did we know, the hot and dirty bus ride would be the best part of our trip (Sutis).

**Prewriting:** Select a topic you know well. In the example above, a STLCC student is from Somalia and wrote about a bus ride she remembers well. Ask yourself, what is the one feature about your topic that you want to describe and go from there. What mood/feeling do you wish to create with your description; is it misery, mystery, awe, shock, alarm, happiness, sympathy, peace... what? A place to start is to first write down ten adjectives to describe the feeling you wish to create. From the list of ten adjectives, pick a few to focus on and add details, strong nouns and active verbs.

**First Draft:** Think about giving your reader a reason to read! WHY do you want to share this dominant impression with your readers? The answer to this question may be part of your introduction, thesis, topic sentence or even your conclusion. Once you find that reason, you can begin using the following writing strategies:
Use sensory details/adjectives/adverbs:

to see - He peeked into the dingy alley of cracked concrete where the homeless man slept.
to hear - The anxious cub scout heard the loud screech of the night owl.
to smell - The first graders noticed the sour smell of rotting food in the cafeteria.
to touch - The detective ran his finger along the ragged edge of the broken glass.
to taste - The fresh, tangy lemon drops in my Easter basket made my lips pucker.
to feel - My cozy, velvet, baby blanket gave me a sense of security.

Use literary language:

Metaphor - Life is a journey.
Simile - My love is like a red, red rose (Burns).
Hyperbole - I’m hungry enough to eat a horse.

Use dialogue: “Stop pulling my hair.”

Add concrete and proper nouns:

Concrete noun - - Instead of “The very small dog was making an irritating noise,” write, ”The toy poodle yipped” (Plourde).
Proper noun - - Instead of “Professor”, write, “Professor Riggins”

Add active, unexpected verbs:

She stripped me of my credibility.

Revision:

Does every word contribute to the overall effect/feeling/mood you wish to convey?  
Ask yourself: Will the reader be interested in my dominant impression?  
Do you help the reader see the scene, or is your description merely a step-by-step tour?  
Did you avoid use of passive verbs (is, was, were)?