For Object Descriptions

From Markel & Selber’s Table 20.1, “Questions to Answer in Introducing a Description”

Instructions: Review your rough draft for the information in each of these questions. Copy the information from your draft and paste it in as your answer. If the information is missing from your draft, you can add it, make a note that you need to add it, or explain why it is not necessary for your technical description.

* **What is the item?** You might start with a sentence definition.
* **What is the function of the item?** If the function is not implicit in the sentence definition, state it: “Electron microscopes magnify objects that are smaller than wavelengths of visible light.”
* What does the item look like?Sometimes an object is best pictured with both graphics and words. Include a photograph or drawing if possible. (See Chapter 12 for more about incorporating graphics into your text.) If you cannot use a graphic, use an analogy or comparison: “The USB drive is a plastic-or metal-covered device, much smaller than a pack of gum, often with a removable cap that covers the type-A USB connection.” Mention the material, texture, color, and other physical characteristics, if relevant.
* **How does the item work?** In a few sentences, define the operating principle. Sometimes objects do not “work”; they merely exist. For instance, a ship model has no operating principle.
* **What are the principal parts of the item?** Limit your description to the principal parts. A description of a bicycle, for instance, would not mention the dozens of nuts and bolts that hold the mechanism together; it would focus on the chain, gears, pedals, wheels, and frame.