

Using All the Senses in Writing

by Megan Easley-Walsh



As a writing consultant and in my own work, crafting effective writing is a must. In fiction, creating a cast of characters and an engaging plot are the bedrock of a successful story. One of the best ways to do that is to paint the story with vibrant descriptions that will draw the reader in.

Life is experienced through the senses. Sight. Sound. Smell. Taste. Touch. Sight is the most common sense that is explored through writing. Writers often describe how the setting looks, what the characters look like, what the furnishings are, how the light settles over the land. All of this helps to paint a vivid picture for the reader.

What is less often explored are the other senses. Dynamic writing draws from all means of experiencing life. The sound of a bird's call or the crunch of leaves under feet is evocative and transporting to a particular location or season. Hearing can also come into play for how dialogue is delivered. Are the lines whispered? Are they shouted? Sound cues can be incorporated, almost like stage cues, for a richer reading experience.

The smell of freshly baked bread wafting through a kitchen in the morning or the scent of jasmine heavy in the air are details that add layers of textural information to the story. Smell is strongly tied to memory and the mention of a scent is likely to draw the reader in more.



Taste is often overlooked, but is a good tool for adding verisimilitude. When a character eats breakfast, what does the oatmeal taste like? Is it plain or does it have sugar in it? Do the pancakes come with buttery syrup? Just like a TV show about food or a menu relies upon good description of taste to effectively communicate a dish, readers rely on strong taste descriptions for a more complete reading experience.

Touch comes with myriad possibilities. Is someone's hand cold? Is the sun sweltering? Is the teacup chipped? Is the wool sweater scratchy?



In addition to this there's also what's often labelled a sixth sense: intuition. Your characters shouldn't all be psychic, because people must uncover the next step in the journey and learn and grow. Your stories will be richer if your characters develop in the unfolding. Intuition, though, is an effective tool and it can add a sense of suspense and foretelling to your stories. It's especially

useful, because intuitions can be right, but they don't have to be. It can heighten the drama.

Incorporation of the senses leads to stronger writing. Happy writing!

Megan Easley-Walsh is an author, editor and writing consultant. She offers editing services for writers and can assist at all stages of the writing process. She has previously taught writing to college students. www.ExtraInkEdits.com

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