

Edit to Excellence Session 1

Make Your Story Sing with Sensory Details

What we'll cover today:

What sensory detail is

Why sensory detail is so important

Examples of sensory detail

Exercises to get us writing



Let's begin by understanding sensory detail.

Understanding sensory detail

Sensory detail involves the use of descriptive language to engage the reader's senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Sensory details draw readers into the story, making them feel present in the scenes. Engaging the senses can evoke strong emotional responses from the reader and helps readers connect with characters by experiencing the world through their senses.

Sensory detail in romance writing

Excerpt from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen:

Sight: "Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter."

Excerpt from *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon:

Touch: "His hand was warm and slightly rough, the calluses catching on the silk of my gown as he slid it off my shoulder."

Sensory detail in fantasy writing

Excerpt from *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien:

Smell: "He could hear the groaning creak of the trees far below and the sense of the air was full of the smell of the forest."

Excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling:

Taste: "The treacle tart was Harry's favorite, and the warm, sweet taste of it made him feel as though he had come home."

Sensory detail in crime writing

Excerpt from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson:

Sight: "The room was lit by a single lamp, casting a pale yellow glow over the scattered papers and files."

Excerpt from *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn:

Sound: "I heard the crackle of the gravel under his feet as he walked away, each step a countdown to the explosion."

Crafting vivid sensory details

Show, Don't Tell: Use descriptive language to paint a picture rather than stating facts.

Example: Instead of "The room was messy," say "Clothes were strewn across the floor, and the smell of stale pizza lingered in the air."

Be Specific: Choose precise details that evoke the senses strongly.

Example: "The freshly baked bread had a golden crust that cracked under the knife, releasing a warm, yeasty aroma."

Crafting vivid sensory details

Engage All Five Senses: Ensure your descriptions include sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Example: "The carnival was a sensory overload with its bright lights, the roar of the crowd, the sweet scent of cotton candy, the sticky taste of caramel apples, and the rough texture of the burlap sack in the potato race."

Incorporate Character Reactions: Show how sensory details affect your characters.

Example: "The icy wind cut through his coat, making him shiver and pull the collar up tighter around his neck."

Now it's time to practice!

Here's how this works:

We will now proceed through four prompts. For each prompt, you will have a set of instructions, then a certain amount of time to complete the prompt.

At the end of the timer, you can paste your work into the chat to share and have it read out, if you're comfortable.



Exercise 1:

Sensory Snapshot

Take a moment to close your eyes and imagine a specific setting from your own story. Then write down as many sensory details as you can think of, focusing on all five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch).



Exercise 2:

Sensory Transformation

Choose a short descriptive passage from your own work that uses sensory details. Then rewrite the passage, changing the sensory details to create a different mood or atmosphere (e.g. from calm to eerie).



Exercise 3:

Scene Enhancement

Identify a pivotal scene in your story that could benefit from enhanced sensory details.

Then rewrite the scene, ensuring to incorporate sensory details for sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.



Exercise 4:

Memory Trigger

Recall a personal memory that is vivid in sensory detail. Then write a brief scene for your story, inspired by this memory, ensuring to include all five senses.



Thank you! See you at the next three
webinars:

14th August

21st August

28th August

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