

Sensory details: Using sensory details is a way of adding details and describing using the 5 senses

Example of text with no sensory detail: Grandmother Workman reached over and grabbed her grandson's arm. He was nervous because the staircase was so steep, but she leaned against him and they began to climb.

Visuals (sight)

Visual details are often successfully incorporated into writing. Details which appeal to our sense of sight ensure that the reader is able to give faces to characters, or add concrete details to a setting. For example, through adding visual detail, a room can become more than just a blank, vague receptacle. It becomes a small, oblong room with peeling maroon wallpaper and cracked ceiling tiles. A visual description allows readers to place themselves *within* a text. Visual details help accomplish this through encouraging the reader to create a mental image of the characters, setting, and action.

Sound

The human sense of hearing is an important means of communication. Next to visual details, auditory details are most commonly included in writing. This is because sounds give us a primary experience of the world. Sounds can remind us of personal memories, or can create images in our minds. For example, the sound of a ship's whistle might remind a person of a summer's night in New England, or of a tour of duty in the military. Sounds recreate personal, sensory experiences. The addition of auditory details gives the writer the opportunity to create a more detailed, layered, texture. In the sample text on the last page, the writer has incorporated references to sounds which allow the reader to infer the state of the old staircase, as well as the physical condition of the grandmother.

Smell

The sense of smell is commonly overlooked in writing. However, it is the human sense of smell that is most closely linked to the brain. The receptors in the brain which are responsible for processing smells are very close to the area of the brain responsible for the storage of memory. Because of this link, scents are able to cause vivid sensory re-creations of memories. Our sense of smell has an uncommonly strong power over our feelings, thoughts, and emotions. In the sample text, the addition of olfactory details helps set the mood of the paragraph by triggering our senses.

Touch

The sense of touch encourages us to investigate the world around us by feeling it and learning the texture, shape, and size of things. Tactile images can be powerful sensory triggers. They allow a reader not only to visualize a scene, but to experience it. Inclusion of the sense of touch prevents the reader from remaining distanced or detached from the writing. In the sample text, the sense of touch has been engaged through allowing the reader to recreate a primary sensation: the feel of a person's breath on the back of his or her neck. This is a sensory experience that most people have encountered. Therefore, through recalling familiar tactile sensations the writer encourages the readers to put themselves in the place of the characters.

Taste

The human sense of taste allows a person to do much more than simply select and enjoy food. There are four familiar tastes:

1. Sweet
2. Salty
3. Bitter
4. Sour

By appealing directly to any of these tastes, a writer has the unique opportunity to affect a reader's senses. Memories, feelings, people, and places can all be suggested through the sense of taste.

Find the sensory details in the following paragraph and underline and label them.

Grandmother Workman lurched over and grabbed the pale skin of Randal's left arm with her leathery hand. The folds and creases beneath her skin coiled themselves out like electrical wiring, like the bloated, roughly-textured relief map of the world that his mother just posted above his bedside table. Randal looked ahead toward the winding spiral staircase, fidgeted with a small hole in his baseball jersey, and bit his lip. His mouth filled with the sweet, coppery taste of blood as she leaned in closely toward him, breathing her hot breath on the damp hair at the base of his neck. She smelled of wet cigarettes and bacon. As they slowly climbed the long, steep staircase, the only sound was his grandmother's labored breathing and the mournful creak of the wooden stairs.