

Learning to Write With All of Your Senses

Writers often forget the importance of capturing all of the senses within a novel. To really make a scene believable the reader needs to be able to experience it as the characters are experiencing it, which means being able to see the same things as them, feel the same things as them, hear the same noises as them, taste the same tastes and smell the same smells. It is essential therefore that as a writer you consider all of the senses when you are writing, to help to bring your story to life.

However, it is often difficult to do this or to stay focused on doing this when you write; you may get bogged down in just one sense, so that your novel becomes unbalanced with visual descriptions of the surroundings and the things that the characters can see, or you may not feel confident in working with a certain sense, which could leave your book lacking.

There is a very simple exercise that writers can carry out to help them discover each of the senses and learn how to write about them. This exercise can be carried out at any time of day and any where it just requires the writer to be able to concentrate for a short period of time. The exercise is this:

Hold an object in your hand and then sit, stand or lie, whichever is more comfortable or convenient and remain in that position, in silence for 5 minutes. During that five minutes you should spend one minute concentrating on each of your senses. So, for the first minute concentrate on what you can hear; you may be sitting in your office in silence, but there will always be a sound, even if it's just the humming of your laptop or the clanging of the central heating. If you can hear voices, try to tune in to the accents, the tones of the voices and the enunciation of the words. Next move on to sight, this is an easier one but you need to push yourself to see more than a first glance would see. Look at the trees, at first glance it may look like they are swaying in the wind but if you look closer you might just see that it's actually only the very tips of the branches that are being blown by the breeze, perhaps you can see a bead of condensation dripping down the window, track it's path, see how it moves. Next move on to touch; this can often be tricky so start by thinking about the object you are holding in your hand, how does it feel? Is it smooth, cold, silky? Once you've appreciated the feeling in your hands and between your fingers, think about your feet are they standing on a worn carpet or wrapped within a thick duvet, what textures can they feel? Carry on in this fashion taking on each of the senses in turn, a minute each, and once you have finished jot down some of your thoughts on each of them. You will find that some senses are easier to write about than others but if you repeat this exercise regularly you'll soon be able to tap into your senses with ease, notice more of the world around you, and hopefully start to translate this into your creative writing so that you are writing stories that capture the reader's attention from all possible angles.