

Senses Make Sense Material

Working all five senses into your manuscript makes it richer and involves your brain in the story to a large degree, based on an article in The New York Times

(http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3).

The brain doesn't know the difference between doing something, and reading a richly detailed description of something and reacts the same to either, firing off a lot of synapses.

But how to get the senses in there? A little training and practice will help. That's what this class will do—give you an exercise to practice getting those senses into your writing. Dean Wesley Smith, author of over 100 novels and the former publisher of Pulp House, advocates all five senses every 1,000 words. It seems like a lot but they can be sprinkled in, like spice, to flavor the scene. It works out to roughly one and a quarter senses on every manuscript page. You can spread them out, and you should, so it doesn't overload the reader, but when setting a scene, nothing works better than a full house of sensory detail.

Think about it. Which would you rather read?

1. Carolis stepped into the forest and began her journey.

Or

2. Carolis nudged her chestnut war horse between the two massive oaks that signaled the entrance to the Dragon's Wood. She had to go in to get Morlan before Drake's thugs found her. The winter shorn tree limbs reached toward her like witches claws (sight). One scraped over her steel helmet (sound). She shivered, her mouth suddenly dry as dust (feeling and taste). Pearly light

filtered through fog that billowed in the light breeze tugging at her cloak (sight and feeling,) and helped muffle (hearing) her horse's hooves as the gelding made his way over the thick mulch of centuries of fallen leaves. Those same hooves kicked up the smell of damp humus (smell and hearing), reminding her of the years she'd spent tending the mulch pile on the farm at her foster home. The water from the fog condensed on her hands, chilling them and turning the gilded leather reins slick between her fingers (touch).

What a way to start a quest.

So you know who she is (Carolus=character) and where she is (entrance to Dragon Wood=setting), and what is going on (She has to go in and rescue Morlan=the problem). You get a hint of who she is (gilded reins and a steel helmet make her a soldier, she grew up on a farm with a foster family), how she feels about what she is about to do (dry mouth and shivering). All this in one hundred fifty words. Much richer than just "Carolus stepped into the forest and began her journey."

All setting is Point of View and Point of view equals Character Voice which is comprised of

Accent
Attitude
Content
Opinion
Actions
Manuscript

1. Accent where the character is from
2. Attitude what the character wears
3. Content what the character sees or says about what they see/say. Not necessarily dialogue
4. Opinion what the character believes
5. Action what the character is doing how they behave. Characters don't have to be moving to have action
6. Manuscript=how the text on the page reflects the action and the mood.
 - Character action drives the structure/look of your manuscript.
 - Character emotion drives the look of your manuscript.
 - Agitated character, manuscript looks agitated.
 - Lolling, the shape of paragraphs indicates the lazy Sunday afternoon in the hammock
 - Sentence and paragraph lengths speed up action.
 - Long slows it down.
 - Short, choppy sentences convey confusion, anger, fear, etc., and speed up the action, giving a breathless sensation to the reader.

Using sensory detail is also is a clever way to add character and voice to the story. You can sprinkle the senses in like a good oregano or a swish of satin or the stark beauty of statue in moonlight *from the Point of View of the Character*.

The following exercise give you a practice in thinking about all five senses, how they lie latent in any scene, and how the character will shade them. You just have to spend some time thinking about the scene, recognizing the senses that are there and figuring out a way to show your character through them. With a little practice, it will become automatic to layer them in as your write.

The point to the following exercise is to get you in the habit of visualizing a scene by placing your character there and letting the senses come alive, so your character tells you how he or she wants to dress the scene.

Sensory Visualization Exercise

So start out by closing your eyes and thinking about a place you know well. Put yourself there in the center of it. Stand there and let yourself sink into the place. No hurry, just be there.

Now chose one sense and write one paragraph about the scene, concentrating on only that one sense.

Then write the same scene from the perspective of another sense and write another paragraph. Repeat for each of the five senses.

Then choose one sentence from each paragraph and combine them into a single paragraph. I know it's hard to choose, but this is just an exercise and they're only words. They don't have to be in the same order that you wrote the paragraphs, just so they make sense and add sensory detail to the scene.

The Exercise

Choose one picture and write a 200-300 word scene from both points of view noted under the picture. Each view point should be completely different in regard to:

Attitude

Content

Opinion

Actions

Manuscript

****Don't forget the senses.****

You can do it, and your reader will not be able to put it down.

Take a look at the pictures, read the view points and decide which picture you want to use. Then go to the last page.



Exercise 1

A. A person marooned on a desert isle.

B. A water sport enthusiast on a "Get Away From it All" vacation for the first time in years.



Exercise 2

A. A doctorate level archaeologist or anthropologist hungry to make a name for him or herself on a dig at a newly discovered site.

B. A hot and cranky little kid who would rather be back at the motel swimming pool than walking out in the summer heat to see another empty ruin.

Getting into character.

Look at the picture you have chosen. As the scene opens, become the POV character. Read each question aloud, then jot down the answer as if you were that character. This is just a scene, not an opening. Repeat for the second point of view character. Then do the writing exercise.

Where are you?

What do you see around you?

What time is it? What is the light like?

What is your body doing?

What do you hear right at this moment?

What do you think the sound is?

What do you feel under your feet?

What do you feel on your face?

What do you feel in your heart?

What do you smell?

What do you taste in your mouth?

Who is with you?

What do you hope will happen?

What do you fear will happen?

How do you feel about it all?

What's your Scene Goal?