

Sensory Details Word List

Keep the following lists of words to help you improve your writing. Using sensory words can help you provide more details and examples in your writing. Add to this list as you learn more sensory words.

Sight	Sound	Touch	Taste	Smell
bleary blurred brilliant colorless dazzling dim dingy faded faint flashy gaudy glance gleaming glimpse glistening glittering gloomy glossy glowing grimy hazy indistinct misty peer radiant shadowy shimmering shiny smudged sparkling streaked striped tarnished twinkling	bellow blare buzz cackle cheer clamor clang crackle creak grumble gurgle hiss howl hush jabber mumble murmur mutter rant rave roar rumble rustle screech shriek shrill sizzle snarl squawk squeal swish thud thump whimper yelp	balmy biting bristly bumpy chilly coarse cold cool crawly creepy cuddly dusty feathery feverish fluffy furry fuzzy goeey greasy gritty hairy hot icy limp lumpy moist oily powdery prickly scratchy shivery silky slimy slippery spongy springy squashy sticky sweaty velvety	appetizing bitter bland creamy delectable delicious flavorful flavorless gingery luscious nauseating palatable peppery piquant refreshing ripe rotten salty savory scrumptious sharp sour spicy spoiled stale sugary sweet tangy tasteless tasty unappetizing unripe vinegary yummy zesty	acrid aroma aromatic fetid foul-smelling fragrant moldy musty nidorous odiferous odor odorless old perfumed pungent putrid rancid rank reeking scent scented smell spicy steno sweet waft whiff

Sight

The most often used sense when writing is sight. It's what we use most and what comes naturally to us-write about what you see. But here's a tip: Look beyond what others see-blue sky, green grass-to the details of color, shape, size, to indicate something new. For example, "The shamrock green of the open expanse curved around a small grove of trees then down toward the river."

Hearing

Loud, soft, yell, whisper, angry, and all kinds of other adjectives are used for sound. But have you thought about using something more personal? "She spoke with a lover's voice, not a cat's, making me want to listen closely to every syllable." Or, "He sounded like freedom. Not just his words, but the way they tumbled gently from his lips." Or use a little synesthesia: "It was a bright red noise, repeating stop, stop, stop continually, until I couldn't go on any longer."

Smell

Smell is another one of those senses that's different for each of us. What I think is a bad smell, someone else might not be bothered by it. So, words like stink and pungent are great to use, but you can easily go deeper into explanation. For example, "The alley smelled of urine and Cracker-Jacks, an assault to the nose and eyes alike." Or how about this: "The wind changed to something foul, dead, wafting up from the darkened pit."

Touch

The way things feel is more than just texture and temperature. Like the other senses, it can be personal: "His handshake was my father's handshake, not to meet you, but the rough callousness of someone showing you who's boss." Or try something like this: "It felt like the memory of something long forgotten, thin, almost invisible."

Taste

Taste is something that is different to each of us and is difficult to get across in a book. Yes, we all know what bacon tastes like if we just say it tastes like bacon, but what about doing something unique with that idea? If you think about it, taste is more than just something your brain interprets from your taste-buds. It's texture and smell and sight and even process, all mixed together. Try this: "The undercooked bacon felt like a wet sponge placed on my tongue, only grease leaked into my mouth instead of water." Or this: "I could smell the mold even before I put the cheese into my mouth." Of course, you can always use a metaphor or simile, like, "Like hot cocoa on a winter morning, the dinner calmed and relaxed me."

Of course, you can always use the senses in your writing just to "explain," in which perhaps you want to be straightforward and use familiar language, but when you have all these other tools, you'll want to select how you approach the five senses. As mentioned and illustrated in the example, the senses overlap to a point where we often pitch them together as a way of explaining just one of them. That might be the best way to approach this subject after all, since writing is personal and we each have our way to do it.