

FACTSHEET: DESCRIPTIVE AND SENSORY WRITING

Descriptive and sensory writing is not just for creative texts. It is a valuable way to communicate points to audiences about a number of issues. By drawing on the senses and describing settings, people, places, actions and so on, you can very effectively engage an audience and 'put them in the moment' to see, understand or feel something about an issue. Imagine being able to communicate the need for more quiet parkland space in the community by appealing to your audience's sense of sound, touch and sight and articulating a vision for this parkland space. Use the following prompts to help you develop your sensory and descriptive writing skills.

The key to unlocking the five senses is the question you ask about it - why you are seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, or feeling something. Once you've established the sense, ask "What does this mean?"

Use the sense of SIGHT

There is more to writing with sight than green trees, people walking and blue skies. Consider: "What am I seeing?" Beyond the man walking by with tattoos covering his arms, watch the way he walks. Does he stare at the ground as he walks or does he confidently stare forward? Once you see the obvious, go deeper. So, what do you really see? What do you not see? What does it mean?

Use the sense of TASTE

This is a good way to engage your audience with the details. Consider using a metaphor. Kellie McGann's favourite comedian, Tim Hawkins, compares the flavour and taste of a doughnut to "eating a baby angel." The metaphors we use have the power to transport audiences to places that evoke memories and emotion from their own life, allowing deeper engagement.

Use the sense of SMELL

The sense of smell is a powerful way to trigger emotions and memories in audiences. When you begin to describe something, close your eyes and think about all of the possible smells that surround you. Smells do not only describe food and body odor, they can be used to describe the weather, a room, or a situation. Other figurative devices can be used, such as similes and personification. The phrase, "this smells fishy" is a good example.

Use the sense of SOUND

This is a popular sense to use and is often achieved using onomatopoeia. However when you start really listening, you can use sound in more powerful ways. There are noises all around you and you can consider what they might indicate - is the sound of traffic just the sound of traffic or is it the sound of frustration? Some sounds tell your audience where you are or what you are doing without actually having to tell them.

Use the sense of TOUCH

This can be a lot of fun, especially when using adjectives. Consider describing touch through the temperature and texture, such as "Her fingers skimmed the cool, silky water." When using the sense of touch, it is important to describe the physical, but even more effective can be the invisible - the different aspects that are "touched" but not with your hands, or not felt by the body, such as "the calmness of the new park caressed his soul." Caressed is a verb that refers to the action of touching.

(adapted from: Kellie McGann - <http://thewritepractice.com/five-senses-in-writing/>)