

Enliven Your Writing by Engaging the Senses

by Linda Hart, author of *Thesaurus of the Senses*

THE SENSES ARE A DOORWAY INTO CREATIVITY. Everything we perceive is through the five senses. We constantly float in a sea of sensations. We feel. We taste. We see and envision. We are transported in time by smells. Sounds surround us, and we are part of the soundscape.

When we fully engage our senses, we can turn ordinary writing into vibrant, explosive prose. How do we arouse our senses? By becoming more aware. By observing deeply. By allowing sensations to infuse our entire body. We can even extend our sensory awareness beyond our physical boundaries.

Engaging your senses makes the writing process more juicy, visceral, and pleasurable and allows readers to connect more directly to your work. Use all of your senses to build rich sensory landscapes. Think in terms of what readers might feel, see, hear, taste, and smell, and how these senses combine into a complex amalgamation of experiences. Even mundane events can reverberate with profound kinesthetic and emotional impact.

Have you ever touched the delicate fluff of a dandelion or beheld the dusty ring of the Milky Way on a clear night? Have you plucked a mulberry from a tree, expectantly and perhaps too early, and tasted a burst of sourness with the promise of sweetness to come? Have you breathed in the rich, earthy smells of fallen leaves in autumn? Take the time to experience everything at a deep sensual level and draw on these experiences to create a sensory extravagance for readers.

Connecting with Sensory Dimensions

Each sense has fascinating dimensions and facets to explore. As our most dominant sense, seeing is perhaps the richest as well as the most unreliable sense. We notice shapes, colors, light and darkness, textures, patterns, and movement. We also perceive unspoken or hidden qualities in people and situations by reading facial expressions and gathering non-verbal impressions. But we also have blind spots and faulty vision. We can learn to see things more accurately or in new ways by sharpening our focus or perhaps softening our gaze to visually connect otherwise unrelated things.

Touch, our second set of eyes and ears through which we experience the world, involves textures, motion, pressure, pleasure, and pain. Though we can become numb to some touch experiences, we cannot completely shut off tactile

See: shapes, colors, light/dark, textures, position, motion, patterns, facial expressions, visual impressions or qualities

Hear: vibrations, percussions, discord, music and harmony; speech, movement, volume, onomatopoeia

Touch: textures, movement, pressure, skin sensations, visceral responses, pleasure, pain, emotions

Taste: flavors, textures, mouthfeel, accompanying smells and ambiance, sense of decorum

Smell: fragrant, aromatic, noxious, repulsive, memory, pleasure

sensations and visceral responses. These reactions are some of our most profound sensory experiences. Sense of touch also extends to our emotions, which bubble and burn within us.

Our sense of hearing is constantly on, though we are often adept at filtering out unwanted noise and distractions. Hearing involves vibrations, percussions, discord, music and harmony, speech, movement, and volume. Taste is a mixture of flavors, textures, mouthfeel, and accompanying smells and ambiance that add to our gustatory experience. Smell, though perhaps an overlooked sense, offers a direct connect to memory, pleasure, and repulsion. Smells can orient us, warn us, delight us. Finally, we experience all of our senses in rich combinations. The five senses intermingle in a mystical alchemy that triggers thoughts and emotions.

Building a Sensory Vocabulary

Sensory words are part of our vibrant, descriptive language: *scrumptious, velvety, shrill, quench, bitter, frothy, luminous, careening, abrasive, ablaze*. Our speech pops with onomatopoeic sounds such as *crackle, buzz, and clang*. For powerful writing, we can build a complete sensory vocabulary to bring immediacy, drama, and mood to our work, whether it's a physical description of a scene or character or a line of poetry. Of course, don't overdo sensory words. Use them sparingly and with finesse so that the most electrifying words stand out.

Sensory words can broaden your viewpoint and inspire you to reach new heights of expression. Grounding yourself in the senses and selecting those words that have the most punch, color, aroma, and flavor will bring depth to your writing—and open new doors to creativity.

Linda Hart is the author of *Thesaurus of the Senses*, a tool for writers, poets, teachers, students, and word lovers, available in print at <https://wwwcreatespace.com/4577495>.