

## Lesson 4.2

# Using All Your Senses

**S**ensory language—words and phrases that activate the senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste—gives readers a guided tour of the writer’s world. Through sensory details, readers see what you see, hear what you hear, feel what you feel. Choose your sensory words carefully, and you strengthen the traits of Ideas and Voice, right along with Word Choice.

## Sharing an Example: *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Consider the following passage from J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic fantasy tale *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first part of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy originally published in 1954. You may be familiar with the books, movies, or both. In this example, the author uses sensory language to create a fantasy world. Read the passage with a pen or pencil in hand. Underline any sensory words or phrases you find.



At the south end of the greensward there was an opening. There the green floor ran on into the wood, and formed a wide space like a hall, roofed by the boughs of trees. Their great trunks ran like pillars down each side. In the middle there was a wood-fire blazing, and upon the tree-pillars torches with lights of gold and silver were burning steadily. The Elves sat round the fire upon the grass or upon the sawn rings of

old trunks. Some went to and fro bearing cups and pouring drink; others brought food on heaped plates and dishes.

"This is poor fare," they said to the hobbits; "for we are lodging in the greenwood far from our halls. If ever you are our guests at home, we will treat you better."

"It seems to me good enough for a birthday-party," said Frodo.

Pippin afterwards recalled little of either food or drink, for his mind was filled with the light upon the elf-faces, and the sound of voices so various and so beautiful that he felt in a waking dream. But he remembered that there was bread, surpassing the savour of a fair white loaf to one who is starving; and fruits sweet as wildberries and richer than the tended fruits of gardens; he drained a cup that was filled with a fragrant draught, cool as a clear fountain, golden as a summer afternoon.



*The Fellowship of the Ring*  
by J.R.R. Tolkien

## Your Response



Look carefully at the sensory words you underlined. Record some of them to fill out the following chart. We've provided a few to get you started, but you should find many more!

**I see . . .** *green floor, wide hall,* \_\_\_\_\_

**I hear . . .** *blazing fire, footsteps,* \_\_\_\_\_

**I smell . . .** *the fire, warm bread,* \_\_\_\_\_

**I feel . . .** *warmth of the fire,* \_\_\_\_\_

**I taste . . .** *bread,* \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on the sensory details you noticed and recorded. Were you surprised by how many there were? Was there a particular sense that dominated this passage? Use this writing space to record your thoughts.




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## Creating the Writer's World in Your Mind

This time, your teacher will share a passage aloud. It's from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. This example of realistic fiction centers on the life of its British narrator and title character Jane Eyre. The novel recounts her orphaned childhood, her schooling at Lowood School (where this scene takes place), her experiences as a governess and teacher, and finally her marriage to the mysterious Mr. Rochester. In this scene, Jane and her classmates are looking forward to having breakfast on a cold, wintry morning, having eaten so little the night before. They wake up at dawn, sit through several classes, and wait and wait for this moment to arrive.



This time you won't be able to look at the words. Just listen closely and let impressions form in your mind. Then talk with your writing group and list everything you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste.

## Share and Compare

Compare sensory details with the class as a whole. Think about the world Brontë created for you. What is most vivid in your mind? Was there a particular sense that stood out in this passage? When you finish your discussion, your teacher will share the passage a second time. Did the world in your mind match the world in the writer's actual passage? Did you add any details of your own to that world?

## Pulling Readers into YOUR World

Have you ever had to wait and wait and *wait*—as Jane and her classmates did in the passage you read earlier? Maybe you were waiting for a person or for something to happen. Where were you? What did you do as you waited? Was it a positive experience or a disappointing one, like Jane's? Take a thinking minute: Close your eyes and recall the scene in your mind, remembering how everything felt, sounded, smelled, tasted, and looked.

Then make some notes. Jot down the sensory details that are most vivid and important. Notice little details a reader might not think of. Record them as follows:

**I feel . . .** \_\_\_\_\_

**I hear . . .** \_\_\_\_\_

**I smell . . .** \_\_\_\_\_

**I taste . . .** \_\_\_\_\_

**I see . . .** \_\_\_\_\_

Look at your sensory chart carefully, and underline three to five details you think are especially interesting or unusual. Focusing on those details first, create a paragraph that helps readers live your experience of waiting. Invite readers into your world by sharing what you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel. Use your own paper to write your paragraph.

## Share and Compare

Meet with your writing circle. Take turns reading your paragraphs aloud. Listen carefully for sensory details. After each writer shares, write the strongest sensory impression from his or her paragraph on an index card, fold it in half, and give it to the writer. Do NOT open any cards until *everyone* has shared.



### A Writer's Questions

Picture yourself visiting an Internet site devoted to tropical vacations. The site has no photographs and uses no sensory language to describe the vacation destinations—only names of islands. Would that site be effective? In what other kinds of writing is sensory detail not just important, but vital?



### Putting It to the Test

Everyone knows how important sensory detail is in descriptive writing. But suppose the prompt in an on-demand writing assignment asks you to write a persuasive or expository essay. Will sensory detail still matter? Why or why not?