Detail and Description

When you walk around living your life, you experience things in several ways. Sometimes you hear the low incessant humming coming from your slightly awkward neighbor. Sometimes you smell the stink bomb set off down the hall. Sometimes you feel the slimy residue left on your desk. You may even tear up as you realize that residue is the ghost slime of your long lost pet, Chubbers, here to play supernatural fetch. In truth, describing a scene involves all your senses and then some. No one ever just sees what’s going on. Make sure you include all of the following (when they fit in your story):

**Sight**—This is the first sense people think of when writing a story. It is the sense people use most, or the one they are most aware of. Make sure you add details, like the colors of things, the way the flowers are wilted, little details to help the reader picture themselves in the story.

**Hearing**—This sense can be particularly important in a story. It goes beyond just describing dialogue and into the little noises, the creak of a staircase, the cry of a child.

**Touch**—The way your skin tingles with goosebumps, the slither of a snake across your leg, the gentle touch of a loved one. These details can be vital to any story. Be careful in writing these though. Many people stick with something like, “It felt cold.” This sentence, put simply, is lame. It doesn’t add to the story and will not help the reader. What does cold feel like?

**Smell**—Scents can be the strongest trigger in memory. Everyone can remember what grandma’s cookies smell like or the inside of a locker room. They are emotional triggers, and can be important to any story. But don’t overdo it. No one likes a nose it all. (Sorry for the bad pun.)

**Taste**—Every once in a while, taste can be important to a story. Sometimes. It’s not like characters walk around licking everything. That would be gross. Only use this sense when it makes sense. Don’t be gross.

**Mood**—Bet you didn’t know about this sense. In a story, you sense things through the mood of the characters. Their thoughts and feelings are important details as well, sometimes the most important details. Without this, stories can be boring and unimportant. Be careful to keep it to a minimum or you risk making your character seem like a crybaby or a psychopath.

**Tip: Use ONLY important details**—Not all details are created equal. Some are important, some are not. Do not waste the time of the reader by describing a whole scene that will never matter or describing something in detail that we never see again. AND, for the love of Pete, DO NOT tell me about every stinking moment of your trip to Bear Lake. No one cares that you packed the night before or that you stopped for gas three times. Details in a story should be important to that story. It might matter if your whole story is about how you forgot the one thing you actually needed when packing for Bear Lake: underwear. The reader does not need to sit with you while you pack; however. Keep it simple. Keep it interesting.