

## The Five Senses and Beyond

By Azalea Dabill

Using all the human senses of your characters in their interactions with their world anchors your reader in the story. What the eye sees, the ear hears, the nose smells, the tongue tastes, the body feels, and the mind, heart and soul sees: makes or breaks your story. Help your readers experience these things and they will faithfully sing praises about your tale. Using *your* senses makes your writing a worthy gift to your readers. Using the senses works best sprinkled through your scenes where they would naturally occur. This takes practice.

Rachel Neumeier does this very well in *Lord of the Changing Winds*.

The griffins came to Feierabiand with the early summer warmth, riding the wind out of the heights down to the tender green pastures of the foothills. The wind they brought with them was a hard, hot wind, with nothing of the gentle Feierabiand summer about it. It tasted of red dust and hot brass.

Kes, gathering herbs in the high pastures above the village of Minas Ford, saw them come: great bronze wings shining in the sun, tawny pelts like molten gold, sunlight striking harshly off beaks and talons. One was a hard shining white, one red as the coals at the heart of a fire. The griffins rode their wind like soaring eagles, wings outstretched and still. The sky took on a fierce metallic tone as they passed.... Kes stood in the hills above the high pastures, barefoot, her hair tangled, her hands full of fresh-picked angelica, and watched until the last of the griffins slid out of view. They were the most beautiful creatures she had ever seen.

Notice how Ms. Neumeier does not use all the senses in this one scene. Her judicious use of sight, touch, and taste in her word-pictures gives a distinct tone of other-worldly fire. Using all the senses in this one scene would ruin her effect. It comes down to craft. And the situation your character is in.

If you are in your point of view (POV) character while he/she waits for an attack, all the senses will be alert. If your character has been sleeping, and has just been rudely awakened, some or all perceptions may be fuzzy.

Craft comes from experience, and experience is gained by practice. Thousands upon thousands of hours. Study well-done writing, emulate it, and practice. Enjoy your practice.

Also practice really seeing, cataloguing, noticing what is around you. How would you describe that spectacular sunset, the cooling air on your face, the lights that beckon you inside to the warmth in your house? Try to find words that fit, that relate what you feel, see, hear, taste, say, or think in any given situation or scene.

Your right word will be different than someone else's. And that is alright, that is good. That right word that fits what *you* see is your unique voice. The trick to writing in your voice vs.

sloppy or horrible writing is finding the true word to describe what you see in your mind. Not always taking the first, second, or third word that presents itself, but the right word. When your soul at last says, “Ahh, that’s it,” or “That’s as close as my words come.”

*Below is further information from my friend and mentor, Jeanne Leach.*

### **Beyond the Five Senses**

During one of my Editing Fiction courses I teach to a group of editors, a student sent me a short article from Wikipedia, which theorized that in the scientific world there is no solid consensus among neurologists regarding the actual number of senses because of differing definitions of what actually composes a sense. Humans are considered to have at least six additional senses that include:

- Pain
- Balance
- Joint motion and acceleration
- Sense of time
- Temperature differences
- Direction

After researching these further, I’ve come to the conclusion that these extra “senses” are a valuable part of descriptions used in fiction stories, so as you edit your fiction, keep these in mind. Most of them are usually mentioned naturally as the need arises in a story, but a couple of them could easily be overlooked. Using these senses will definitely enhance the word pictures you’ve created.

**Jeanne Marie Leach**

***Author \* Speaker \* Freelance Fiction Editor \* Writing Coach***

*In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.*