



Sensory Inspiration

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Introduction

This resource is intended to provide inspiration when it comes to adding sensory details into your writing, breaking down each of the main senses – vision, sound, taste, smell, touch – into subcategories to get you thinking about the complex options you have as a writer when bringing each sense to the page. There is also a short final section which focuses on the internal senses of heat, pain, balance and self. This resource is not intended as an exhaustive thesaurus but simply as a handy starting point to help you bring the world of your stories to life.



VISION

General Words

Nouns – apparition, deception, figment, glimpse, hallucination, illusion, image, impression, mirage, perception, picture, reflection, scene, sight, spectacle, view, vision

Verbs – behold, detect, dream, fixate, focus, gape, gaze, glance, glare, glimpse, imagine, leer, notice, observe, ogle, peer, perceive, pry, see, spy, squint, stare, watch, witness

Light / Dark

Light – bright, burnished, dazzling, glazed, gleaming, glimmering, glistening, glinting, glowing, illuminated, irradiated, light, lit up, luminescent, luminous, lustrous, polished, reflective, resplendent, shimmering, shining, twinkling

Dark – cloudy, dark, dense, dim, dingy, drab, dusky, gloomy, in shadow, inky, muddied, murky, overcast, shadowy, sludgy, tenebrous, umbrous

Colour / Tone

Nouns – bloom, blush, cast, colour, complexion, dye, hue, pallor, pigment, shade, stain, tincture, tinge, tint, tone, varnish, veneer, wash

Adjectives – brushed, coloured, distempered, dyed, glossed, flushed, imbued, infused, painted, saturated, stained, suffused, tinted

Pale – anaemic, ashen, blanched, bland, clear, colourless, dim, drab, drained, dreary, dull, faded, faint, ghostly, insipid, lacklustre, lifeless, lustreless, muted, pale, pallid, pastel, pasty, sallow, see-through, sheer, translucent, vapid

Discoloured – bleached, blemished, faded, jaded, stained, tarnished, washed-out, yellowed

Vivid – bold, bright, colourful, deep, dynamic, flashy, garish, intense, kaleidoscopic, loud, lucid, lurid, ornate, psychedelic, rich, vivid, warm

**For an extensive list of colour words, see the “Colour Guide” resource available [here](#).*

Pattern

adorned, bald, bare, basketweave, blotchy, blurry, brocade, checked, chevron, chinoiserie, chintz, complex, crystalline, dainty, damask, dappled, decorative, distinct, elaborate, fanciful, flamboyant, flashy, flecked, fleur-de-lys, flowery, freckled, frilly, garish, garnished, geometric, gingham, glassy, graffiti, harlequin,

herringbone, houndstooth, indistinct, lattice, marbled, monochrome, montage, mosaic, mottled, naked, nebulous, ornamented, ornate, paisley, patchwork, peppered, plain, polka dot, pronounced, scrawled, scribbled, showy, sparse, speckled, spotted, spotty, stark, stippled, striped, stripy, superficial, tartan, unadorned, vague, variegated, wreathed, zigzags

Shape

Two-dimensional – angle, arc, arrow, circle, cloud, club, corner, crescent, cross, curve, diamond, ellipse, heart, hexagon, kite, leaf, line, lozenge, oblong, oval, pentagon, pentagram, rectangle, rhombus, spade, square, squiggle, star, trapezoid, triangle

Three-dimensional – ball, bell, block, bowl, bubble, bucket, bulb, coil, cone, crystal, cube, cylinder, dent, disk, egg, elongated, gap, globe, hole, hollow, lump, orb, pyramid, sphere, stick, stump, tube

Adjectives – amorphous, asymmetrical, bent, bony, bulbous, concave, contoured, convex, corkscrew, crooked, curly, curved, fluid, forked, fluted, globular, helical, hollow, indented, irregular, jagged, kinked, pointed, serpentine, shapeless, sleek, spiralled, stream-lined, symmetrical, tangled, twisted, warped, wavy

Size

Big – ballooning, big, broad, bulging, bulky, cavernous, chunky, colossal, cumbersome, distended, elephantine, endless, enormous, expansive, gaping, gargantuan, giant, gigantic, huge, humungous, infinite, mammoth, massive, mushrooming, plump, portly, pudgy, puffy, rambling, sizeable, spacious, spindly, sprawling, swollen, tall, thick, titanic, towering, unwieldy, vast, voluminous, whopping, yawning

Small – compact, condensed, cramped, diminutive, dinky, fine, gangly, microscopic, miniature, miniscule, minute, narrow, paltry, petite, puny, scraggy, skimpy, skinny, slender, slight, spindly, stunted, svelte, teeny, thin, tiny, truncated

Amount

A lot – abundant, ample, awash, bristling, bursting, copious, crammed, dense, flourishing, overflowing, plentiful, prolific, swarming

A few – barren, empty, meagre, scant, scattered, skimpy, sparse, sporadic, thin, threadbare, void

Movement

ambling, billowing, blundering, bobbling, cascading, careening, convulsing, dawdling, darting, ebbing, flittering, flickering, floundering, flowing, fluttering, grumbling, gushing, gyrating, immobile, impaired, incapacitated, jittery, jolting, lumbering, lurching, meandering, moving, oscillating, paralysed, pouring, quivering, rippling, rocketing, rolling, rumbling, rushing, shuffling, snaking, spiralling, stationary, still, streaming, strolling, swarming, swaying, swirling, swishing, swooping, tilting, tottering, trembling, twitching, undulating, unmoving, vibrating, wavering, winding, wobbly

Permanence / Condition

aged, antiquated, beat-up, bedraggled, blemished, blighted, blistered, broken, bubbling, chipped, corroded, cracked, craggy, creased, crumbling, crumpled, decaying, decrepit, dented, dilapidated, dishevelled,

disintegrating, dog-eared, drooping, emaciated, eroded, fizzy, flattened, floppy, foamy, frayed, freezing, gnarled, grimy, grubby, grungy, immaculate, impervious, mangy, messy, melting, new, old, pleated, polluted, pristine, ragged, ramshackle, resplendent, rickety, ruffled, rusted, scraggly, scruffy, shattered, shrivelled, smudged, solid, sooty, sparkling, splintered, squalid, squashed, ruined, tarnished, torn, tousled, unchanging, unkempt, warped, weathered, wizened, wrinkled

Location / Presentation

aerial, afar, aligned, askance, askew, balanced, boxed, buried, caged, capsized, contained, covered, crooked, distant, elevated, enclosed, far, floating, isolated, jumbled, near, obscured, on display, remote, secluded, sheathed, slanted, soaring, squeezed in, submerged, teeming, wrapped, yonder



SOUND

General Words

Noise – babble, babel, cheering, clapping, clatter, commotion, din, fracas, frenzy, hubbub, noise, pandemonium, racket, ruckus, sound, tumult, uproar

Types of noise – alarm, bell, buzzer, buzzing, chant, drone, grumbling, horn, hum, murmuring, rumbling, siren, throbbing, vibration, whine

Volume

Loud – bawling, bellowing, blaring, booming, caterwauling, clamouring, deafening, ear-splitting, hammering, howling, raucous, roaring, thunderous, trumpeting, uproar, vociferous, wailing

Quiet – dull, faint, hushed, inaudible, indistinct, mumbled, murmuring, muted, silent, soft, soothing, stifled, still, tentative, whispered

Pitch

High – falsetto, high-pitched, piercing, shrieking, shrill, soprano, squawking, squeaking, wailing, whistling

Low – baritone, bass, cavernous, deep, droning, dulcet, grumbling, heavy, low-pitched, resonant, soft, tenor

Duration

Long – ceaseless, constant, continuous, dragged-out, extended, lengthy, lingering, permanent, perpetual, prolonged, protracted, stretched, sustained, unbroken, unrelenting

Short – brief, clipped, cursory, ephemeral, fleeting, fragile, fugitive, glancing, quick, short-lived, staccato, sudden, swift, temporary, transitory

Texture

Adjectives – brassy, chiming, dull, fizzing, fluttering, full, grating, gravelly, gurgling, hissing, hollow, husky, jangly, mellifluous, mellow, muffled, nasal, raspy, reedy, ringing, rustling, shrill, squelching, thin, tinny

Nouns / Verbs – bang, braying, buzz, clatter, clang, crackle, crash, creak, crinkle, crunch, growl, grunt, knell, peal, rap, resound, siren, slam, smash, thud, toll, wallop, whack, whomp

Vibration

Burbling, clacking, clanking, clattering, crackling, echoing, gurgling, jingling, purring, quavering, quivering, rattling, resounding, reverberating, ricocheting, rippling, rumbling, shivering, shuddering, smooth, throbbing, thrum, tinkling, trembling, warbling, whirring

Harmony / Discord

Discord – atonal, cacophonous, clashing, discordant, flat, grating, jarring, off-key, raucous, sharp, tuneless

Harmony – dulcet, harmonious, in tune, lyrical, melodious, peaceful, tonal, tuneful, unified

Change

Volume – approaching, building, climbing, crescendo, diminuendo, dimming, escalating, fading, growing, heightening, intermittent, receding, reducing

Pitch – falling, inflecting, lifting, modulating, rising, shifting, sinking, varying

Onomatopoeia

Animals – baa, bark, bow wow, bray, buzz, cackle, caw, cheep, chirp, chirrup, cluck, cock-a-doodle-doo, coo, croak, crow, cuckoo, gibber, gobble gobble, growl, grunt, hee haw, hiss, honk, meow, moo, neigh, oink, purr, quack, ribbit, roar, squeak, trumpet, twit twoo, twitter, whinny, woof, yap, yelp, yowl

Other sounds – bang, boom, buzz, chug, fizz, ping, plink, plop, plunk, thud, thump, thwack, ting, whack, whoosh

Music

Type of piece – aria, chord, chorus, composition, concerto, improvisation, jingle, lullaby, medley, melody, note(s), piece, oratorio, refrain, reprise, sonata, song, symphony, tune

Musical genres – alternative, atonal, baroque, bluegrass, blues, classical, commercial, country, dance, disco, drum and bass, dubstep, folk, funk, garage, gospel, grime, grunge, heavy metal, hip hop, house, hymn, jazz, Latin, pop, punk, opera, operetta, rap, reggae, rhythm and blues, rock, romantic, sacred, secular, ska, soul, swing, synthesised, techno, trance, virtuoso

Musical instruments – accordion, bagpipes, banjo, bassoon, bongo, bugle, cello, clarinet, cor anglais, cornet, cymbals, didgeridoo, double bass, drums, dulcimer, euphonium, fiddle, flute, French horn, glockenspiel, gong, guitar, harmonica, harp, harpsicord, horn, hurdy gurdy, lute, lyre, mandolin, marimba, oboe, ocarina, organ, piano, recorder, saxophone, sitar, snare, tabla, tambourine, timpani, tin whistle, triangle, trombone, trumpet, tuba, ukulele, viola, violin, xylophone, zither

Musical terms – arpeggio, beat, cadence, legato, meter, octave, pitch, rhythm, scale, staccato, swing, syncopation, tempo, timbre, tone, volume

Singing – belt out, chant, chorus, croon, hum, intone, quaver, screech, sing, warble, yodel

Speech and Laughter

Speech nouns – address, altercation, argument, chat, consultation, contretemps, conversation, diatribe, discussion, dispute, drivel, exchange, farewell, greeting, lecture, natter, oration, outburst, presentation, rant, sermon, soliloquy, speech, spiel, squabble, tirade, utterance, yarn

Speech verbs – argue, babble, blather, blether, chatter, discuss, explain, expound, garble, gossip, gurgle, jabber, lisp, murmur, prattle, preach, rabbit, ramble, recite, say, shout, stammer, stutter, talk, whisper, yak, yell

Laughter – cackle, chortle, chuckle, giggle, guffaw, laugh, snicker, snigger, snort, titter



General Words

Nouns – aftertaste, bite, dash, drop, hint, flavour, hint, impression, morsel, nip, note, pinch, punch, shred, soupçon, sprinkling, taste, titbit, tot, trickle, zing

Verbs – chew, consume, devour, drink, eat, gorge, gulp, munch, nibble, relish, sample, savour, scoff, sip, swallow, swill, taste

Pleasantness

Pleasant taste – bright, delicate, exquisite, flavoursome, fresh, luscious, luxurious, mellow, mouth-watering, refreshing, rich, rounded, scrumptious, smooth, soft, succulent, tasty

Unpleasant taste – burnt, charred, disagreeable, disgusting, fetid, foul, inedible, insipid, off, rancid, repugnant, rotten, stale, tainted, unpalatable, unpleasant

Strength

Strong taste – bracing, brisk, heady, intense, invigorating, lively, piquant, potent, rich, robust, sparkling, stimulating

Weak taste – bland, dull, flat, flavourless, mild, plain, subtle, tasteless, watery, weak

Sweet

agave, aniseed, apple, banana, berry, blueberry, bubble-gum, butterscotch, candied, caramel, cherry, chocolatey, cinnamon, citrusy, cloying, cola, confection, frosting, fruity, fudge, gingerbread, glacé, grape, honeyed, liquorice, mango, marmalade, marzipan, nougat, peach, pineapple, praline, raspberry, saccharine, sickly, strawberry, sugared, sweet, syrupy, tart, toffee, treacly, tropical, vanilla

Sour

acerbic, acrid, astringent, bergamot, biting, bitter, caustic, citrus, corrosive, lemon, melon, orange, overripe, sharp, sour, stinging, tangerine, tart, wine, zesty

Salty

anchovies, brackish, briny, saline, salted, salty

Bitter

artichoke, aubergine (eggplant), beer, bitter, chicory, cocoa, coffee, dandelion greens, dark chocolate, espresso, ginger, hoppy, kale, malty, mocha, turmeric, vinegar, vinegary, yeasty

Savoury / Umami

fleshy, gamey, meaty, nutty, savoury

Spicy

fiery, garlicky, hot, oniony, peppery, piquant, spicy

Fatty

buttery, cheesy, creamy, eggy, fatty, greasy, lardy, milky, oily, unctuous



SMELL

General Words

Nouns – aroma, balm, bouquet, essence, fragrance, miasma, odour, perfume, pheromone, scent, smell, stench, stink, trace, whiff

Verbs – breathe, gag on, inhale, reek, smell, snort, stink, whiff

Adjectives – fragrant, odourless, perfumed, piquant, scented, smelly

Strength

billowy, bright, brisk, crisp, delicate, heady, heavy, intense, light, permeating, piercing, pure, strong, wispy

Fruity

apple, banana, berry, fruity, full-bodied, mellow, overripe, peachy, ripe, tropical

Citrus

acidic, citrus, lemony, pithy, sharp, tangy, tart, vibrant, zesty, zingy

Flagrant

allspice, aromatic, botanical, cinnamon, floral, flowery, garlicky, gingery, lavender, lilac, peppery, piquant, spicy

Minty

balmy, cooling, fresh, menthol, minty, peppermint, refreshing

Sweet

ambrosial, caramel, chocolatey, cloying, honied, oversweet, sugary, sweet, syrupy

Toasted / nutty

almondy, burning, burnt, buttery, caustic, charred, cheesy, coffee, fiery, incense, nutty, roasted, seared,

smoky, sooty, toasted, yeasty

Meaty

beefy, cured, fishy, fleshy, gamey, leathery, rancid, rotting

Woody

briny, camphor, cedar, damp, earthy, grassy, herbal, humid, loamy, marshy, mossy, mouldy, muddy, petrichor, piney, rosemary, sandy, weedy

Metallic

coppery, metallic, tinny

Chemical

ammonia, antiseptic, chalky, chemical, fummy, gassy, intoxicating, medicinal, plastic, rubbery, synthetic, vaporous, vinegary

Pungent

barnyard, doggy, eggy, fermented, festering, fetid, foul, funky, fusty, mildewy, musty, nauseating, noxious, pungent, putrid, rank, reeking, repulsive, skunky, slimy, stale, sweaty



TOUCH

General Words

Verbs – caress, brush, clamp, clasp, clutch, cuddle, daub, grasp, grip, infuse, lather, nudge, nuzzle, permeate, rub, saturate, scrub, squeeze, stroke, submerge, swab, touch

Adjectives – distinct, palpable, perceptible, tangible

Solidity

bendable, brittle, concrete, congealed, cotton-wool, dainty, delicate, durable, firm, fleshy, flexible, flint, fluid, fragile, frail, gaseous, gooey, hard, hefty, impervious, inflexible, jellied, malleable, molten, mushy, pappy, pliant, pulpy, rickety, rigid, robust, runny, soft, solid, spongy, springy, squashy, squelchy, squidgy, stocky, stretchy, strong, sturdy, supple, swampy, threadlike, weak

Texture

bearded, bejewelled, bespangled, bumpy, bushy, cottony, covered, craggy, drenched, feathery, filmy, fizzy, fleecy, fluffy, foamy, fretted, frilly, furry, fuzzy, gauzy, glossy, gossamer, greasy, knobbly, jagged, lacy, lavish, lumpy, luscious, moist, oily, opulent, papery, prickly, puffy, rocky, rough, rubbery, rugged, satiny, scrubby, scruffy, sequined, serrated, shaggy, sharp, silky, slick, smooth, spiky, spiny, sticky, stony, stringy, tacky, thorny, velvety, webbed, whorled, willowy, wispy, woolly

Weight

airy, bulky, clunky, cumbersome, dense, flimsy, heavy, hefty, hulking, insubstantial, leaden, light, weightless

Vibrations / Movement

babbling, billowing, bubbling, electric, flailing, flowing, jolting, oscillating, popping, rippling, still, throbbing, trickling, turbulent, vibrating



OTHER SENSES

Heat

blistering, boiling, brisk, burning, chilly, choking, cold, cool, crisp, feverish, flushed, freezing, frosty, hot, icy, invigorating, nippy, numbing, oppressive, radiant, searing, simmering, singeing, sizzling, smouldering, stifling, stuffy, warm

Atmosphere

airless, airy, arid, balmy, blustery, breezy, close, constrictive, damp, dank, dehydrated, desiccated, dewy, drafty, dry, foggy, gusty, humid, mild, misty, moist, muggy, murky, oppressive, parched, refreshing, soothing, steamy, stormy, suffocating, sultry, sweaty, windy

Pain

Adjectives – aching, acute, aggravating, battered, biting, blistering, bloodied, bruised, caustic, chronic, convulsing, deep, excruciating, fiery, flaring, gnawing, grumbling, heavy, intense, mild, nagging, needling, penetrating, raw, searing, shallow, sharp, shooting, singeing, smarting, soothing, stabbing, stinging, skewering, tender, throbbing, tingling, torrid, twisting, wounded

Nouns – abrasion, ache, bite, blister, break, bruise, convulsion, cramp, cut, discomfort, fracture, gash, irritation, itch, laceration, migraine, pang, pustule, scar, scrape, scratch, spasm, sting, tenderness, throb, twinge, welt, wound

Verbs – aggravate, break, bruise, chafe, cringe, cut, damage, flinch, fracture, gnaw, gouge, graze, grimace, injure, mollify, puncture, quell, recoil, shudder, soothe, squirm, sting, subdue, tense, throb, twinge, twitch, wince, wound, writhe

Balance

afraid, calm, distress, edgy, feverish, fidgety, flustered, frantic, fretful, jittery, malaise, off-balance, peaceful, relaxed, restless, spooked, unease, uptight

Effort / Energy

back-breaking, calming, easy, energetic, fatigued, gruelling, hard, laboured, lacklustre, languid, leaden, lethargic, lifeless, listless, onerous, punishing, relaxing, rigorous, sluggish, strenuous, taxing, tiring, torpid, wearying



ENDNOTE

Bio:

This resource has been created by Matt Kendrick. Matt is a writer, editor and teacher based in the East Midlands, UK. His short fiction has been widely published both online and in print. He has been placed or listed in various writing competitions including Bath, Flash 500, the Oxford Flash Fiction Prize, Reflex and Leicester Writes. His work has been included on the Biffy 50 list for 2019-20, in Best Microfiction 2021, Best Small Fictions 2022 and the Wigleaf Top 50 list for 2022. He has also been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize.

Other Resources:

For links to other free resources, please visit my website: <https://www.mattkendrick.co.uk/resources>

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