



Sensory Details

Sensory details use the five senses (sight, touch, sound, taste, and smell) to add depth of detail to writing. Although sensory details are most commonly used in narratives, they can be incorporated into many types of writing to help your work stand out. Sensory details are powerful and memorable because they allow your reader to see, hear, smell, taste, or feel your words.

Type of Sensory Detail	Vague Sentence	Vivid Sentence	Explanation
Sight (color, shape, appearance)	The sky was blue.	The sky was a bright blue, like the color that stains your teeth after drinking a blue raspberry slushy.	Blue can be used to describe many shades of colors, so simply saying blue gives the reader a category of color. Explaining a similar color helps the reader know exactly what shade of blue because the sky varies in color.
Touch (textures)	The rock was rough.	The coarse rock was rough against my palm; it felt as if it was coated in sandpaper.	“Rough” is a very vague description that could be interpreted in many different ways by the reader. The added detail specifies the definition of rough used as well as a similar known texture.
Sound	The music sounded nice.	From the very first jazzy note, the whole room couldn’t help swaying along to the irresistible beat.	A lot of music sounds “nice.” The added detail of the type of music and energy in the room lets readers know exactly what kind of music you are describing.



Type of Sensory	Vague Sentence	Vivid Sentence	Explanation
Taste	The candy was sour.	My taste buds recoiled from the sudden tartness, drawing my lips into a pucker.	Just saying “sour” does not fully describe the painful experience of eating a candy that is exceptionally sour.
Smell	I smell something weird.	The odor attacked my nostrils; It was a disgusting mix of rotten eggs, wet dog, and dirty diapers.	“Weird” could describe numerous unusual smells. The added detail in the second sentence specifically describes the scent of the smell and just how terribly smelly it is.

What to Avoid

Too many adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns. Retain only the most powerful words in your writing, deleting any unnecessary words.

- The tiny, fluffy, soft, furry cat made a cute, weird, funny sound. ⇨ The tiny, fluffy cat made a cute sound.

⇒ **Explanation:** Reducing the amount of adjectives used to describe “cat” and “sound” creates a more specific image, concrete image.





Too many adverbs

Adverbs are descriptors applied to adjectives, verbs, or other adverbs. Verbs are stronger than adverbs.

- The dog chewed his food rapidly. \Rightarrow The dog devoured his food.
 - \Rightarrow **Explanation:** The wording of “chewed rapidly” only implies that the dog ate quickly. It does not add a deeper level of detail to the picture. Using “devoured” instead of “chewed rapidly” is a more specific image. It tells your reader that the dog was both extremely hungry and ate quickly.

Clichéd figures of speech

Overused language signals a lack of imagination in your writing. To keep readers engaged, you must present new and interesting language.

- She had eyes on the back of her head. \Rightarrow She must have been using echolocation, like a bat or a dolphin. That is the only way she would know Ricky and I were cheating on the test.
 - \Rightarrow **Explanation:** This wording is fresh compared to the cliché phrase, so it catches the reader’s attention and causes them to think more about your writing.

Further Assistance: For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library or call 815-836-5427.