

Writing With The Senses – Session 3

BALANCE

Okay, we've looked at narrative description and how to layer sensory data into that. We've peeked into dialogue, and added some to the tags and surrounding POVs. Now, we have to find 'balance.'

Just like every writer is different, so is every editor. Therefore, here's where the "art" comes in, it's not a science... it's a matter of style, personal signature, and frankly, what your editor will accept (what his/her style is—that's important to know.)

Here are a few tips on dialogue, but POV is in here too (as dialogue and POV go hand in hand):

DIALOGUE

1. When writing dialogue, I first focus on what the people are feeling (POV) in my head. Are they angry, hot, fearful, exasperated... and ask myself what emotion am I trying to convey? That's critical, because it's going to tell me their tone, body language, where they breaths and rests are in their conversation, expressions, etc. This is the root source of developing sensory layers—because the goal of adding sensory data is to evoke a "mood," and to set a tone for the scene.
2. I next position them in the room or place where this conversation happens (this is narrative description), as this tells me what "props" I have to work with. Map it out like a stage play in your head. Why, because as she folds her arms over her chest, let's say for example, I can play with the elements or what's in the room. I can sprinkle sensory data here, but I don't need as much to belabor the point.
3. Then, and only then, do I begin working on letting the characters verbalize what's in their head... and let them say whatever.

For me, I think one can get caught in the trap of going for snappy dialogue first. The snappy lines will come if you set the mood in your own mind as a guidepost. If you do the dialogue first, then what tends to happen is, everything else becomes a "fit in" and can really seem unbalanced, forced, and unnecessary.

[Example... They will be outside in the woods. They will have a spat that ends in a kiss. Watch where sensory data is sprinkled in. You don't have to be heavy handed or use "all" of the various senses, but enough—balanced—additions to make the reader feel tension.]

Susan leaned against the tree with her arms tightly folded over her chest. Dan was a royal pain in her butt. She would just allow the cool breeze to carry his arrogant words away. The sun was shining, the sky was blue—this man would not be allowed to ruin her day. Nope. She didn't want to hear a thing he had to say.

"All right," he said, letting his breath out hard. "Enough of this."

The nerve of him! She could feel the hard tree bark digging into her back the way she wanted to scratch out his eyes.

"I saw her," she muttered, still looking off into the distance.

"Good, because she saw you, too."

Susan unfolded her arms and pushed away from the tree. "What's that supposed to mean!"

She eyed Dan with a glare as his boots crunched against the dry leaves, further grating her nerves with each footfall. He stood before her with a sly smile.

"I wanted to send her a message," he said calmly.

"What kind of message?"

She'd meant her voice to sound angrier, firmer, but with him standing so near and his gorgeous brown eyes raking her the way they did, some of the bluster had gone out of her tone. His earthy scent mingled with the wild grasses all around her. She lifted her chin higher and strengthened her resolve.

He stepped closer. This time the crackling leaves beneath his boots set off butterflies in her belly.

"I wanted her to know that you were my choice... and for her to see me leave with you," he murmured.

The low rumble of his voice and his admission stilled her.

"You did?"

He simply nodded and sealed the small gap between them. Heat soaked into her skin as their stomachs met. She could feel each individual block of his well defined abs through his cotton t-shirt. She looked up at him as his hand cupped her cheek. The touch burned where it fell. Her back slowly depressed against the tree as his mouth sought hers. His soft kiss created mild delirium. Her lips soon parted and the gentle probe of his tongue coaxed hers to dance over his teeth. He tasted like the coffee he'd been causally sipping at lunch, and she inhaled that sweet flavor on a quiet gasp only to be duly rewarded with more of his earthy scent. She couldn't exactly remember why she'd been so peeved. All resistance fled her as his warm, hard body fully blanketed her.

"Oh," she whispered. "Then why didn't you just say that?"