

## **Writing With The Senses – Day 1 – March 7<sup>th</sup> Romance Divas On-Line Workshop**

Hi, Everybody...

Welcome to the first on-line evening of the “Writing With The Senses” Workshop. First let me *thank you* all so much for inviting me to be your workshop leader for this week! We’re gonna get down and dirty with this one, so roll up your sleeves☺

Okay, let’s get down to business. The best way to critique your own work is to start off by checking (or circling) every instance within a love scene or battle scene where you have a sensory element. Just go through the scene, line by line, and put a notation over each description type. Is it a visual, sound, taste, touch, or smell type of element that you’re employing? Where do you come out leaning the heaviest? If your hero or heroine is only “seeing” this or that action taking place, then... ooops, you’re missing multiple opportunities, and your readers are only “seeing” the action, too. They aren’t “feeling” it or going for the complete ride the scene could offer.

Why am I using battle or love scenes as the first scene building categories we’ll tackle? Those are the ones that give writers the biggest challenges, because it’s so easy to get caught up in the logistics or props of that scene. Let’s look at key examples.

### EXAMPLE 1 – The Battle Scene:

As writers, we get stuck on punches, blows, shots fired, pivots, fly kicks, body slams, etc. Those are visual backdrops that propel the action, but they don’t lift the scene from the page by themselves.

Slow it down. Dirt has a taste, as does C4. Gun discharges do too. Blood in the air has a sickening stench. Horrible smells put a nasty taste on the palate. If guts are flying... well, ya know there’s a really foul smell that might make a few folks on the battlefield hurl... which also has a result of adding more layers of odors. True terror and adrenaline make the body physically go through changes... cold sweat being one of them, aftermath shakes, nausea, breathlessness... need I go on? Think of the action as the bare frame. Then go back over your scene to add layers.

After you’ve gotten the logistics of the action down, then ask yourself, “Okay, where’s the smell?” If you’re working with frightened horses thundering across the desert... can we get some fetid dust, stinky steeds, hot bodies, shrill whinnies, and fear-drenched sweat? (What does that smell like?) With all this foul stuff in the air, what’s on the characters’ palates, what do the characters “taste?” Fear has a metallic taste. If they get socked in the jaw and bite their tongue, do they taste salty, thick, wetness—blood? Here, in this type of scene, you cannot shy away from bodily fluids and be coy if you want maximum impact. Warfare and fighting isn’t neat and clean, so if you’re gonna have your folks battle, then no half stepping—go for it.

Next, layer in sound. Ask yourself what the true chaos of the fight “sounds” like—and not just the grunts and “ughs,” but the shatter of glass, broken wood tables (in the bar fight), sirens approaching from the cops on the way, footfalls thudding, the pitch of screams and shrieks from

bystanders, do they temporarily go deaf—causing sound to become muffled from a too near explosion (or ringing in the ears?)—do whatever you have to do to layer in sound like you're making a CD.

Then layer in touch/feel... if your hero/heroine is using a blade, if it strikes soft tissue that feels different than if it connects with bone or tendon. The vibration from connecting with something hard travels up the blade. Gunshot is the same. Do they “feel” the report? Is there any “kick back” when they fire? Are they *sore* after all this fly kicking and rolling in the dirt? I think you get the point.

### EXAMPLE 2 – The Love Scene:

Ah... romance. The most important element of the quintessential love scene is anticipation, which is your tension line. You cannot create tension easily from a one dimensional perspective, sight. Your lovers can “see” each other... but what happens after that should set off every layer of the five senses for ‘your reader.’ What you're building is a slow, chemical chain reaction. Here's how...

He saw her walking along the beach. She was gorgeous beyond compare. Her hair was XYZ, her skin ABC, her eyes, 123, and her body that of a goddess. STOP. Okay, the guy is blown away. We “see” what he sees, but let's go deeper. That, like the battle action background, is the framework. Now, layer in the tension. What does seeing his beloved do to him, other than the obvious (smile)?

As the body syncs up with the sightline, skin becomes more sensitive, pupils dilate (but the person looking out of them can't see their own eyes—this has to come from the other party's perspective), breathing becomes shallow, palms sweat, gooseflesh appears (for the ladies), etc. But everything he/she “sees” should have a resultant “feel” (bodily reaction), which connects to what they “hear,” and what they “smell,” and all of that loops back to heighten “their anticipation” of the first physical encounter. As the hero/heroine “falls,” let these layers of sensations drop and ripple like evenly spaced dominoes. Bam, oops, bang... each sense tumbling right into the other seamlessly until your hero/heroine is flat on their back (all puns intended!)

First contact—not anything too naughty... anticipation building is an art ☺ Use the kiss as the most erotic contact... be bold and use EVERY sense. The lips “feel” a certain way, the mouth has soft tissue, enamel (yeah, I'm into teeth cause I write vampire love, okay, smile!), there are surface textures, tastes—not just sweet... salty, what they ate for dinner that's a fusion of tastes, plus something just them... skin tastes... there's a scent, an aroma... is it the Merlot they just consumed (?)... is their skin resplendent with earthy, lavender, jasmine, woody scents—describe their skin as though it were a wine, and use the fragrance each time the hero/heroine encounters the scent away from their lover. If you mark the scent once, then later in the novel, if they get a whiff of it in the supermarket or somewhere innocuous, it ought to mentally ‘send them’ (and your reader) back to the love scene.

Scent is the most powerful of the five senses for inducing memory. Sound, the use of it or absence of it, can build tension... a drip from a faucet can sync up with a pulse, a heartbeat, or a throb. What was once a bustling traffic corner can go stone quiet when the characters see each other—

signifying that the world stops. A well timed sigh, the hitch of breath, the slow expulsion of air, all has a sound, and the slow expulsion (or fast exhale) has a feel—warmth, heat, which radiates through the body, can connect to a shiver to drive another sound = a gasp. Understand? Even sweat has a taste—salty. Use your discretion on other bodily fluids (smile.)

However, without violating any FCC censor issues, you can do a kiss so freakin' erotic by using the five senses that, nary a body part need be named.

So, let's go through those scenes. Label what you have used by sensory type, and where you're missing them, and then add them in. Rework what you've got until you have relative balance, and then re-read your work from the top. You'll watch that battle scene jump off the page, or need oven mitts to hold the paper while going over the love scene. Sensory awareness and involvement is what makes the scene a three dimensional excursion for your reader.

Tomorrow night, anyone not afraid to post a few lines of work, I'll go in and critique, we'll workshop it on line and add the layers to see how we can add depth and texture to what was once a "visual only" scene.

Now get to writing and have a GREAT evening!