

## Sense-Driven Characters: Breathing Life into Personalities

### ### Introduction

Building on our previous lesson on character creation, we'll now explore how to use the five senses - sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch - to breathe life into our characters. By incorporating sensory details, we can create more vivid, relatable, and memorable personalities that truly come alive on the page.

### ### Narrative Outline

1. The Sensory Palette
2. Crafting Sensory Memories
3. Sensory Quirks and Habits
4. The Sixth Sense: Intuition

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### ### Breakdown

#### **\*\*1. The Sensory Palette\*\***

##### **\*\*Elements:\*\***

- Visual cues and appearance
- Auditory signatures
- Olfactory associations
- Gustatory preferences
- Tactile experiences

##### **\*\*Exemplars:\*\***

1. "Eliza's world was a canvas of vibrant colours. She saw music as swirling hues, tasted emotions, and could discern a person's mood by the texture of the air around them. Her synaesthesia wasn't just a neurological quirk; it was the lens through which she experienced life."
2. "For Diego, the world was a symphony of sounds. The soft whirl of his prosthetic leg, the gentle clinking of his dog tags, the rhythmic tapping of his fingers on any available surface - these formed the backdrop of his existence, a constant reminder of his past and present."
3. "Amina's hijab was more than just a symbol of her faith; it was a sensory comfort. The soft fabric against her skin, the subtle scent of jasmine from her mother's perfume that lingered on it, the whisper of material when she moved - all grounded her in moments of uncertainty."

#### **\*\*2. Crafting Sensory Memories\*\***

**\*\*Elements:\*\***

- Childhood sensory experiences
- Traumatic sensory triggers
- Comforting sensory associations
- Cultural sensory connections

**\*\*Exemplars:\*\***

1. "The acrid smell of smoke instantly transported Jack back to that fateful night. His hands shook, phantom heat licked at his skin, and the sound of crackling flames filled his ears. Even years later, a simple campfire could trigger the memories of the fire that claimed his family."
2. "Nana's kitchen was a sensory wonderland for young Mei. The warmth of the oven, the rhythmic thud of the rolling pin, the sweet aroma of red bean paste, the sticky texture of rice dough between her fingers - these memories were more vivid than any photograph."
3. "For Alejandro, the taste of salted plums would always be bittersweet. It reminded him of lazy summers in his grandmother's orchard, but also of the last day he spent there before leaving his war-torn country. Now, half a world away, each bite was a journey home."

**\*\*3. Sensory Quirks and Habits\*\***

**\*\*Elements:\*\***

- Unique sensory preferences
- Sensory-based coping mechanisms
- Sensory aversions or phobias
- Profession-related sensory skills

**\*\*Exemplars:\*\***

1. "Dr. Samantha Reeves could diagnose certain conditions by scent. Years of experience had honed her olfactory senses to detect the sweet, fruity odour of diabetic ketoacidosis or the musty smell of a fungal infection. Her colleagues joked she was part bloodhound."
2. "Trevor's fingers never stopped moving, always seeking texture. Rough denim, smooth river stones, fuzzy moss - touching, feeling, exploring. It was how he stayed present, how he reminded himself he was real when the world became too overwhelming."
3. "Louisa's misophonia made certain sounds unbearable. The squelch of someone eating an apple or the high-pitched squeak of markers on a whiteboard could send her into a panic. She navigated the world with noise-cancelling headphones and a polite smile, always on guard against the next aural assault."

**\*\*4. The Sixth Sense: Intuition\*\***

**\*\*Elements:\*\***

- Gut feelings and instincts

- Heightened awareness of surroundings
- Emotional intelligence and empathy
- Unexplained knowledge or skills

**\*\*Exemplars:\*\***

1. "Maya couldn't explain how she knew, but she always sensed when a storm was coming. It was more than just reading the clouds or feeling the air pressure change. Something deep in her bones resonated with the approaching tempest, a connection as old as time itself."
2. "As a veteran detective, Rodríguez didn't need to see a crime scene to know something was off. The hairs on the back of his neck would rise, a metallic taste would fill his mouth, and he'd know - this case was different. His colleagues called it a hunch. He called it survival."
3. "Esther had always been able to 'read' people. A slight change in posture, a barely perceptible shift in tone, the briefest flicker of an expression - these tiny cues painted a vivid picture of a person's emotional state. It made her an excellent therapist, but a terrible liar."

**### Vocabulary List**

1. Synaesthesia - a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway
2. Olfactory - relating to the sense of smell
3. Gustatory - relating to the sense of taste
4. Tactile - relating to the sense of touch
5. Auditory - relating to the sense of hearing
6. Visual - relating to the sense of sight
7. Sensory memory - the shortest-term element of memory
8. Trigger - something that initiates a process or reaction
9. Aversion - a strong dislike or disinclination
10. Misophonia - a disorder characterised by negative reactions to specific sounds
11. Proprioception - the sense of the relative position of one's own parts of the body
12. Kinaesthesia - awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body
13. Vestibular - relating to the balance-maintaining functions of the inner ear
14. Hyperosmic - having an abnormally heightened sense of smell
15. Ageusia - the loss of taste functions of the tongue
16. Haptic - relating to the sense of touch, especially involving proprioception
17. Photophobia - extreme sensitivity to light
18. Paresthesia - an abnormal sensation, typically tingling or pricking
19. Phantasmia - the perception of odours that aren't really present
20. Chromesthesia - a type of synaesthesia in which heard sounds automatically and involuntarily evoke an experience of colour

**### Writing Prompt**

Create a character whose perception of the world is dominated by one particular sense. This could be due to a heightened ability in that sense, a deficiency in others, or simply a unique way of processing sensory information. Develop this character by:

1. Describing how they perceive the world through their dominant sense
2. Exploring a memory that showcases how this sensory dominance has shaped their experiences
3. Showing them navigating a challenging situation using their unique sensory perspective
4. Hinting at how this sensory focus affects their relationships and interactions with others

Remember to use rich, specific sensory details to bring your character's world to life. Your goal is to make the reader experience the world as your character does, highlighting both the advantages and challenges of their unique sensory perspective.

### ### Exemplar Response

#### **\*\*The Sound of Colour\*\***

Lila's world was a symphony of colours, each sound painting a vivid hue across her mind's eye. As she stepped onto the busy city street, a cacophony of tints and shades exploded around her. The low rumble of passing cars swirled in deep blues and purples, while the high-pitched chatter of sparrows darted about in quick flashes of yellow and green. A street musician's saxophone poured out in rich, velvety reds that seemed to coat the air itself.

She closed her eyes, letting the colours wash over her. This was how Lila had always experienced the world - through chromesthesia, a form of synaesthesia that turned sounds into colours. Where others heard noise, she saw art.

The memory of her first piano lesson flooded back, unbidden. Seven-year-old Lila, sitting before the imposing instrument, her tiny fingers hovering uncertainly over the keys. "Go on," her teacher had urged, "play any note you like." Tentatively, she'd pressed a key. The note rang out, and with it came a burst of brilliant orange, so vivid and unexpected that Lila had gasped aloud. Her teacher, misunderstanding, had praised her "good ear" for music. But for Lila, it was the beginning of understanding that she experienced the world differently from others.

A sudden discord jolted Lila back to the present - the harsh screech of brakes manifesting as a jarring streak of acid green across her vision. She turned towards the sound, her heightened auditory awareness immediately picking up on the problem: the arrhythmic sputtering of an engine in distress, visualised as sickly brown splotches.

Without hesitation, Lila approached the stalled car. The driver, a middle-aged man, was futilely turning the key, each attempt producing a grating whine of muddy yellows and browns.

"Excuse me," Lila said, "I think I might be able to help." The man looked sceptical but stepped aside. Lila closed her eyes, focusing on the engine sounds. There - amid the chaos of colours, a particular olive-green tone that she associated with a loose timing belt.

"Your timing belt is loose," she explained, opening her eyes. "It's causing the engine to misfire." The man's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "How could you possibly know that just by listening?"

Lila smiled enigmatically. "Let's just say I have a good ear for these things."

As she walked away from the grateful driver, Lila reflected on how her chromesthesia had shaped her life. It had led her to a career as a sound engineer, where her unique perception allowed her to mix audio with an intuition others found almost magical. But it also set her apart, making it difficult to explain her experiences to others. How could she describe the kaleidoscope of colour that was a laughing child, or the soft pastels of a whispered "I love you"?

Her phone chimed - a text message appearing in her mind as a sparkle of silver. It was from her boyfriend, asking about dinner plans. Lila sighed, remembering their recent arguments. He tried to understand, he really did, but there was always a gap between them. How could she make him see that his voice was the most beautiful shade of gold she'd ever experienced?

As she composed her reply, the city's colours swirled around her. A police siren wailed in the distance, streaking crimson across her vision. Lila took a deep breath, cantering herself in this vibrant, noisy, colourful world that only she could truly see. It was beautiful, overwhelming, isolating, and wondrous all at once. But it was her world, and she wouldn't have it any other way.