

## ~GOING BEYOND 5 SENSES ~

**Remember those two hard-to-spell senses I mentioned back when I started this lesson series? Well, now it's time to talk about them.**

The **vestibular sense** provides feedback on our body's balance, coordination, and movement in space. We have vestibular sense organs in the hairs of our inner ears and on the soles of our feet (Yes, really!). These organs sense rotation and changes in balance and send messages to the brain that jump start reflexes that keep us stable or warn us to change position. For example, if we feel ourselves losing balance, our arms shoot out to stabilize us.

The vestibular sense allows us to walk on a balance beam, dance a waltz, or perform the balancing stances in yoga. Overstimulated, this sense can cause dizziness and nausea.

The **kinesthetic or proprioception sense** lets us know how our bones, muscles, and tendons are positioned and moving in space. This sense is located in specialized nerve centers in our tendons, joints, and in certain muscles. This is the sense that allows us to place a part of our body in a position without looking or touching. We use this sense when steering and giving gas in a car while at the same time watching the road or when typing on your computer without looking at the keys.

This sense has both conscious and unconscious elements. For example, if we stand on a slanted surface, our heads automatically tip to keep the horizon horizontal. (Try it!).

How important are these two senses? Without them, we would be little more than puddles on the floor.

### **Sensory Impairment**

Temporary loss or impairment of one or both of these senses can occur for many reasons. In adolescence, when children are growing rapidly, they may not be as smooth in positioning their bodies, making them seem gawky or awkward. Adults with poor proprioception seem clumsy and uncoordinated.

Epilepsy and migraines can make body parts feel like they are heavier or a different size than normal as can fatigue. People who have lost a limb through amputation may still be able to “move” that limb. The aging process also weakens these senses causing older people to be unsteady on their feet and to fall frequently.

These senses are heavily affected by alcohol and drugs. Closing your eyes and touching your nose or walking a line in a sobriety test are examples of this.

At the same time, the vestibular and kinesthetic senses are the ones that allow blind people to navigate their surroundings.

Thought for Writers. These two senses provide a rich resource for writers - especially those writing in close point-of-view. After all, we don't want our characters acting like worms. We want them to move through our scenes in natural, but interesting, ways. So, if you are tired of characters walking, stepping, and turning, think **kinesthetic** and **vestibular**.

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## **DESCRIBING KINESTHETIC AND VESTIBULAR MOVEMENTS**

Probably one of the best methods for describing characters' use of these senses is to take a tip from dramatic performers and use your own vestibular and kinesthetic senses by acting out those movements yourself.

If possible, try to do the movements on a similar surface and wearing similar type clothing as your character. Be conscious of how you find and keep your balance. What does it feel like to climb up stone steps wearing winter snow boots? Or waltz in dew-covered grass wearing sandals? How does your body move differently when the surface underfoot is slippery or uneven or steep?

## **CLOTHING, AND MOVEMENT**

Since our characters rarely walk around naked in a smooth undifferentiated setting (although that sounds like a great start for a sci fi story), examine environmental and clothing elements that limit their ability to move freely.

How does the type of clothing affect the range of your muscle and tendon motions and the awareness of your body in space? Try the types of fabrics and styles of clothing that your characters might wear. Can your hero really fight the enemy in skin-tight jeans? Can your heroine really maintain her balance walking in high heels in mud? What does it feel like to go up steps wearing a Civil War crinoline dress? If you are writing historicals and don't have a clothing collection from the period, check out *The Wearing of Costume* by Ruth M. Green. It's old, but you can still find used copies on Amazon. In this book intended for actors, she describes how clothing from classical Greece and Rome up to 1930s affects the way a person can move his or her body.

## DESCRIBE THE SURFACE

Clothing is one restriction. Environment is another. What's under a character's feet matters. Are they stable? Unbalanced? Are their feet placed in the right position or do they need to shift their weight or readjust their balance? Does an unevenness in the surface affect how they move? All these are important questions to ask as you describe how a character moves through your setting and paying attention to them will add action and a sensory element to the scene. Not only that, it will add originality to your writing as most authors forget to include these senses in their writing.

Adding brief descriptions of how the character is moving is a simple way to deepen point of view. Movements a character makes while talking can be added to dialogue to break up long sections and identify the speaker without saying said over and over.

Describing the surface is extremely important when writing a fight scene for adding realism. Rayne Hall in her book *Writing Fight Scenes* says:

“Location can also make your fight scene realistic. As soon as you mention what kind of ground the combatants are fighting on, the scene gains realistic flavour. What's the ground like: Persian rugs? Concrete? Lawn? Uneven planks of splintered wood? Hard, firm, soft, squishy, muddy, wet, slippery, wobbling, cluttered, sloping? I suggest mentioning the ground twice: once to show how it feels underfoot, and once to show how it affects the fight. Perhaps your heroine slips on the wet asphalt, or stumbles across the edge of a rug.” Hall, Rayne. *Writing Fight Scenes: Professional Techniques for Fiction Authors* (Writer's Craft Book 1) (Kindle Locations 226-230). Scimitar Press. Kindle Edition.

## OUR CHARACTERS AS VERBS

When characters balance and move in space, we need to use active verbs—in particular—transitive verbs. These verbs can add energy to your characters and stories. Transitive verbs are ones that describe something the character does to a person or object. Here is more on [identifying transitive and intransitive verbs](#).

For example: *Hit* is a transitive verb. The sentence “She hit.” does not sound like a complete thought, because as a reader we want to know what she hit. The sentence needs an object to be meaningful. Better “She hit the wall with her fist.” Or here’s another transitive *grasp* -“He grasped.” Better “He grasped the icy-cold, iron bar.”

Action verbs carry pop. You can improve your writing by looking for intransitive verbs and changing them to transitive ones.

**She washed the blood from her arms.** versus **She scoured the gore from her arms.**  
(scoured is transitive, and gore is the object)

Thought for Writers. Writers aren’t the only ones who use verbs. Actors use transitive verbs to work out how they will act out their lines. If you aren’t sure what verbs are transitive or want a resource of active verbs, check out this book: *Actions: The Actors’ Thesaurus* by Marina Caldarone. Actors preparing a scene will sit around a table and identify a verb for each line they will deliver to each other. This helps them know how to move and act. You can do the same for your dialogue tags.

### Watch It in Action

If it is not possible to act out the movements, a good substitute is to watch videos of people moving like your characters do. You can find almost any action on YouTube using simple search terms such as "running" or "climbing a ladder".

Here, for example, is a video I found by searching for "climbing a fire escape" (not something I would ever consider doing myself, by the way. But my characters do it.).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnQFmNg534o>

In the video, it is easy to see how the climber's body finds balance by swinging and reminds me as a writer to include swaying and kicking and twisting of the torso and not just a focus on the hands clinging to the rungs. It also demonstrates how the body movement changes as the climber tires.

Here is what I wrote after watching this.

She seized Hanger's hand, placed her foot flat against the gate and used her momentum to push herself up and over. Her belly scraped across the metal bars, and her shin smashed hard into the iron rail.

Ignoring the pain, she kept one foot on the railing, and flailed around until her sole caught the edge of the sash. Heart banging against her ribs, she pushed up, found a toehold on the top of the window frame, then a projecting brick. With a final tug from Hanger, she flopped up and over, the air whooshing out of her as she landed with all the gracelessness of a hooked fish, her face scraping on the rough tar of the roof as she slid to safety. *Close to the Skin* by Zara West

Adding kinesthetic and vestibular elements to the written description will go a long way to deepening the reality and improving the reader's reading experience.

We can also describe the interaction of our character's bodies with objects in the environment. Notice how in the following example we not only feel the interaction, but also hear it because sound words have been used.

"Off balance, she plunked down on it, or more precisely, on a bag of chips, which crunched ever so finely under her bottom." *Coming Home to You* by M. L. Stelmark in Curtis, Melinda. Harlequin Heartwarming October 2018

## When to Add Kinesthetic and Vestibular Movements

Keeping characters moving is key to keeping reader interest. Movements can be added to almost every scene and paragraph. But there are some spots where movement is especially important. When editing, check these spots and make sure movements are described in terms of balance, flexing of muscles and bones, position in space, surface footing, and clothing limitations.

1. Any time a character goes from one place to another.
2. When a character is handling or moving an object.
3. During a fight scene.
4. During a love scene.

5. If the environment changes in a way that forces the character to move, such as a sudden rain or a falling tree.
  6. Any time the character changes position - gets up, lies down, etc.
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## **Movement Resources for Writers**

[Body Types and Movement](#)

[Clinical Terms for Body Movements](#)

[Direction Word List](#)

[How the Body Moves](#)

[Movement in Drama](#)

[Physiology of Body Movements](#)

[Up and Down Movement Words](#)

[Word List of General Movements](#)

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## **BEYOND THE SEVEN SENSES**

Scientists have proposed several other senses which are beyond the scope of this course. However, being aware of them can provide another resource of sensory elements to add to a scene. Here are some of them:

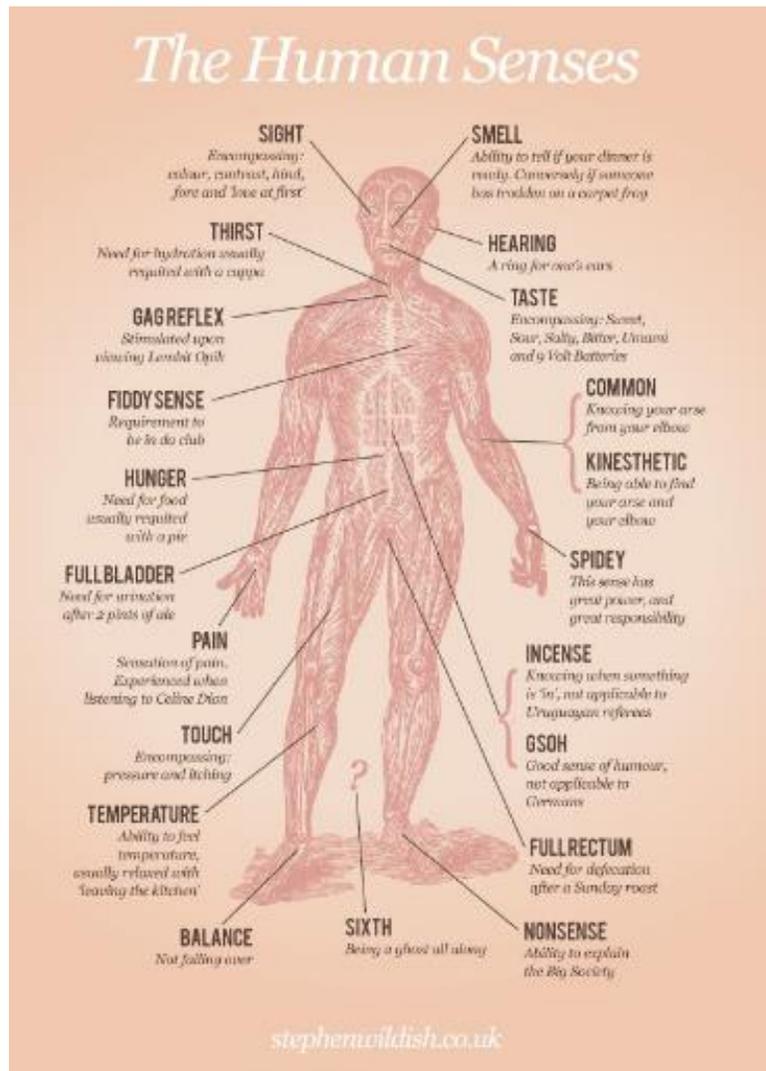
**Thermoception** – temperature perception i.e. knowing if something hot or cold.

**Chronoception** – a sense of time

**Electroception** – perceiving electrical fields i.e. hairs raising or skin crawling in the presence of electrical charges

**Pain** – damage to nerve endings in our skin or internal organs sends signals to our brain so we can take immediate action.

As the chart below shows, hunger, thirst, a full bladder and other visceral feelings can also be considered senses.



## EXERCISE 7

Act out a movement for one of your characters. If possible, dress in a similar way.

Based on the experience, write a brief description (2 to 3 sentences) of the character's action from the character's Point of View and using action verbs with pop.

Thursday will be our last lesson. I will talk about ways to combine the senses and provide some useful tools for revision of your work.

I would be happy to do a sensory critique of one chapter for each participant.

If you wish, you can send me your chapters privately starting today at

[zarawestworkshops@gmail.com](mailto:zarawestworkshops@gmail.com) Or if you prefer, you can send it after

Lesson 8.

If you do not have a chapter, I will look at any piece of your writing up to two thousand words or so.

Note: I will only be giving feedback and suggestions on the sensory elements in your piece. If you have specific sensory questions or areas you want help on let me know.

Looking forward to reading your work. 😊