

Setting Is More Than a Place

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How would your character perceive the space?

- Action— no time for a character to take in all the details
- If character is in an altered state/experiencing trauma or flashback, only certain details will ever be anchored for them.
 - Discordant sounds and smells become more important.
 - Character might focus on one thing. That engagement becomes the “setting.”
- Characters may only notice things of interest to them
 - What a character does/doesn't notice can be useful character development.
- Sometimes the revelation of the setting is a major plot point or point of dramatic tension (setting as a character).
 - A setting involves all the senses and things most emotionally critical to the character.
- Smells too often neglected when smells are actually the closest linked to memory
- Music, background noise, echoing, thin walls, natural sounds
- Tactile senses— temperature, textures, character's physical comfort
- Food and drink—Specific to region, to class, to occasion
- The feelings a place can trigger in the character more important than wall color

- Creative descriptions
- Making use of the reader's preconceptions to fill in space
- Avoid stereotypes unless they advance the plot
 - Tips for finding the details that matter
- Visit a place similar to the one you're trying to describe and close your eyes.
- If working from research, try to find elements and experience them.
- Learn your foods and drinks by actually trying/making them.
- What would annoy/delight your character? Give those things emphasis.
- Let the setting open up as character spends time in it, instead of beginning with a block of text that lists all the particulars.
- Use "widely known" elements as a backdrop to the character's specific observations.