

The Pen Picture

Getting the Story · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

I think you should give your readers a pen picture of *. Here's my standard advice on this important part of good writing. For a person, describe him or her. Give readers aspects to imagine in their mind's eye.

- Age
- Height (not "tall" or "short" but the measurement, perhaps both metric and imperial)
- Build
- Clothes
- Lined / unlined face
- Accent
- Glasses
- Jewellery
- Facial expressions
- Eyes, eyebrows
- Hands (long fingers, paint-covered, dirt-covered, whatever)
- Body language
- Hair color and style
- Skin tone
- Facial hair (beard, moustache, side-levs)
- General demeanor (smiling, sad, laughing, polite, shy, angry)

Not all of these aspects, but something other than JUST the words they spoke. You might also describe where the person was at the time of interview (at big desk, in warm kitchen, at workbench).

For a scene, describe it so we readers might feel as if we too are there. Tell us the size of objects such as a 1 metre tall dog weighin 70 kilos - not a "big dog" or worse "a very big dog". Think of your five senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight). Was the thing rough, smooth, brittle? Was there an odour of pine trees? Could you hear engines chugging in the background? Was the telephone red? Add another "sense" if appropriate: time. How long did it take the woman to walk to the fountain or the blacksmith to shoe the horse? It's more enjoyable to read writing that gives concrete pen pictures rather than vague images. Sort of a picture is worth a thousand words, if you know what I mean.

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