

Setting

When describing the setting, concentrate on including everything that is important to the plot—elements that describe the setting of the story overall, but also elements that are more limited to important events in the story. Sometimes this information is very specific, like an hour of the day, or a specific room in a specific building. On the other hand, don't forget to include the general information that is important as well. Is it important that the story takes place in a specific country, or could it really be anywhere? Consider the cultural implications of the setting.

Always include **three main components** when describing the setting:

- **Time**
 - Consider century, year, season, day, hour—anything that is important to the plot
 - Consider the range of the story: does it take place over the course of a few hours, a few days, etc.?
- **Place**
 - Consider broad AND specific physical areas, especially places where **key events** of the plot take place.
- **Circumstances**
 - Consider the geographic, political, environmental, and cultural circumstances that are important to the story. Sometimes they are in the background, but we still see them having an influence on the characters, the plot, or sometimes even symbolism in a story. For instance, if a story takes place in Germany in 1942, then it would be important to mention the circumstances of World War II taking place; it would be important to mention the war when describing the setting. Or, if a story takes place in a Chinese village where they don't value the opinions of women, then it would be important to mention that cultural belief, especially if it impacts the story. Sometimes the important circumstances can be as simple as the weather.

Atmosphere (Mood)

Atmosphere (also called “mood”) is the general feeling the reader gets from a story based on the specific details of the setting. For instance, a character enters a dark, dank, cobweb-infested room and the faint stench of rotten meat on the air. What is the mood? It's scary, terrifying, disgusting, and creepy. Notice these are all **emotion words**. Again, atmosphere is the feeling, the emotion, created by **images** of the setting. An image is a word or phrase that appeals to one of the reader's five senses: sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste. When the author chooses the right images, a distinct mood is created, and the reader's imagination can fill in the rest of the scene.

Consider a scene in a green meadow filled under a blue, cloudless sky. The sweet scent of wildflowers wafts lightly on a gentle, cool breeze. Does your mind fill in some other details? What kind of action would seem appropriate in this kind of setting?