



## EDIT YOUR DETAIL AND DESCRIPTION

When might I need to add more information to my stories?

What do you think of when you hear detail and description mentioned?

What characterizes a piece of writing that is not descriptive?



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What to look for when evaluating your writing for detail and description

- general words to specific words

- abstract words to definite words

- solely sight-based writing to include sense-based writing

- figurative language



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- eliminate clichés

### Assignment – Detail and Description

- Put a square around every noun in your piece.
- Then with each noun you identify, ask yourself is it specific or is it general.
- Put an S or a G next to each to mark it as specific or general.
- If the noun has an adjective(s) attached, put parentheses around the adjective.
- Don't stop to change it now. Go through the entire story first.
- Then go back and try to come up with better, more specific nouns to replace the general ones.
- Look for places to show rather than state abstract words.
- Determine what senses you've used in your piece.
- If your piece does not include sound, taste, touch, or smell, try to add references to the other senses in a natural way.
- Examine your text for any figurative language.
- If you don't have any, add some. If you have too much, delete some.
- Post what you learned about your writing in this exercise in this lesson's comments section.

*When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago  
Prologue, pages 3-4

There are guavas at the Shop & Save. I pick one the size of a tennis ball and finger the prickly stem end. It feels familiarly bumpy and firm. The guava is not quite ripe; the skin is still a dark green. I smell it and imagine a pale pink center, the seeds tightly embedded in the flesh. A ripe guava is yellow, although some varieties have a pink tinge. The skin is thick, firm, and sweet. Its heart is bright pink and almost solid with seeds. The most delicious part of the guava surrounds the tiny seeds. If you don't know how to eat a guava, the seeds end up in the crevices between your teeth.

When you bite into a ripe guava, your teeth must grip the bumpy surface and sink into the thick edible skin without hitting the center. It takes experience to do this, as it's quite tricky to determine how far beyond the skin the seeds begin.

Some years, when the rains have been plentiful and the nights cool, you can bite into a guava and not find many seeds. The guava bushes grow close to the ground, their branches laden with green then yellow fruit that seem to ripen overnight. These guavas are large and juicy, almost seedless, their roundness enticing you to have one more, just one more, because next year the rains may not come.

As children, we didn't always wait for the fruit to ripen. We raided the bushes as soon as the guavas were large enough to bend the branch.

A green guava is sour and hard. You bite into it at its widest point, because it's easier to grasp with your teeth. You hear the skin, meat, and seeds crunching inside your head, while the inside of your mouth explodes in little spurts of sour.

You grimace, your eyes water, and your cheeks disappear as your lips purse into a tight O. But you have another and then another, enjoying the crunchy sounds, the acid taste, the gritty texture of the unripe center. At night, your mother makes you drink castor oil, which she says tastes better than a green guava. That's when you know for sure that you're a child and she has stopped being one.

I had my last guava the day we left Puerto Rico. It was large and juicy, almost red in the center, and so fragrant that I didn't want to eat it because I would



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lose the smell. All the way to the airport I scratched at it with my teeth, making little dents in the skin, chewing small pieces with my front teeth, so that I could feel the texture against my tongue, the tiny pink pellets of sweet.

Today, I stand before a stack of dark green guavas, each perfectly round and hard, each \$1.59. The one in my hand is tempting. It smells faintly of late summer afternoons and hopscotch under the mango tree. But this is autumn in New York, and I'm no longer a child.

The guava joins its sisters under the harsh fluorescent lights of the exotic fruit display. I push my cart away, toward the apples and pears of my adulthood, their nearly seedless ripeness predictable and bittersweet.

Notes: