

Hi! Welcome to "Form into Fiction: Translating Texture into Words." I'm JT Lachausse, a writer and graduate student at the University of California in Riverside. This program was made possible thanks to the Max H. Gluck Foundation.

Today we're going to discuss how to write texture. Texture is information gained through feeling. Texture is also the expectation of what something might feel like. Look at the colorful background on this slide. What do you see? What do you think this might feel like? Would you make a blanket from this material? Why or why not?

In this program we'll explore different definitions of texture and how to write them so that we can describe our tactile experiences. You will need a piece of paper and a writing tool for the following exercises.

The ► "triangle" symbol indicates an interactive component. Please pause when you see the ► symbol to answer the question or complete the prompt.



1) the quality of something that can be decided by touch

— "Sandpaper has a **rough** texture."

— "The dog's fur had a **fluffy** texture."

The most common definition of texture is this: "Texture is the quality of something that can be decided by touch." The key word is "quality." When we describe the texture of something, we are describing the quality of that thing received through touch.

Here is an example of this definition in a sentence: "Sandpaper has a rough texture." In this sentence, the word "rough" describes the quality of the sandpaper. But why do we describe the sandpaper as "rough"? Because usually, when we rub our fingertips across sandpaper, the quality — or the tactile experience — is rough. When we use the word "tactile," that just means "as related to touch."

Here is another example of the definition in a sentence: "The dog's fur had a fluffy texture." In this sentence, the word "fluffy" describes the quality of the dog's fur. Of course, not all dogs have fluffy fur. This is why we write texture: to clarify the quality of something as opposed to other things. While most sandpaper feels rough, not all dogs have fluffy fur. Some dogs have prickly fur. Other dogs have lumpy fur. But the quality of the dog's fur in this sentence is fluffy.



Once we experience the tactile quality of something, we can expect things that look similar to feel the same way.

Look at the two images above. Without naming these two surfaces, you can probably predict what each surface might feel like. That's because your brain remembers textures that you've felt before. Once you've experienced the quality of a brick wall, you can expect other brick walls — or things that look like a brick wall — to feel hard, dry, and gritty.

The same logic applies for the second image. Because you've probably experienced the feeling of sheets and pillows, you can look at the image on the right and expect — even though you can't actually feel them — that the surface is fluffy, soft, and smooth.

From The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

"Mary had not noticed it before, but she looked up and saw it. It was a curtain of **soft** silk hanging over what seemed to be some picture."

> "She thought she saw something sticking out of the black earth—some **sharp** little pale green points."

"She bent very close to them and sniffed the fresh scent of the **damp** earth."

Here are a few examples of texture used in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel, "The Secret Garden."

"Mary had not noticed it before, but she looked up and saw it. It was a curtain of soft silk hanging over what seemed to be some picture." In this example, the character Mary sees a curtain of silk and describes the quality as "soft." Notice how Mary hasn't touched the curtain. She looks at it and predicts what the curtain probably feels like. This is because Mary has likely experienced a similar surface before. She can predict that the silk curtain will feel soft.

Here is the second example: "She thought she saw something sticking out of the black earth—some sharp little pale green points." In this example, Mary notices something "sharp," but she doesn't know what that "something" is yet. Even though Mary doesn't know what she's looking at, she has likely seen and felt things that are sharp before. Because of this previous experience, when Mary sees the "points," she can predict that the tactile quality will be sharp.

Our last example is similar: "She bent very close to them and sniffed the fresh scent of the damp earth." The quality of the earth is described as "damp." In this sentence Mary does not feel the earth, but she can expect the earth to feel damp because of the way it looks and smells. This is how our brains remember texture. When we experience a surface we've encountered before, we can predict the tactile qualities of that surface.



On this slide we have six surfaces that have different tactile qualities. If you were to close your eyes and run your hand over any of these surfaces, you would be able to understand its tactile quality. Here's something to remember: Texture is something you can learn with your eyes closed.

When you look at the first, second, and third images — the marble, the droplets, and the wall — you can predict what each surface might feel like. The surface of the marble will feel round. The surface of the droplets will feel wet. The surface of the wall will feel cracked. Now let's look at the bottom row of images.

The image of the yellow ducks has the word "rubbery" beneath it. But what if I told you that these toy ducks were actually made out of stone? That would change your expectation of the tactile quality. Now you might describe the texture of the yellow ducks as "hard" or "rough." The same applies for the next image. The word "fuzzy" is written beneath the tennis ball, so you can expect that the surface will feel fuzzy. But what if I told you that the tennis ball was actually made out of paper? Our expectations play an important role in how we perceive texture. If you were to construct a tennis ball entirely out of paper, then you might want to clarify that unique quality. We write texture to clarify the quality of something as opposed to other things AND things that look similar.

► Let's look at the photo of the leaves on the bottom-right. What do you expect these leaves to feel like? If you were to put a leaf in your hand and then close your hand into a fist, what would the leaf feel like? That expectation is your memory at work.



Look at this photo of honey being poured. If you were to stick a finger into the bowl of honey, what do you expect the honey would feel like?

► Finish the two sentences on the right with a texture description chosen from the words on the left. Use each word only once. Try to choose a texture description that most people would expect.



Here is a list of texture words that you might use to describe the feeling of a surface.

► For practice, place your fingertips onto the shirt you're currently wearing. What words here could describe the tactile experience of your shirt? There might be several words that can describe the feeling.

► Now look across the room and find a random object. Instead of picking up the object and feeling its surface, imagine what the surface feels like. Choose a word or two that expresses the tactile experience of that surface. Now pick up the object and feel its surface. Were your descriptions correct?

▶ What other words can be used to describe surface textures? Write a few down.

<u>Prompt #1a:</u> Close your eyes and imagine you are holding a rabbit. Write one sentence describing how the rabbit feels. Use at least two texture words.

OR

<u>Prompt #1b:</u> Close your eyes and imagine you are walking barefoot on the beach. Write one sentence describing how the sand feels. Use at least two texture words.

► Now let's practice writing texture descriptions. Choose one of the following prompts.

Prompt #1a: Close your eyes and imagine you are holding a rabbit. Write one sentence describing how the rabbit feels. Use at least two texture words.

Prompt #1b: Close your eyes and imagine you are walking barefoot on the beach. Write one sentence describing how the sand feels. Use at least two texture words.

If you'd like, you can revisit the word bank on the previous slide.

texture

2) the way that food feels when you are eating it — "Fried foods have a **rough** texture."

— "The tomato soup had a **creamy** texture."

Another definition of texture is this: "Texture is the way that food feels when you are eating it." The key word here is "feels," as opposed to how something tastes. When we describe the texture of something we're eating, we are not describing the flavors. Flavor descriptions use the taste senses. Instead, we are using our feeling senses to describe the quality of food or beverages inside of our mouths or against our hands.

Here is an example of this definition in a sentence: "Fried foods have a rough texture." In this sentence, the word "rough" describes the quality of the fried foods. Just as we described sandpaper as "rough," we usually describe the quality of fried foods — or the tactile experience — as being rough. Remember, we are only describing the feeling of food or liquids, not the taste.

Here is another example of the definition in a sentence: "The tomato soup had a creamy texture." In this sentence, the word "creamy" describes the quality of the tomato soup. You can experience the creaminess of the tomato soup through your fingertips or inside of your mouth. Not all tomato soups are creamy, however. Some tomato soups have a chunky texture. But the quality of this tomato soup is creamy. As stated before, this is why we write texture: to clarify the quality of something as opposed to other things and things that look similar.



As we've stated before, once we experience the tactile quality of something, we can expect things that look similar to feel the same way.

Look at the two images above. Although you are not eating or feeling the foods above, you can probably predict what each surface might feel like. Once you've experienced the quality of a tangerine, you can expect other tangerines — or things that look like a tangerine — to feel juicy, chewy, and squishy. Notice how we aren't using the word "taste." A tangerine might taste sweet or sour, but those sensations are experienced through the taste buds. We are focusing on texture through feeling.

The same logic applies for the second image. Because you've probably experienced the feeling of a cracker, you can look at the image on the right and expect — even though you aren't actually eating them — that the surface is dry, crunchy, and crumbly.

From The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

"I'll bake 'em a **crusty** cottage loaf."

"You are full to the brim with ... richly frothed new milk."

Here are a couple examples of food and beverage texture used in "The Secret Garden."

"I'll bake 'em a crusty cottage loaf." In this example, the character predicts the texture she wants for the loaf. Notice how the loaf hasn't been baked yet. The character wants a specific texture — a crusty texture — for the cottage loaf. This is because the baker has likely experienced a crusty loaf texture before, and her tactile memory of that surface is pleasing. Notice how she doesn't describe the taste of the loaf — only the texture.

Here is the second example: "You are full to the brim with ... richly frothed new milk." In this example, the character describes something that has already been consumed: the "richly frothed" new milk. "Frothed" is another way of saying "to make foamy," so the character remembers that the milk was really foamy. This is a useful description because we might've assumed that the milk was "smooth" or "lumpy" without it.



Here we have six surfaces that have different tactile qualities. Even though these are foods and beverages, they still have surfaces that we can experience. If you were to poke your finger into any of these surfaces, you would be able to understand its tactile quality. Remember: Texture is something you can learn with your eyes closed.

When you look at the first, second, and third images — the soda, the cake, and the pizza — you can predict what each surface might feel like. We see bubbles inside the soda, so the surface of the soda will feel bubbly. We see the crumbles on top of the cake, so the surface of the cake will feel crumbly. We see the grease shining on top of the pizza, so the surface of the pizza will feel greasy. Now let's look at the bottom row of images.

The image of the steak has the word "tender" beneath it. But what if I told you that this steak was firm? That would change your expectation of the tactile quality. Now you might describe the texture of the steak as "hard" or "tough," since the meat is cooked to be firm. The same applies for the next image. The word "creamy" is written beneath the ice cream, so you can expect that the surface will feel creamy when you touch it or eat it. But what if I told you that the ice cream was actually frozen solid? Then you might describe the ice cream as "crunchy" or "hard."

► Let's look at the photo of the pasta on the bottom-right. What do you expect the pasta to feel like? If you were to scoop the pasta into your hand and then close your hand into a fist, what would the pasta feel like? That expectation is your memory at work.



We looked at this photo of honey earlier, but now the words and sentences have changed. If you were to take a bite of the honey, what would the substance feel like?

► Finish the two sentences on the right with a texture description chosen from the words on the left. Use each word only once. Try to choose a texture description that most people would expect.



Here is a list of texture words that you might use to describe the texture of a food or beverage.

► For practice, try to remember your most recent meal. What words here could describe the tactile experience of your meal? There might be several words that can describe the feeling.

► Now imagine your favorite food or beverage — if your previous meal was your favorite food, imagine another meal. Choose a word or two that expresses the tactile experience of that food or beverage.

► What other words can be used to describe food or beverage textures? Write a few down.

<u>Prompt #2a:</u> Close your eyes and imagine you are chewing on a cookie. Write one sentence describing how the cookie feels. Use at least two texture words.

OR

<u>Prompt #2b:</u> Close your eyes and imagine you are drinking a milkshake. Write one sentence describing how the milkshake feels. Use at least two texture words.

► Now let's practice writing texture descriptions for food or beverages. Choose one of the following prompts.

Prompt #2a: Close your eyes and imagine you are chewing on a cookie. Write one sentence describing how the cookie feels. Use at least two texture words.

Prompt #2b: Close your eyes and imagine you are drinking a milkshake. Write one sentence describing how the milkshake feels. Use at least two texture words.

If you'd like, you can revisit the word bank on the previous slide.

texture

1) the quality of something that can be decided by touch

— "Sandpaper has a **rough** texture."

2) the way that food feels when you are eating it — "Fried foods have a **rough** texture."

Before we move on to our third and final definition for texture, let's revisit our previous definitions.

The most common definition of texture is this: "Texture is the quality of something that can be decided by touch." An example of this definition used in a sentence is, "Sandpaper has a rough texture."

Our second definition of texture is this: "Texture is the way that food feels when you are eating it." An example of this definition used in a sentence is, "Fried foods have a rough texture."

texture

3) an identifying quality

- "That was a **rough** game."
- "The man had a dry sense of humor."

We use the word "feeling" to describe information that we receive through touch. But we also "feel" things at an emotional level. Our feelings — or our feelings about things — are sometimes described with texture words.

Our third definition for texture is this: "Texture is an identifying quality." Let's look at the first example of this definition in a sentence: "That was a rough game." In this sentence, the person speaking feels that the game was "rough." Why do you think this person used the word "rough" to describe the quality of the game? When we touch something that is "rough," the surface tends to be uneven, irregular, or sometimes unpleasant. Sometimes we use tactile language to describe the quality of something that cannot literally be touched. When we say a game is "rough," what we're saying is that the game was irregular or maybe unpleasant to watch.

Here is another example of the definition in a sentence: "The man had a dry sense of humor." When we touch something that is "dry," the surface tends to be hardened or lacking moisture. But when we say that someone had a "dry" sense of humor, we aren't saying that their humor was literally moistureless. Instead, we're clarifying that the humor was "hard" — stiff, rigid — and "without moisture." We identify things that have moisture as "soft" or "squishy," like a tangerine. But the man's sense of humor was the opposite, being without moisture or "dry," like a piece of toast. Remember, we often write texture to clarify the quality of something as opposed to other things.



When we hear a bird chirping a song, people will often describe the voice as smooth, soft, or tender. These are texture words applied to qualify the experience. The bird's voice is not literally smooth or tender, as we cannot feel the chirping itself. But the effect on our ears — the way our bodies feel or react to the chirping — is soft and tender, because our bodies relax at the sound. When we hear sounds that are hard and rough, such as nails against a chalkboard, our bodies become tense or hardened. In this case, we qualify the bird's chirping as "tender" to indicate that it is not rough.

Now look at the image on the right. People will often describe this expression as hard, sharp, or prickly. The woman's gaze is not literally sharp or prickly, of course, but the shape of her eyes has taken the form of something that is sharp or prickly—they have narrowed. Because we often describe things to identify what they are not, we can say that her eyes did not become "softened" or "rounded." And because we associate narrow things with sharp or prickly surfaces, such as the tip of a pencil, we call expressions such as this one "sharp" or "prickly."

From The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

The **soft** drone of her voice.

"She had not expected him to remember her at all and her **hard** little heart grew quite warm."

Here are a couple examples of texture used as an identifying quality in "The Secret Garden."

"The soft drone of her voice." In this example, the character's voice is described as "soft." The effect on our ears — the way our bodies feel or react to the voice — is comforting and easy, much like the texture of a soft pillow.

Here is the second example: "She had not expected him to remember her at all and her hard little heart grew quite warm." In this example, the word "hard" qualifies the heart as something stiff or rigid, much like a wooden log. Of course, the character's heart is not literally hardened. This tactile expression identifies the quality of her heart as compared to others: stiff, not flexible. But the end of the sentence says that her heart "grew quite warm."

► How might you describe the character's heart after it "warmed" up? What texture words might you use?



We have now seen texture words applied in various ways. Here are a few examples of how the word "soft" can be applied as a texture expression.

The word "soft" in "soft pillows" describes the literal tactile feeling of the pillows. The same use applies for the feeling of biting into a "soft cake." Both suggest that the feeling against your body is comforting, easy, or gentle.

The phrases "soft singing" and "soft smile" also describe the body's reaction to something, but it does not describe a literal tactile experience. Instead, it suggests how the body reacts — or "feels" — to an experience. A "soft" song is relaxing to the ears and a "soft" smile is relaxing to see. That said, they are also relaxing to produce.

► For practice, smile as large as you possibly can. Now give a small smile. Which one felt "softer," or more relaxing, to produce?



Imagine that you are attending a baseball game. If you were to describe the game with a few texture words, what are some examples that might apply?

► Finish the two sentences on the right with a texture description chosen from the words on the left. Use each word only once. Try to choose a texture description that most people would expect.

► Once you've selected your two words, think about an actual surface that feels like your chosen descriptions. How might the experience of the baseball game "feel" like the textures you've chosen?



Here is a list of texture words that you might use to describe a voice, expression, or feeling. A voice might be described as "bubbly" because it goes up and down like a bubbly surface. An expression might be described as "prickly" because the eyes have narrowed. An experience might be described as "rough" because it was unpleasant to watch.

► Now imagine your favorite animal. How does your heart "feel" when you think about this animal? Choose a word or two that expresses the texture experience of that "feeling."

► What other texture words can be used to describe a voice, expression, or experience? Write a few down.

<u>Prompt #3a:</u> Close your eyes and hum a familiar song. Write one sentence describing the texture of your own voice. Use at least two texture words.

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<u>Prompt #3b:</u> Close your eyes and imagine a happy memory. Write one sentence describing the texture of your feelings. Use at least two texture words.

► Now let's practice writing texture descriptions for voices or experiences. Choose one of the following prompts.

Prompt #3a: Close your eyes and hum a familiar song. Write one sentence describing the texture of your own voice. Use at least two texture words.

Prompt #3b: Close your eyes and imagine a happy memory. Write one sentence describing the texture of your feelings. Use at least two texture words.

If you'd like, you can revisit the word bank on the previous slide.



Before we move on to our final writing prompt, let's revisit our definitions.

The most common definition of texture is this: "Texture is the quality of something that can be decided by touch." An example of this definition used in a sentence is, "Sandpaper has a rough texture."

Our second definition of texture is this: "Texture is the way that food feels when you are eating it." An example of this definition used in a sentence is, "Fried foods have a rough texture."

Our third definition of texture is this: "Texture is an identifying quality." An example of this definition used in a sentence is, "That was a rough game."

<u>Prompt #4:</u> What is the texture of your name? What does it feel like when you write it? What does it sound like when you say it? Describe your name with a few texture words and then write a paragraph describing your choices.

► Now that you've explored texture in numerous ways, let's put our skills to the test. Be creative with this one!

Prompt #4: What is the texture of your name? What does it feel like when you write it? What does it sound like when you say it? Describe your name with a few texture words and then write a paragraph describing your choices.

If you'd like, you can revisit the word banks on slide 7, 14, and 22.

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Slide 4/11/19: The Secret Garden, Frances H. Burnett	Slide 6/13: "Honey Sweet Syrup" — Pixabay
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Slide 12: "Macaroni" — Pixabay https://pixabay.com/photos/food-photography-macaroni-pasta-2358902/ Slide 16: Definition "texture" — Merriam-Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/texture

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Sounds: "Page Turn" and "Beep" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjNeNobdMaA

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