

Sheet 13: Creating Tension

Worked example:

Read this sentence: 'The wind howled through the trees as Kit the fox gripped his flashlight, his heart hammering against his ribs.' How does the writer create tension here?

Answer: The writer uses personification ('wind howled') to make the setting sound threatening and describes physical reactions ('heart hammering') to show the character's fear.

- **Read this short paragraph: 'The old floorboards groaned under Nova's feet. Every shadow in the attic seemed to stretch and reach toward her. She held her breath, listening to the silence of the dark house.'**

Identify two words or phrases that make the setting feel spooky.

- **Why does the writer use the word 'groaned' instead of 'creaked' to describe the floorboards?**
- **How does the phrase 'the silence of the dark house' help build tension for the reader?**
- **Rewrite this sentence to make it more tense: 'Leo the lion walked into the cave.' (Hint: Think about sound and how Leo might feel).**
- **If a writer wants to create tension, why is it better to describe a character's racing heart rather than just saying 'they were scared'?**

Self-check: Check your answers to ensure you have identified specific words that affect the reader's mood, rather than just summarising the plot.

Ready for next: Once you can identify how language creates tension, you are ready to learn how writers build complex characters through their actions and dialogue.