

Write Your Novel

Setting

The Fundamental Elements of Setting

1. **Locale.** This relates to broad categories such as a country, county, region, city, town, village, as well as to more specific locales, such as a street, house or school. Other locales can include coast, islands, farms, rural areas, etc.
2. **Time of year.** The time of year is richly evocative and influential in fiction. Time of year includes the seasons, but also encompasses specific periods, such as Christmas, New Year's Eve or Halloween. Significant dates can also be used, such as the anniversary of a death of a character or real person, or the anniversary of an historic event.
3. **Time of day.** Scenes need to play out during various times or periods through day or night, such as dawn or dusk. Readers have clear associations with different periods of the day, making an easy way to create a visual orientation in a scene.
4. **Elapsed time.** The minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months a story encompasses must be somehow accounted for or the reader will feel confused and the story will suffer from a lack of authenticity. While scenes unfold moment by moment, there is also time to account for between scenes, when a flashback is inserted, and when a character travels a long distance.
5. **Mood and atmosphere.** Characters and events are influenced by weather, temperature, lighting, and other tangible factors, which in turn influence the emotional timbre, mood, and atmosphere of a scene.
6. **Climate.** Climate is linked to the geography and topography of a place, and, as in our real world, can influence events and people. Ocean currents, prevailing winds and air masses, latitude, altitude, mountains, land masses, and large bodies of water all influence climate. It's especially important when you write about a real setting to understand climatic influences. Harsh climates can make for grim lives, while tropical climates may create more carefree lifestyles.
7. **Geography.** This refers to specific aspects of water, landforms, ecosystems, and topography in your setting. Geography also includes climate, soil, plants, trees, rocks and minerals, and soils. Geography can create obvious influences in a story like a mountain a character must climb, a swift-running river he must cross, or a boreal forest he must traverse to reach safety. No matter where a

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story is set, whether it's a mountain village in the Swiss Alps or an opulent resort on the Florida coast, the natural world with all its geographic variations and influences must permeate the story.

8. **Man-made geography.** There are few corners of the planet that have not been influenced by the hand of humankind. It is in our man-made influences that our creativity and the destructiveness of civilization can be seen. Readers want visual evidence in a story world, and man-made geography is easily included to provide it. Ensure that your stories contain proof of the many footprints that people have left in its setting. Use the influences of humankind on geography to lend authenticity to stories set in a real or famous locale. These landmarks include dams, bridges, ports, towns and cities, monuments, burial grounds, cemeteries, and famous buildings. Consider too the influences of mankind using the land, and the effects of mines, deforestation, agriculture, irrigation, vineyards, cattle grazing, and coffee plantations.
9. **Eras of historical importance.** Important events, wars, or historical periods linked to the plot and theme might include historic events like the English Civil War, World War II, mediaeval times, the Plague or Covid.
10. **Social/political/cultural environment.** Cultural, political, and social influences can range widely and affect characters in many ways. The social era of a story often influences characters' values, social and family roles, and sensibilities.
11. **Population.** Some places are densely populated, while others are lonely places with only a few hardy souls. Your stories need a specific, yet varied population that accurately reflects the place.
12. **Ancestral influences.** Ancestral influences can be depicted in cuisine, dialogue, values, attitudes, and general outlook.

Source: Writer's Digest