

# Electric Lemons, or Truth is in the Details

from

*Electric Lemons: Interpretation and the Art of Writing*

by Judy Fort Brenneman

*Detail is electric. In writing, detail is everything. It shocks, explodes, illuminates. It electrifies the reader's imagination and sparks a chain reaction of associations.*

—Bonni Goldberg

What do you include? What do you leave out? What do you notice? What do you want your reader to notice?

Details bring the reader more fully into the topic and the experience. Details can also dictate the pace of a passage by slowing down or speeding up the interval between two actions. Detail can create tone, too.

***Compare these two vignettes:***

The doe stood on the hillside. It raised its head and sniffed the air.

The doe stepped out from under the dark canopy of aspen and pine, pausing in the splash of sunlight that warmed the meadow. Cautiously, quickly, she tested the scent first north, then east, before flicking an ear.

We're not using every detail possible—that would be incredibly boring as well as much too long. We are selecting specific details—"electric details"—that blend tangible and intangible to reveal a richer story.

***Try the writing exercise on the next page.***

Visit <https://skysingerpress.com> for more information or to order a copy of *Electric Lemons: Interpretation and the Art of Writing*.

# Electric Lemons, or Truth is in the Details

from

*Electric Lemons: Interpretation and the Art of Writing*

by Judy Fort Brenneman

Try this:

◆ **Examine a fresh lemon.** As quickly as possible, **list at least twenty details** for it. Be exhaustive in your detailing of it. Keep going! Can you do forty? Did you remember to look inside it? Smell it? Roll it around? (Note: details can include associative or intangible details—*lemonade* or *summer at grandma’s house*, for example—as well as concrete, tangible details, such as *yellow*.)

◆ Next, go back over what you’ve written and **pick out the “electric details”**—anything on your list that zings you. Trust your intuition in this. Pay attention to your own reactions as you read through your list. What makes you sit up? breathe faster or hold your breath? smile? bite your lip? exclaim? These physical reactions are *zings*—your brain and body recognizing an electric detail.

◆ Now **write, incorporating your electric details.** You can write about lemons or this specific lemon or about anything else that comes to mind, as long as you include your electric details. This is a rough draft, so don’t worry about verbs or spelling or perfect punctuation. Just use your electric details and see what shows up on the page. Write for a minimum of 30 minutes or three pages (typed or handwritten), maximum of 60 minutes and eight pages.

◆ **Read your draft out loud.** If you’re doing this exercise as part of a class or writing group, read it out loud to the group. (And listen as group members read theirs.)

This exercise works for any object, including objects that are part of an interpretive program. Begin with an exhaustive examination of the object, listing at least twenty details. Select the electric details.

*Then write!*

Visit <https://skysingerpress.com> for more information or to order a copy of *Electric Lemons: Interpretation and the Art of Writing*.