

## Snapshots and Thoughtshots

*A novelist should aspire to be the kind of person on whom nothing is lost. —Henry James*

### What is a “snapshot?”

A “snapshot” helps a writer develop exact detail—especially sensory detail. First, a writer must learn to see details wherever he or she goes. The writer can then use certain tools to bring those details to life in the writing. Whenever you observe or visualize a scene, it may help to think of your eye as a “magic camera,” taking several snapshots of the scene, zooming in on certain details and pulling out to see the entire picture. Snapshots allow the reader to be drawn into the story and for the story to come to life. Snapshots are used when the writer zooms in and looks closely at details. It is especially important to pay attention to more than physical details. Students often focus only on sight, but remember that there are 5 senses that play a part in creating a scene or a mood in a story; appeal to as many senses as possible.

### What does a “snapshot” look like?

I went inside. The smell of hot cocoa flowed throughout the house. The fire crackled in the small red and brown bricked fireplace. My mother was stirring the beef soup. My two-year-old brother was quietly playing with wooden blocks that had little letters carved in them. My father sat playing a slow, sad song on his beautiful country guitar. I took off my parka and hung it on the brass coat rack. My mother gave me a bowl of hot beef soup and cocoa. The broth felt warm running down my throat. The feeling of warmth spread all over me.

### What is a “thoughtshot?”

A “thoughtshot” is just that: a mental picture of a character’s feelings, opinions, thoughts, or reflections. Thoughtshots are designed for the reader to view the mindset of a character. It can be defined as a snapshot that takes place in a character's head (i.e., a *thoughtshot*). When used appropriately, thoughtshots allow the reader to be drawn into the character's life and for the character to become lifelike. A thoughtshot is needed when the story becomes too rooted in the physical and the reader may benefit from some thinking.

### What does a “thoughtshot” look like?

Unpacking even just the few things in her brown suitcase always seemed a waste of time to Gilly. She never knew if she'd be in a place long enough to make it worth the bother. And yet it was something to fill the time. There were two little drawers at the top and four larger ones below. She put her underwear in one of the little ones, and her shirts and jeans in one of the big ones, and then picked up the photograph from the bottom of the suitcase.