Setting the Scene

1. What details are unique to your setting?
Everyone knows what an office looks like, or a spaceship, or a farm, but what makes your office, spaceship, or farm different? List three or four key elements that readers need to know when they enter this setting.

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2. What might readers assume incorrectly about this setting?
If characters walk into a "forest," readers will likely imagine tall, green, trees, birds singing, and sunlight filtering in between the leaves of the canopy. But if your forest is comprised of white crystalline trees that resonate with musical chimes when the wind blows, that's an entirely different forest. Establish details readers won't assume right away so they don't make all the wrong assumptions.

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3. What details are relevant to the scene?
If your protagonist is trying to escape a killer by running into a crowded food court, it's not a good time to describe the overlay of the entire mall. Keep your descriptions to what's nearby and what matters.

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4. What details are relevant to the character?
If your protagonist couldn't tell the difference between a palm tree and a maple tree, they won't be describing the local landscape in meticulous detail. Irrelevant details can either be cut or reworked to show some aspect of the world or character.

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5. How might you describe the setting through action versus explaining what's there?
Pick details that make it clear it's raining without having to say it. If it's raining in a city, show people stepping over puddles on the sidewalk, pulling on raincoats as they leave cafes, and the squeak-thunk of windshield wipers instead of "It was raining when she left work.

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