



For this exercise, we will walk or drive around a neighborhood (yours or someone else's) and take notes. Look outside your window if you are feeling particularly lazy.

1. Who comes and goes?
2. What type of cars pass? How frequently?
3. How upscale or derelict is the neighborhood?
4. Do you see police cars on patrol or parked?
5. What do the houses say about the people who live there?
6. Which yards are well groomed, which ignored?
7. What do the mailboxes, paint choices, yard ornaments, and foliage say about the occupants?
8. How does a particular house make you feel: irritated, enchanted, worried?
9. What can you tell from the outside about the occupants?
10. Are there toys on the lawn or seasonal decorations? Are they elaborate or laughable?
11. Are the newspapers piled up?



12. Can you tell whether someone is home or not?
13. Do they have uncovered windows that allow you to see inside? During the day? At night?
14. Do they have fences or pets?
15. Do they have sliding glass doors?
16. Does anyone sit on their front porch, back deck, or in lawn chairs in their garage?
17. Is there a lot of traffic or a little?
18. Are children playing outside or are children's toys outside?
19. Is the neighborhood welcoming or spooky?
20. How easy is it to attract attention when walking through the neighborhood?
21. Do people look out and see you? Do they wave hello? Do they stay locked inside?
22. Is it one of those places where everyone is gone during the day? Does the dynamic change after 6 p.m.?
23. Is it one of those places where everyone leaves after 6p.m.?



24. Is it close to a park, forest, or other greenspace?

25. Are there signs of wildlife?

26. What other observations stick in your mind as you explore?

Hopefully, this exercise has helped you look at your surroundings in a new way and you can better assist your characters with their detection.

Even if you don't write mysteries, these exercises are a good way to hone your observational skills because every character lives, works, and plays somewhere!

For more information on scene writing visit <http://www.dianahurwitz.com> for free downloads and pick up a copy of Story Building Blocks: The Four Layers of Conflict available in [e-book](#) and [print](#).