

Show, Don't Tell!



Do good writers **tell** stories? No!

Good writers **show** stories.

To **show** a story instead of just **tell** it, you should include details that make the reader feel he is experiencing the story right along with the characters, rather than just hearing about it.

There are several ways to do this - through **dialogue** (you **show** the reader what the characters are saying to each other), through **action** (you **show** what the characters are doing), and through **sensory details** (you help the reader see, smell, taste, touch, and hear what is going on). ****Dialogue is NOT suggested for the state writing test!!!**

This is **telling**: *Maria was sad.*

It doesn't **show** the reader much. It just **tells** him how Maria felt. But can the reader really picture what's going on with Maria? Probably not.

This is **showing**: *Maria felt a sinking feeling in her stomach. Then her eyes watered and her bottom lip started to quiver before she burst into tears.*

This lets the reader see what's happening to Maria, then he can figure out for himself that she must be sad.

As a writer, you want to take the reader to the action in the story. Help him to feel as if he's experiencing it firsthand. For that, you need details.

And the best ways to include details that **show** what's going on are through **action** and **sensory images** - describing how a particular time and place smelled, how it sounded, what it felt like, tasted like, and looked like.

Here are some examples of sentences that merely **tell** the reader something:

1. My room was a mess.
2. It was a beautiful day.
3. Mark had a terrible cold.

Now, here are the same situations, only this time, the paragraphs **show** the reader what is going on in each situation:

1. Where was my homework? I looked under the pile of dirty clothes behind my bedroom door. Nope. I pulled dirty clothes, shoes, a moldy, green sandwich, and a rubber ball from under my bed. Not there either.

2. Sun soaked into my dark hair and sweater. I looked up at the cloudless, blue sky as a gentle breeze touched my cheeks.

3. "Achoo!" Mark sat up in bed. His head throbbed and his nose dripped like an ice cube in July. He shuffled to the mirror. "Achoo!" SPLAT! At least he couldn't see his puffy face through the goo. Mark shuffled back to bed.

Once you get the hang of *showing* instead of *telling*, you'll never want to go back to simply telling a story again.

A story that includes too much *telling* and very little *showing* tends to sound like a summary.

But *showing* things in a story makes every scene come to life for the reader.

And isn't that the kind of writing you're really hoping to create?

Student Practice: Read the following sentences that just **tell** the reader something. Then, rewrite them so that they **show** the reader what you are really talking about.

1. The football game was exciting.
2. Evelyn looked pretty.
3. The mall was crowded on Sunday.
4. The driver was speeding.
5. The test was hard.
6. I am tired today.
7. That teacher is mean.
8. I'm very busy.
9. Her father is rich.
10. My older brother got a great job.
11. My little brother is annoying.
12. She's always helping the teacher.
13. That student is rude.
14. The movie was excellent.
15. This class is so boring.
16. I hate Mondays.
17. The hallway smelled awful.
18. These jeans were really cheap.
19. I'm in a good mood today.
20. That car is really old.