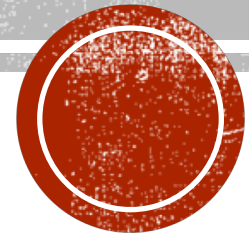


# SHOWING, NOT TELLING



Creative Writing

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Telling means simply tell the readers what happened/happens/happening.
- It gives the readers the idea of the event, but not emotional connection and experience.
- It also “kills” the readers’ imagination by giving a stale and dull description or exposition.
- Showing incorporate both description and feeling.
- It triggers readers’ imagination and emotional responses.
- It doesn’t mean giving readers a lengthy description of an event or place/time full of difficult and excessive use of words.
- It simply how to make a description more alive by giving readers room to interpret and perceive an event/ a character / place.



# EXAMPLES

- Telling:

“I heard footsteps creeping behind me and it made the whole situation scarier.”

- Showing:

“Crunching hit my ears from behind, accelerating the already rampant pounding of my heart.”

- Why is showing better?

In an instance such as this, you want the reader to feel what you did: the surprise and the sense of urgency, the fear. Describing the crunching that hit your ears even through the pounding of your heart not only creates a powerful visual, but it also tells the reader the state your body was in during that intense moment.



# EXAMPLES

- Telling:

“She was my best friend. I could tell her almost anything.”

- Showing:

“I met her at the town square, running in for our usual hug that carried on for far too long as we gushed about our lives with smiles lighting our faces.”

- Why is showing better?

The *telling* is shorter, and it doesn't do a great job of really showing the impact you have on each other. Anyone can think of “best friend” and form an overall thought about what that looks like. But this isn't just “anyone.” This is *your* best friend. *Showing* your relationship with one another is vital to forging that deeper connection.



# THE BASICS: REDUCE BASIC SENSORY WORDS

- Phrases like, “I heard,” “I felt,” and “I smelled,” are all very weak. These are “telling” words and phrases (also commonly referred to as “filters”) that force the reader *further* away from you and your experience.
- Instead, you need to pull them into your world and into your psyche the very moment you were encountering the situation. In other words, change those basic sensory words into action and interaction.
- This is done through **using strong verbs** and other visual language.
- Example:

Telling:

“As we stepped in, we instantly smelled something unpleasant”

Showing:

“The door slowly opened. So heavy as if some unseen power guarding it from any visitor. Slowly light broke the staleness of the air. Only in few steps we could sense the otherworldliness of the place. A strong scent, a mixture of camphor and rotten meat, penetrated the room and consumed all the fresh air left”



# THE BASICS: REDUCE EMOTION EXPLAINING WORDS

- Emotion words like *Happy, Sad, Angry, Frustrated, Excited, Giddy, Love, Anxious, Joy, Disgust* are self-explaining but actually tell a little about what is really happening.
- Instead of saying “She was excited”, try to show what somebody usually does when she/he is excited by combining physical and emotional reaction.

- Example:

- Telling:

*She was excited to know that in the next few hours she would finally see him.*

- Showing:

*She could feel blood rushed rapidly to every part of her body. She tried to be calm, but her heart beat uncontrollably. She knew the day would come. She just never expected it would be this soon. She stood in front of the mirror, patting herself, trying to convince herself this was not a dream. Suddenly warm drops ran down her rose-red cheeks. “Five years. Yes. Five years. It will end soon,” as she smiled at her own reflection.*



# THE BASICS: DESCRIBE BODY LANGUAGE

- One of the best ways you can show not tell in writing is to use strong descriptive language when it comes to body language.
- A person's actions are really a gateway to their mind and how they feel. You can tell if another person has a crush on someone just by paying attention to the way their body adjusts when in that person's presence.
- Showing versus telling in writing is exactly that. You want to *show* the reader what is happening and allow them to form a conclusion about how you or others in your story felt based on what they look like.
- Oftentimes, we tend to over explain in an effort to make something obvious when really, the emotion is in the guesswork; it's in allowing someone to draw their own conclusions. That over-explaining is what comes across as "telly" and not as emotionally compelling.
- If you do a great job of *showing* what you want readers to see, they'll understand how someone feels – and they'll even feel that way themselves.



# THE BASIC: USE STRONG VERBS

- Telling the readers what a character was doing or thinking and was going to do in a plain narrative can be very boring.
- Instead, show what the character feels about what he was thinking/doing, how events affect what he was thinking/doing, memories of past events might affect what he was thinking/doing.
- When your character, for example, is thinking about:

“I would’ve stayed on the pier forever if I could”
- Think about the feeling that might be involved in this situation such as comfort, nostalgic, sad in a good way, missing, longing, relaxing etc.

“It was a strange feeling, a union of sadness and relief, a longing for the past and hope for the future. This pier, an intimate playground of my childhood, seemed so embracing, tying me in and not letting me go.”





# THE BASIC: FOCUS ON DESCRIBING SENSE

- Describing what the character is feeling and sensing is always more appealing and powerful than just telling what he/she feels.
- Showing versus telling is largely about allowing your readers to interpret what your characters are going through without just telling them.
- This often means using all the senses you can to depict a scene.
- Instead of saying, “She hated it there.” you can use her senses to show the readers that emotion.
- For example writing with showing like this “The faint scent of stale cigarette smoke met her nostrils, pulling her face into a familiar grimace.” allows your readers to understand that she finds where she is distasteful, without having to just say so.



# EXAMPLES

- **Telling:** When they embraced she could tell he had been smoking and was scared  
**Showing:** When she wrapped her arms around him, the sweet staleness of tobacco enveloped her, and he was shivering.
- **Telling:** The temperature fell and the ice reflected the sun.  
**Showing:** Bill's nose burned in the frigid air, and he squinted against the sun reflecting off the street.
- **Telling:** Suzie was blind.  
**Showing:** Suzie felt for the bench with a white cane.
- **Telling:** It was late fall.  
**Showing:** Leaves crunched beneath his feet.
- **Telling:** She was a plumber and asked where the bathroom was.  
**Showing:** She wore coveralls carried a plunger and metal toolbox, and wrenches of various sizes hung from a leather belt around her waist. "Point me to the head," she said.
- **Telling:** I had a great conversation with Tim over dinner and loved hearing his stories.  
**Showing:** I barely touched my food, riveted by Tim. "Let me tell you another story," he said.



# MORE EXAMPLES

- **Telling:**

*The night was cold and moonlit. The sleigh moved fast through the forest.*

- **Showing:**

*Ekaterina was shocked by the cold. She'd known winters before, but never this far north and never this deep. Burrowed under furs as she was, she still felt her eyelashes freeze. There were crystals of ice on her face where her own breath had frozen solid. It was a clear night, and they raced through the whispering pines, like a feather drawn over a sheet of silver. It seemed magical. Impossible. Temporary. Forbidden.*

- **Telling**

*The parties were dazzling and opulent. They spilled out of the house, into the garden and even the beach. [That's my version of how a "telling" version might go.]*

- **Showing**

*In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. ... The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing up-stairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive ... floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside ... the lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher.*



# ASSIGNMENT

- Read chapter 5 from your book
- Write three situations from your story in “Showing, Not Telling” technique and send via email to [eko\\_rujito@uny.ac.id](mailto:eko_rujito@uny.ac.id)
- Due date: next week, Thursday, April 2 before 1 pm.

