

Show, Don't Tell!

Show, don't tell means just what it says. Show your readers through your words what you want them to see; don't just tell them about it.

Some tips to show and not tell:

1. Use dialogue

Dialogue allows readers to experience a scene as if they were there. Dialogue can give your reader a great deal about character, emotion and mood.

Tell: Justin's mom was angry

Show: "Justin Michael," Mom bellowed, "Get in here *this instant!*"

2. Use sensory language

Sensory language is language that appeals to the five senses and allows the reader to experience what you are writing.

Tell: I woke up to the smell of the bacon that my mom was frying in the kitchen.

Show: I was lying in bed when the salty scent of frying bacon crept up the stairs, slid through the cracks of my door and into my room, tickling my nostrils and my imagination. The image of the thin slivers of fatty, succulent meat crackling and cooking to a crisp in the frying pan, the edges slightly burning in the melted fat, lured me out of my bed, dragging me by the nose.

3. Use descriptions

Being descriptive is more than placing a couple of adjectives and adverbs in a sentence. Choose words carefully, particularly for their relevancy in relation to whatever you are intending to describe.

Telling: Mike was mad.

Showing: Mike's face reddened and he felt his fingers wrap tightly around the smooth metal base of the desk lamp.

Note: Always be careful not to flood your writing with adjectives.

Example: He was tall and slender, with brown hair and blue eyes. He wore a red cotton shirt, old blue jeans, and a brown leather jacket.

When to tell, not show!

If you *show don't tell* all the time, your word count will be too high, and the reader may get bored. No one wants to be able to see every part of every building or every scene that clearly.

Tell the things that are of no real importance to the ESSAY but that are necessary to move the PIECE forward:

Tell: The doorbell rang.

Show: I heard the distinct sound of the shrill doorbell echo loudly through the house.

Do not over-use the *show*, but learn how to use it with *tell* to make your writing smoother and clearer.