

Showing vs Telling

in Creative Writing and Narrative Papers

Showing versus telling is a technique used in storytelling that engages readers by allowing them to come to their own conclusions through the use of descriptive language.

Telling	Showing
<p>Coming out and informing readers of information instead of allowing them to come to those conclusions on their own.</p> <p>Example: Grace was happy.</p>	<p>Illustrating your point through descriptive language.</p> <p>Example: Grace barked and jumped around the room. Her tongue was hanging out of one side of her mouth and her lips looked like they were upturned in a smile. Her eyes were shining like the noonday sun.</p>

Ways to Avoid Telling

1. Use descriptive wording that appeals to your readers' five senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing).

Telling: I was afraid of the bird flying on me.

Showing: The bird's talons were long, and his beak seemed as sharp as a nail as he leaned towards me. I tensed my muscles and leaned as far away as I could

Telling: The bread was hard.

Showing: When I bit into the bread, I hurt my tooth. It was so hard; I could have cracked a tile on the table if I had dropped it.

Telling: The trash smelled bad.

Showing: When I opened the trash can lid, a concoction of meat, eggs, and rotten fruit assaulted my nose, and I felt the bile coming up in my mouth.

2. Use figurative language like metaphor and simile:

The trees were soldiers standing around the house

The sky was as blue as a robin's egg

She treated her phone like a scuba diver does an oxygen tank

3. Avoid abstract language. Abstract words are those you can't experience like happiness, sadness, or boredom.

Telling: The candle smelled good

Showing: The candle smelled like a field of lilies

Telling: The house was old

Showing: The paint was chipping on the house and weeds were overtaking the yard.

Telling: Sophie loved him

Showing: Sophie blushed at the mere thought of him

Telling is not always bad. When a writer needs to move a story along, it is better to come out and tell what happens instead of taking a lot of space to describe something in a lot of detail that does not affect the story in a major way. Stories are interesting because of contrast with different paces, so you can shift between showing and tell.