

“Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” - Anton Chekhov



If you want to **engage the reader's heart, mind, and imagination**, *show* with vivid details that generate the emotions you want to express. Rather than classify and list all the emotions that *you* feel, use specific details that **give the reader a reason to feel** those emotions.

(<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/showing/#specific>)

Telling	Showing
I was nervous.	My palms were sweaty. I popped my knuckles. I looked in my backpack three times for no reason. My leg kept shaking, and I turned my head to look at the clock every few seconds.
She was angry.	“She kicked open the screen door, letting it slam against the wall as she dashed outside. Down the steps and into the yard she flew. Grabbing the first rock in her path, she hurled it back toward the house. It crashed through the living room window with an explosion of shattered glass.” (Marion Dane Bauer, <i>What's Your Story</i>)
My sister is talented.	My sister competes in weightlifting championships, sings lead vocals in a rock band, and speaks five languages.
I like many different sports, but I would have to say that ping-pong is my favorite sport.	He's drenched in sweat, his knuckles are white, he's on the other side of the ping-pong table, and I'm about to bring him down. (http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/showing/)

How to “Show,” not “Tell”

1. Use descriptive details. (Think about your five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch.)
2. Use action. (Strong verbs!)
3. Use dialogue and character thoughts.

(Turn Page Over)

Practice Turning “Telling” into “Showing”

Using the tips on the previous page, add more description to turn these “telling” statements into “showing” statements.

1. Jessica dresses unusually.
2. The movie was boring.
3. My room needed cleaning.
4. Alex was forgetful.
5. The roller coaster ride was scary.
6. Gabriel’s cooking was not great.

(examples from “Show, Don’t Tell,” <http://www.suzanne-williams.com/show.htm>)

Examples of Effective “Showing”

Read these examples of descriptions that create images and generate emotions in the reader. What are the main ideas, emotions, and impressions that you get from these descriptions?

“Whenever puppies in the pet store window distracted me from our walk, Fido flattened his scruffy ears, growling. But he always forgave me. As his sight faded, the smell of fresh air and the feel of grass would make him try to caper. Eventually, at the sound of my voice, his tail thumped weakly on the ground. This morning, I filled his water bowl all the way to the top—just the way he likes it—before I remembered.”

“When the recess bell rang, I grabbed my chess set and dashed to freedom, eager to win the daily tournament of outcasts. I didn’t look, but I knew Lucinda was watching. I could feel her curly locks swaying as her head tracked me. Of course, I tripped in the doorway. Tennis shoes and sandals stepped around me as I scrambled after pawns and bishops. And there was Lucinda, waiting for me to notice her. She smiled, lifted her shiny patent-leather shoe, and slowly, carefully ground her heel right on the head of my white queen.”

(examples from *Jerz’s Literacy Weblog*, <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/showing/>)