

Show Not Tell Examples

1
One day, Sharon, who is eleven and in the sixth grade, got up to get ready for school. Sharon likes soccer, comic books, and rap, and she hates cleaning her room. When she can't find her kneepads because she's so disorganized, she gets worried about getting to the state championship game on time.

Sharon lay on her floor pulling stuff out from underneath her bed. Out flew her math book, last year's fifth-grade report on reptiles, some old CD cases, and a few *Doonesbury* comic books. "Where are those stupid knee pads?" she muttered. How was she going to help win the state championship if she couldn't find her knee pads?

2 CRAFT

"Good writers ...let us see people and ideas in action rather than depend on qualifiers. They give us specifics: strong nouns, precise verbs, actions we can see and hear, reactions we can feel. **An apple is big, red, round, crisp, shiny, and juicy.** Unless this is a commercial for McIntosh apples, so what? Instead, a writer would try to show something about the apple **only if there's something to be shown—if a quality of the apple reflects some meaning in the sentence or story.** For example: *I gobbled the green apples, I found in the clearing.* Now we have specific: hunger, unripe apples, a forest setting: now the apple beings to have a significance we can understand" (Atwell 165).

3 PRACTICE

The man went to the store. He couldn't find what he wanted, so he left.

Group 1 revision: The man **Zavier** went **roller-skated** to the store **Wal-mart**. He couldn't find what he was looking for **Kraft's Peppercorn Ranch** on sale, so he left so he **stormed** all the way home.

Group 2 revision: The man went **homeless** man **crawled out of his box**, and **wobbled to Wal-Mart** to the store. He couldn't find what he wanted **begged for change**, but he had **no luck**. So he left **took off back to his box**, crying.

Group 3 revision: The wrinkled man went **limped** to the **Vision Center** store. He was **almost blind** so he couldn't **find** identify his new pair of glasses what he wanted, so he left because the eye doctor was on a lunch break.

YOUR TURN

Mr. Hoffman was happy. He had gotten a visit from a friend who had been gone for a long time.

Diction

"Diction refers to the author's choice of words...The perfect word is clear, concrete, and exact. In other words, it says exactly what you want it to say, is specific, and creates just the picture you see in your mind."

Details

"Detail includes facts, observations, reasons, examples, and incidents that a writer uses to develop a subject. Specific details create a clear mental picture for the reader by focusing on particulars rather than abstractions" (Dean, p. 22). In other words, when a student writes, "My vacation was loads of fun and I did lots of new things," prompt him to include specific details by asking probing questions. "Where did you go and what did you do that was fun? Who was with you? Did you see, taste, hear, or smell something that you had never experienced before? What did it feel like to be trying out something new?"

Figurative Language

Figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, personification, onomatopoeia, and alliteration, is another device to muscle up writing. "We use figurative language because it's a rich, strong, and vivid way to express meaning." (Dean 35)

Elbow partners:

Name:

Show, Don't Tell: An Overview of the Craft Element

- Spot the difference between telling or reporting information that holds the reader back and writing that involves the audience by showing what's happening in stories.
- Ask yourself, "Does my writing show what's happening?"
- Use sounds, thoughts, and feelings, as well as straight reporting in order to take your reader into your brain.
- Use active verbs to show what's happening. (called, stepped, hung, though, swung, raised, pulled, watched, dropped, ran)
- Use the exact words a character spoke ("Strike two!" the umpire called.)
- Show the feelings of a character by what he does.
- Paint pictures with specific words or groups of words.

Directions

SAMPLE 1:

1. Which groups of words showed you what the narrator did? Mark one group of words and show what this baseball player did? Did the author tell you about the narrator's feelings or did she show you?

1

First Base

Whooooosh! "Strike two!" the umpire called. I stepped back out of the batter's box and hung my head. *Just a hit, I thought, that's all I want.* I swung the bat a couple times to loosen up, and took my place again near the plate. With my heartbeat throbbing in my ears, I raised the bat over my shoulder and waited. The pitcher pulled back and let the ball fly. I watched it speed toward me and . . . SMACK! I dropped the bat and ran and ran and ran. Safe! First base.

Repeat this process with sample #2.

2. Underline the words or groups of words that show. Did the author tell you about the narrator's feelings or did she show you?

2

A Hit

I missed the ball again. It was my second strike. Disappointed, I stepped away and swung the bat back and forth. All I wanted was a hit. I went back to the plate. I was a little nervous. My heart beat fast. I put the bat over my shoulder and waited. The pitcher threw the ball. It came toward me really fast and I swung. I hit it! I dropped the bat and ran to first base. I was safe.



WHICH IS THE MORE EFFECTIVE PIECE OF WRITING? WHY? BASE YOUR JUDGMENT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Did the writer give us the exact words spoken or thought?
- Did the author tell us how the narrator's body reacted to different feelings?
- Did the author use active verbs and paint pictures of what the narrator does?
- Did the author use any specific words for sounds?

1

Autumn Colors

Every fall, the trees near our house have the colors in a campfire. Some trees have dark red and yellow leaves in the morning. Other trees have small yellow and brown leaves that move back and forth. There are big trees that have orange and red leaves that fall when the wind blows their branches. Every day the colors get stronger and stronger. Then the noon sun shines on them and they are really bright. Winter comes soon after that.

2

Autumn Blaze

Every October, the trees behind our house glow like a campfire. maples spark crimson and gold in the morning air. The birches flick yellow, brown, yellow, brown. Oaks shoot flames of orange and red gusty winds fan their limbs. The colors grow stronger, brighter until the noon sun ignites an autumn blaze that will guide winter our way.

Which piece is better? Why? Explain and justify your choice with t.e. in a separate sheet of paper.