

# Show and Tell: Not if, but When



## Main Points

- Tell when it doesn't make sense to show.
- Show the reader first to form connections, make them care, and then tell once readers are connected.
- Use tell to establish character voice and POV.

## Three Methods to increase/strengthen voice

- **Allow readers to make the story their own** - We experience stories, we don't observe them. Have readers reflect on the text.
- **Leave room for ambiguity** - show a character taking money, don't tell us they're a thief. Allow readers to draw their own conclusions.
- **Show first to form connections, then tell** - Letting the reader wonder, debate and THEN be given an explanation makes us care, draws us in, and gives us reason to keep reading, wanting a resolution now that we have connected with these characters.
- **Let go of control** - What your story means to you will not hold true for every reader, but that's okay. They will hit around your target message and it will feel more meaningful because they got there on their own.
- **Use your character's voice to TELL** - Make your telling opinionated, specific to your character, their temperament, likes/dislikes, priorities. The more distinct your character is, the easier showing and telling become.

## Warm Up

- Write down 3 defining things about your character: job/hobby/defining personality trait/etc.
- Write an action they can take to demonstrate each without telling us what it is.





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## Telling through Point of View (voice) Exercise

1. **Think of a place of significance to your main character.** How would they describe it? Use sensory details. Write down whatever comes to mind.
2. **Try it again. Really think how your character would think.** Would they care about the same things you do? Or what you think the reader will care about? Does your character have the same opinions and perceptions? Are their life experiences different from your own?
  - a. How would they describe this environment differently? They have opinions, likes and dislikes that should vary from your own and others. If it's a significant place, those feelings are probably strong and also oddly specific.
  - b. If you are writing memoir, how much of the authentic YOU did you put into your first explanation? Did you describe things from a zoomed-out perspective? Were you trying to give readers an overview or a personal tale? What do you view in a way others may not? What would YOU notice that others wouldn't?
3. **Describe this same place from the perspective of someone else in your story.** Someone who has a different opinion of this same place. Can you describe it without saying WHAT they feel about it?
  - a. Would they notice different things? Use different types of metaphors/analogies?

## Show By Not Telling

- Think of something another character doesn't accept, wants to hide, or in some other way is unwilling to share with your POV character.
- Put them in a scenario where they have to make the CHOICE not to tell the POV character (and thereby the reader) what it is.
- Use body language, metaphors/analogies, as well as the words they choose to say out loud.
- How does your character react? Do they pick up on it? Are they oblivious/distracted/suspicious?