

Showing vs. Telling Cheat Sheet

What Is Telling?

Telling is when the author gives the reader information directly. It's efficient, but can feel flat or emotionally distant if overused.

Example: 'Sarah was sad.'

What Is Showing?

Showing invites the reader into the scene by using sensory details, action, and dialogue. It immerses the reader in the character's experience.

Example: 'Sarah stared at the untouched coffee. Her shoulders slumped, and she blinked back tears.'

When to Show vs. When to Tell

Show	Tell
Immerse readers in the moment	Move story forward quickly
Build tension & emotional resonance	Transition between scenes
Deepen character development	Convey non-dramatic information

Quick Tips for Balancing Both

- ✓ Use telling for exposition, time skips, or background info.
- ✓ Use showing for emotional moments, key decisions, and character development.
- ✓ Revise telling-heavy scenes by asking: 'Can I show this instead?'
- ✓ Use body language, sensory details, and dialogue to convey emotions.

Using the Five Senses

Telling: 'The house was old.'

Showing: 'The floorboards creaked with every step, and a musty scent lingered in the air like forgotten memories.'

Dialogue for Emotion

Telling: 'He was nervous.'

Showing: 'I, uh... I just thought maybe you'd want to—never mind.'

Internal Monologue

Telling: 'She felt guilty.'

Showing: 'What kind of sister forgets her brother's birthday? She stared at the blinking cursor, unsure of how to begin the apology text.'

Practice Exercises

—■ Write one telling sentence and one showing paragraph for each emotion: joy, anger, fear, sadness, love.

—■ Rewrite these telling lines into showing ones: 'He was bored.' / 'She hated her job.' / 'They were in love.'