



## Show Don't Tell, And Ignoring It

“*Show don't tell*” is one of the most quoted pieces of writing advice, and also one of the most misunderstood. It doesn't mean you should describe everything in detail. It simply means giving the reader enough to *experience* the moment, rather than just being told about it.

### A Quick Example

#### Telling:

*Sarah was nervous about the interview.*

#### Showing:

*Sarah wiped her palms on her skirt for the third time and rehearsed her opening line under her breath.*

Both are valid. One gives information; the other creates a feeling.

### When Showing Helps

Showing is useful when you want the reader to:

- feel close to a character
- sense tension or emotion
- picture a moment clearly
- understand a character's behaviour without explanation

It's especially powerful in key scenes, arguments, discoveries, turning points, moments of change.

## **When Telling Is Perfectly Fine**

You don't need to "show" everything. Sometimes telling is cleaner, faster, and kinder to the reader. Use it when you need to:

- move quickly between scenes
- summarise time passing
- explain simple facts
- avoid unnecessary detail

A whole book written only in "showing" would be exhausting. A whole book written only in "telling" would feel flat. The balance is what matters.

## **Think of It Like Camera Work**

Showing is a close-up. Telling is a wide shot. You switch between them depending on what the moment needs.

## **A Simple Way to Practise**

Take a sentence from your draft that "tells" something, an emotion, a decision, a reaction. Write a second version that "shows" it through:

- action
- body language
- dialogue
- small details

Then decide which version serves the story better. Sometimes the answer will be the original telling sentence.

## **A Quick Exercise**

Write two short paragraphs about the same moment, one in a "telling" style, one in a "showing" style.

For example:

- a character realising they've made a mistake
- someone waiting for a phone call
- a person entering a room they don't want to be in

This helps you feel the difference, not just understand it.