



## Writing Is Like Swimming (It's either sink or write)

### What does showing the story mean?

Showing helps readers see the story in their heads. It makes them feel like they are the characters. And writers who find that delicate balance of showing their story mixed with some telling when needed have a lot of happy readers.

**Showing:** painting words to sketch pictures in the readers' minds. So we paint these words like so.

**My favorite quote:** "Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass." Anton Chekhov

**Telling:** Sally Mae was mad. (When you name an emotion, you can be sure that you are telling.)

**Showing:** Sally Mae stomped through the front door and threw her book bag on the table. She raised her fist and yelled, “that Billy Parker will die tomorrow for telling on me.” Notice showing adds to your word count.

**Telling:** reporting the story. Now sometimes telling is fine. A sentence here or there. But imagine how bored you would be if the entire story were being told to you. No diving into the story with the characters. No dreaming the story is happening to you. All because someone is reporting it.

**When should you tell?** Telling is fine when you need to catch a character up on something. The readers went through it with the character so they already know. It is fine to spend a sentence or two telling.

Exp. “Nancy, Billy Parker made me so mad. He told the teacher that I forgot to wash the chalkboard and I got in trouble.”

**Or you may need to tell information.** Fine to do that.

Billy was nine-years-old and too big for his britches.

**The backstory is also a time to tell.** Get it out fast.

Sally Mae remembered when they were five and Billy pushed her off the swing. She told on him. *So that’s what this was all about.*

**Describing a scene is also telling.** From Understanding Show, Don’t Tell by Janice Hardy. “It’s called storytelling for a reason. The trick is to weave your tells in with your shows so readers never get the sense that the author is butting in to explain something to them.”

When we paint the color of blue the sky is today, the readers can actually see it in their heads. When we draw how injured the main character was when he fell off the cliff, the readers can feel the pain. When we sketch what the room looks like on the day a character was killed, the readers are right there watching the drawers pulled out and clothes dumped everywhere. Showing draws us in. Telling mostly pulls us away.

**Words that show you are telling:** remember, realize, heard, believe, could, saw, wonder, hear, think, touch, see, watch, can, seem, look, notice, feel, decided, sounds. Try not to use them. (Unless you are telling.)

**Want your muse back?** Buy a composition notebook for eighty-nine cents. And buy the cheapest pen you can find. Then give it a name like: Awful, dreadful writing lives here. Write on. It won't matter if you are telling. But it will help you in more ways than one. It will unlock ideas for you. It will send your creativity into overdrive. It will teach you how to show. Try it.

How many times have you heard someone say this? “Show me how.”

Next time you sit down to write show them how.

Thanks for reading. Email me and let me know what you do to get that muse back in gear. Did this help you understand showing?