

4.6 Using “Showing” Writing

Level: Foundational

Rationale: Students often hear that they should not be “wordy” in their writing. They often take this to mean that they should write in very few words, without paying attention to the effect of those words. As students learn that powerful writing is made up of carefully chosen words that convey just the right image, the right attitude, or the right feeling, they begin to infuse life into their writing by using descriptive and active words. This lesson gives students a chance to practice choosing words that create vivid images and an active voice.

Suggested Timeline: 60–90 minutes, depending on how much practice is allowed (see “How to Use This Book” for additional guidelines).

Materials:

- samples of powerful descriptions (teacher-selected)
- Student Handout 4.6 (“Practicing ‘Showing’ Writing”)
- paper
- pens or pencils

Assessment Options

- Students’ notes
- Reflective quickwrites
- “Showing” writing practice exercise(s)
- Application of concepts in future writing

Web Sites for Additional Ideas:

www2.soesd.k12.or.us/it/sows/handouts/showing_rubric.html

jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative/showing.htm

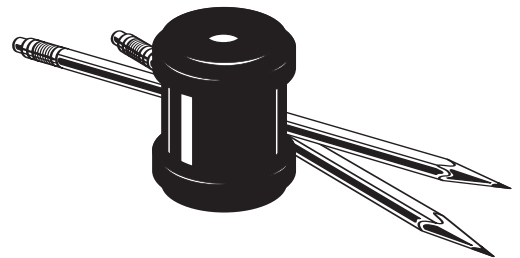
www.rachelsimon.com/wg_showtell.htm#top

AVID Methodologies Used (WIC-R): Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading

Steps

1. Have students quickwrite or share in small groups what they already know about “showing” writing. (Some will have been taught this as “Show, Don’t Tell.”) When they are ready to share aloud as a class, facilitate a discussion on the definition of this type of writing; record students’ ideas on the board. Label these notes: “Definition of ‘Showing’ Writing.”
2. Distribute copies of short, vivid, paragraphs that do an excellent job of “showing.” (You may want to give each group of students a different paragraph.) Have students read their paragraphs in their groups and underline or highlight examples of “showing” writing.
3. Create a new heading on the board (“Advice for ‘Showing’ Writing”), and have students prepare to take notes. Have each group present its ideas by reading its paragraph aloud to the rest of the class and identifying the elements of “showing” writing contained within it. As the groups share, have someone write on the board ideas (advice) that can be gleaned from each sample passage. Advice might include things like:
 - Use active verbs (shuffled, tightened, throbbed, flashed, erupted, tapped, escaped, etc.) to describe something/someone doing an action.
 - Avoid overuse of “to be” forms (be, is, are, was, were, am, been, being)
 - Avoid overuse of “to have” forms (have, has, had)
 - Use adjectives to make nouns more specific (but don’t OVERUSE them)
 - Use adverbs to make verbs more specific (but don’t OVERUSE them)

- Focus on creating images related to the senses (what something looks like, smells like, feels like, sounds like, tastes like)
4. Write some sample “telling” sentences on the board. Examples:
 - She was sad when her puppy died.
 - The room is dark.
 - I am cold and tired.
 - Jennifer left the theater happy.
 - My cat is playful.
 5. Ask students to explain why these are “telling” sentences. They should identify the LACK of elements described for “showing” writing. (This step acts as a review.)
 6. Select one of the “telling” sentences and have students work together as a class to convert it to “showing” writing. Write the ideas on the board for all to see. Refer back to the “Advice” notes as the class determines what to do next.
 7. Distribute Student Handout 4.6 (“Practicing ‘Showing’ Writing”). Review a few of the examples as a class, and then have students work with a partner to do one or more of the practice activities.
 8. Have partners share some examples with the class. Discuss what is challenging about “showing” writing and how to work through these challenges.
 9. Have students do a reflective quickwrite on a topic such as:
 - What’s important to you about “showing” writing?
 - What do you see as the benefits of “showing” writing?
 - When might you most want to be sure to include “showing” writing in your own paper?
 - Are there times that writers should NOT use “showing” writing? If so, when and why?These quickwrites can be the basis for additional instruction, as needed, or for class discussion.
 10. Students should be given the opportunity to immediately apply these “showing” writing skills in their own writing. Using a current piece of their own writing, have students highlight some “telling” sentences. Working alone or with others, have students convert their “telling” sentences into “showing” sentences. Have students share some original and revised examples in small groups or with the entire class.



Practicing “Showing” Writing

Examples

1. **Telling:** She was mad.

Showing: Her jaw tightened and the veins in her temples throbbed. Her eyes flashed darts at me. The words erupted from her mouth: “Stay after class to speak to me, young man.” The final hiss in her voice sent shivers down my spine.

2. **Telling:** He was anxious about the test.

Showing: He held his head in both hands and stared down at the paper. One hand tentatively reached for a pencil. But, when the pencil neared the paper, instead of writing, it nervously tapped against the desk. He let go of the pencil and banged his fist against the desk as a muffled groan escaped his lips.

3. **Telling:** The pizza was good.

Showing: My mouth watered as the fragrant steam rose off the cheese. The rich blend of yeast, tomatoes, and spices tantalized my nostrils. I gasped with pleasure as I took my first bite into the moist crust, my teeth sinking into the succulent blend of cheese and tomato sauce.

4. **Telling:** His room was really messy.

Showing: Clothes were draped over the chair and the desk; books and magazines were scattered across the floor.

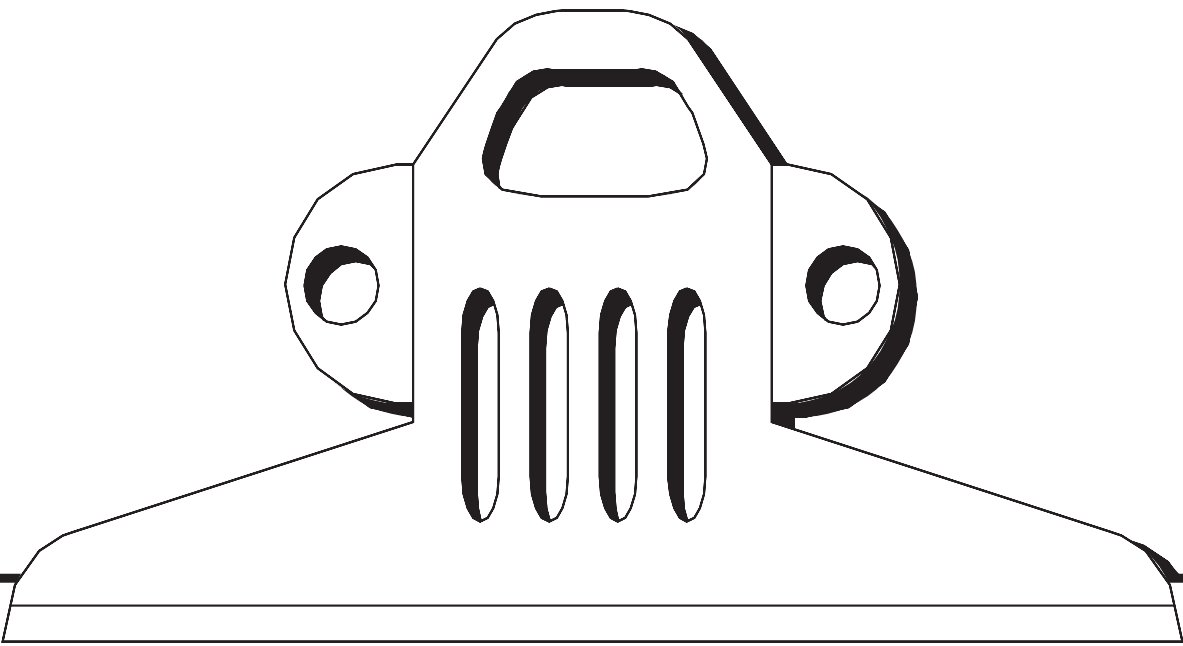
Showing: I pushed and pushed, but the door opened only a crack. Inching the broom stick through the crack, I poked at the pile of clothes blocking the door. With a great shove, I toppled the heap and pushed the clothes away from the door. I eased the door open wide enough for me to squeeze through only to find my brother sound asleep on his bed in the middle of another pile of clothes.

5. **Telling:** The garden was colorful.

Showing: Red geraniums burst from terra cotta pots. Yellow daisies ranged along the fence, and the deep blue morning glories cascaded down the bank.

6. **Telling:** The stadium was packed.

Showing: Shoulder to shoulder, students packed the bleachers. Green and gold jerseys, banners, and pom-poms lined the home side of the stadium, moving upward in unison when the crowd rose to its feet.



Practice

Take one of the following statements that explains or tells about a person's feelings or behavior and demonstrate (SHOW) that feeling or behavior using action; work to make your writing as specific as possible. Choose especially revealing actions or statements that show the given meaning. Remember to use active verbs, strong adjectives and adverbs (but not too many), and sensory images.

1. He seemed to be extremely shy and lonely.
2. She is beautiful.
3. The others looked at her as though she was from another planet.
4. The class is boring.
5. She was thrilled about finally getting the thing she had dreamed of for years.
6. The puppy was excited.
7. She had the flu.
8. Then the man realized how unhappy he was.
9. I am nervous.
10. He thought his father was the most wonderful man in the world.