

The Art of Tiny Tales

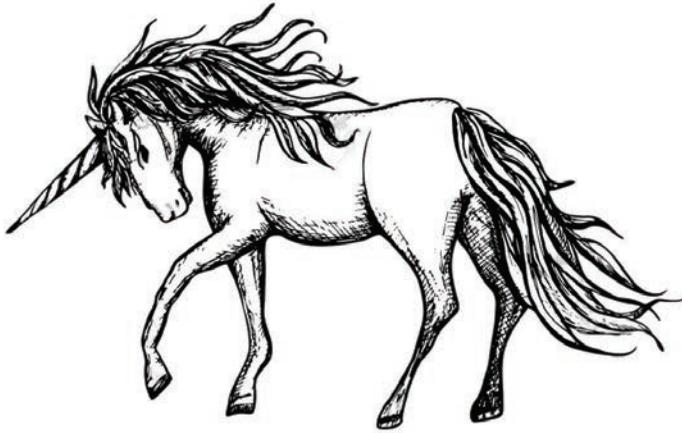
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CHAPTER SIX:

Show and Tell

THREE WAYS STORIES COMMUNICATE

In fiction, writers share information with the reader in three main ways: showing, telling, and dialogue. Most stories use all three, often within the same scene. Showing helps the reader experience what is happening. Telling explains information quickly and clearly. Dialogue reveals character through what is said and how it is said.

Strong writers choose which mode to use based on what the story needs in that moment. In this chapter, we will look at the first two, showing and telling modes.

SHOWING: LETTING THE READER SEE THE SCENE

Showing allows the reader to understand a moment by observing what a character does, says, and notices. Instead of explaining emotions or ideas directly, the writer shares specific actions, reactions, and details from the scene. These details act as clues, and the reader uses them to figure out what the character is feeling or thinking. When writers show, they trust the reader to connect those clues and understand the moment on their own.

Writers often show through body language, small movements, or changes in behavior. A character might avoid eye contact, speak more quietly, or fidget with an object when they are nervous. These actions feel real because they mirror how people behave in everyday life. Showing can also include sensory details, such as sounds, sights, or physical sensations, which help the reader feel present in the scene.



“Do or do not. There is no try.”

ANSWER:



For example: *His hands shook as he tightened his grip, and he forced himself to breathe slowly.*

This sentence never explains the emotion directly, but the reader can tell that the character is tense or afraid. The meaning comes from what the character is doing, not from a label.

Showing works best during important moments in a story, such as danger, strong emotion, or a difficult choice. These are the times when readers want to feel close to the character and experience events as they happen. By showing instead of telling, writers pull readers into the scene and make the story more vivid and engaging.

TELLING: EXPLAINING WHAT THE READER NEEDS TO KNOW

Telling is when the writer shares information directly with the reader instead of letting the reader figure it out through actions or dialogue. This often includes background details, explanations, time passing, or facts the reader needs in order to understand what is happening in the story. Telling gives the reader clear information right away, without asking them to interpret clues.

Writers use telling to move the story forward efficiently. It can cover events that are not emotionally important, summarize long stretches of time, or explain rules, settings, or situations that would be awkward to show in full detail. Telling is especially useful at the beginning of a story, when the reader needs basic context, or between scenes, when the story needs to shift without lingering.

For example: *The rules were clear, and breaking them would have consequences.*

This sentence delivers important information quickly. It tells the reader what matters without slowing the story down with extra description or action.

Although creative writing often emphasizes showing, telling is still an important tool. Telling works best when clarity, pacing, and understanding matter more than emotion. Skilled writers balance both modes, using telling to keep the story grounded and moving, and saving showing for moments that deserve the reader’s full attention.

WRITING EXERCISE:

The following is in telling mode. Rewrite it by expanding it in showing mode:

Stella's first day at her new music class was quiet and overwhelming. The room was unfamiliar and too neat, and the other students already seemed to know where they belonged. The teacher explained the rules, the schedule, and the expectations while Stella listened carefully and tried to remember everything.

JOURNALING EXERCISE:

For this exercise, choose a story that is new to you. You may read a short story, a chapter from a novel, or watch a movie. As you read or watch, pay close attention to how the storyteller uses telling and showing. Instead of judging the story itself, focus on how each mode affects your experience as a reader or viewer.

In your response, do the following:

1. Identify a moment that relies mostly on telling and describe how it made you understand the scene as a reader.
2. Identify a moment that relies mostly on showing and explain how that approach affected your understanding or interest.
3. Decide whether you would make the same choice as the writer or switch modes, and explain why.

Focus on your personal reaction and use examples from the story to support your thinking.



CHAPTER TEN:

Planning and Organizing Your Ideas

Before you begin writing your short story, it helps to understand that there is no single right way to start. Some writers begin with a strong idea for a character, while others picture a place so clearly that the setting comes first. Some writers already have several plot ideas in mind and want to get everything out on paper right away. All of these approaches are valid, and most writers use a mix of them.

In this chapter, you will explore your story ideas through a variety of brainstorming activities. You may find yourself focusing on character first, then jumping to setting, then back to conflict. That is normal. Writing rarely happens in a straight line, and you do not need to complete everything in order. The goal is to gather ideas and begin shaping them into something you understand.

A brain dump is especially helpful if you have lots of ideas and are not sure where to start. This is a space to write freely without worrying about organization, spelling, or whether an idea is “good.” You are simply collecting possibilities. As you work through the worksheets, you will start to notice which ideas feel strongest and which ones belong together.

You may skip around, return to earlier pages, or add new notes as your thinking changes. These activities are meant to support your process, not control it. By the end of the chapter, you will have a collection of ideas about your characters, setting, conflict, theme, and story goal that you can use when you are ready to begin planning your story more carefully.

LESSON EXERCISE:

Now it's your turn! Take your time with this assignment. You won't be able to do it all in one sitting, and that's okay. This could take an entire week (or more), and you will probably come back and add more ideas as you go. Most likely, your story will continue to develop in your mind even when you don't have your workbook open.

Brain Dump