



# Show Don't Tell: Learning to Love and Trust Your Readers

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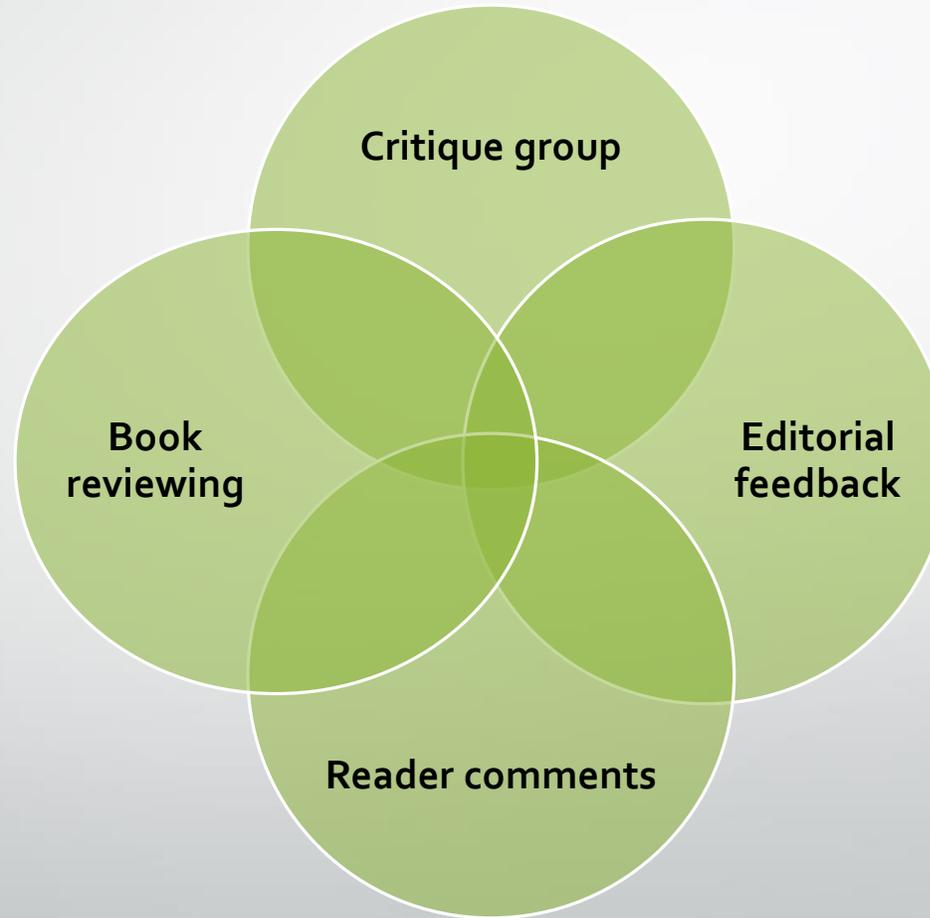
# A little more about me...

Novel	Genre(s)	Subgenre
The Pirate of Panther Bay (2004/2014)	Action/Adventure Young Adult/New Adult	Historical Fiction Romance
Tortuga Bay (2015)	Action/Adventure Young Adult/New Adult\ Mainstream/Literary	Historical Fiction Romance
St. Nic, Inc. (2014)	Action/Adventure Mainstream/Literary	Contemporary Near Science Fiction
Renegade (2012)	Middle Grade	Contemporary Urban
A Warrior's Soul (2011)	Middle Grade	Contemporary

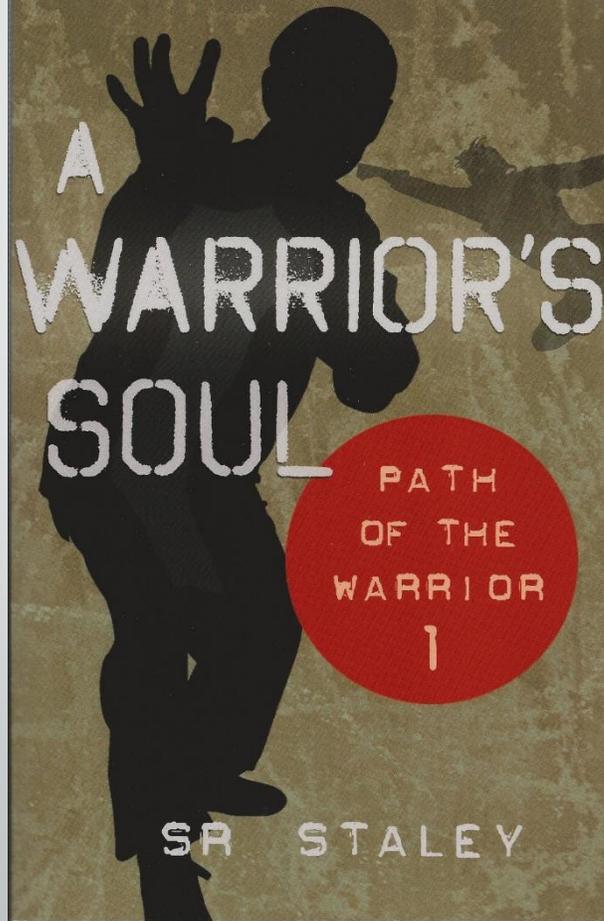


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# Genesis if this workshop

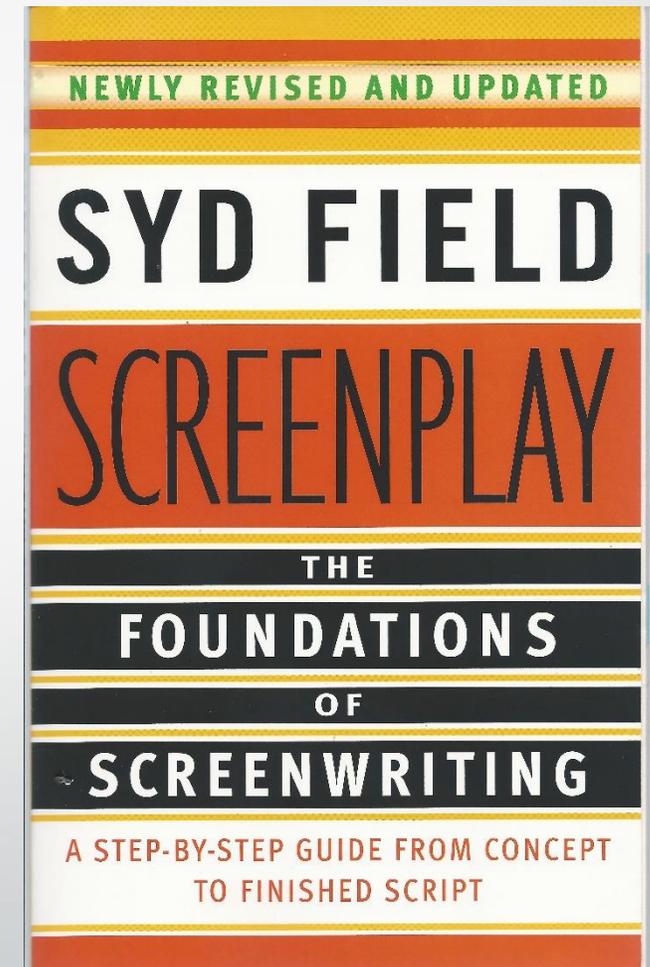


# How much do I trust my readers?



## An observation from Syd Field

"Action is character; a person is what he *does*, not what he *says*. Film is behavior. Because we're telling a story in pictures, we must show how the character acts and reacts to the incidents and events that he/she confronts and overcomes (or doesn't overcome) during the storyline." (Syd Field, *Screenplay*, p. 47)



# "The Inner Eye"

(Gina Hogan Edwards)

## Telling (narrative summary)

- Telling has a place
- Summarizing, explaining
  - Dialogue is almost always "showing"
- Add perspective, dimension, or context
  - Zoom out, or panning a camera in a movie
- Gives reader "breathing room," a break from intensity of scenes

## Best uses of "telling"

- Show passage of time
- Crucial background information
- Transitions between scenes and chapters
- Interject a character's thoughts or interpretations
- Common in science fiction, fantasy, mystery, westerns, historical fiction, YA

# The beauty (and limits) of "showing"

## Showing (scene)

- Paint a picture
- Brings the reader into the story
  - Connects reader to characters and setting
  - Makes the scene "real"
- Detailed storytelling is the technique
- Works well when told in "real time"
- Similar to a movie "close up" where you can see reactions

## Limits of "showing"

- Showing is hard (hence this workshop)
- Too much "showing" can exhaust the reader
- Can be overdone: "purple prose"
- Cannot be used on it's own
- Finding the right blend of showing and telling is an art

# Telling vs Showing: Tortuga Bay

## Early draft

"Damn this storm!" Captain Munoz muttered as he held on the railing. The waves were tossing his ship around in the sea as if it were a child's toy. He looked at the helmsman. "Keep her bow downwind!"

The helmsman looked as if he would throw a sword through Munoz's heart.

The storm raged on as its crew fought to stay on course.

## Published scene (p. 85)

"Damn this storm!"

Captain Munoz clutched the railing as the crest of a wave spun the frigate's bow across the wind again. The stern fell from under his feet as the ship plunged off a receding wave. "Keep her bow downwind."

The helmsman looked as if he would throw a sword through Munoz's heart if he weren't more afraid of being swept off the deck by the next wave. The wooden beam that kept the ship on course snapped to the side, pulling the helmsman off his feet as two more sailors threw their bodies against the tiller to steady the ship. They had barely turned the rudder back to its rightful place when the back of the ship heaved up under their feet to ride another twenty-foot roller.

## Exercise 1

**Source: SR Staley, third volume in Pirate of Panther Bay series**

Set up: The pirates have just survived a high-pitched battle with the Spanish navy in 1783. Isabella, the lead character and captain of the ship, has gone below decks to determine how many of her crew were killed or wounded. The officer's dining table has been converted into a work table for the ship's surgeon, Doc. The room is dark because it is below decks, with light provided by whale oil lamps.

POV: Captain Isabella

Prompt: *A pirate leaned over the wounded sailor as Doc finished his last suture, balancing his weight between a makeshift crutch and the table as he wiped blood away from the wound.*

## Exercise 2

**Source: SR Staley, third volume in Pirate of Panther Bay series**

Set up: The pirates have just survived a high-pitched battle with the Spanish navy in 1783. Isabella, the lead character and captain of the ship, has gone below decks to determine how many of her crew were killed or wounded. The officer's dining table has been converted into a work table for the ship's surgeon, Doc. The room is dark because it is below decks, with light provided by whale oil lamps.

POV: Captain Isabella

- Prompt: *Doc started to wring his hands with a towel. "Damn grape shot," he muttered as he inspected the unconscious body, starting at the head and moving methodically toward the toes as Pete's chest rose and fell with heavy labored breaths.*

# A Few Questions to Guide the Creative Process

- What do you know about the characters?
- What do you know about the setting?
- What do you know about the situation or circumstances?
- What do you know about the relationships between the characters or between the characters and the setting?
- Is this scene meaningful to the story?
- Does the story move forward? Is it just action or is it relevant action?
- What does the author want the reader to believe is important in the scene?

# Closing Thoughts

- **Storytelling is the core of both film and fiction writing**
- **Visual storytelling allows writers to access new descriptive tools and techniques**
- **Films allows writers to use a comparative approach to story telling and deepen our appreciation for alternative mediums**
- **This comparative approach can help shape and sharpen a writers voice.**

