

Lesson Five

Layer 5: Show It All

In our last lesson, we discussed emotional depth and voice, but it is tricky to *show*, is it not? This lesson will provide tips for how to *show* your character's perspective effectively through the most common writing "rule" of all time: Show Don't Tell.

Showing is when we use body language, internal thoughts, and/or senses to make a reader aware of what a character is thinking or feeling, without ever using the words "I feel X way." We see how a character is paranoid, not because the narrator tells us he is, but because of how he acts in situations—always looking behind his shoulder, fidgeting, etc. Showing gives us sensations. What does being depressed feel like? What does agitation look like on another character? What actions on another character can show us how that character feels without saying they feel mad or sad or frustrated?

Showing is also about allowing readers to feel in the moment because they are experiencing what's happening as the characters do.

Telling is the opposite: this is when readers are told what happens through statements instead of allowing the reader to see it through context. For example, "she smiled happily" or "she nodded her agreement." If something is shown, it doesn't also need to be explained. If she smiles, we know she's happy. If she nods, we know she's agreeing.

Major telling phrases to look for are ones that include "she felt" or "she was." Also, using "as X happened" or "when X happened" are telling phrases. Statements such as "Tim was angry," is telling the readers how Tim feels without giving any clues for that being the case.

Try to limit the amount those phrases are used. You won't end up deleting all instances, because sometimes telling is necessary—especially when we need to quickly recap something readers already experienced—but it helps to examine all instances in your manuscript.

Telling sneaks in to scenes in so many ways, which is why there are so many articles and courses on this topic alone. It takes time finding these phrases in your own writing, so if you can have a CP, beta reader, or editor help you become aware of when and how you use telling phrases, you'll begin to get a stronger idea of when it takes place and how to alter it.

A great quote on this topic: *"Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass."* — Anton Chekhov

Deep POV is the ultimate Show Don't Tell experience.

This is because when we are in a character's POV so deeply, we can't escape their experience. Telling is the root cause of readers feeling disconnected to characters. You could nail GMFS and yet your readers still might feel like they just can't get into your character's head. This is likely because the writing at the sentence level is not allowing readers to *see* the story play out.

I gave this topic 7 layers for a reason: they all pile together to create strong Deep POV. (PS. In the next lesson, we will be discussing filtering language, and that is another big spotter for telling phrases, so stay tuned).

For emotions, last lesson we talked about the three key pieces: thoughts, feelings, actions and how they contribute to the emotional layers of a character and of a scene. Showing these elements creates an intimacy for readers that lets them know immediately off the bat that this story is in Deep POV.

But how else can we apply Show Don't Tell to Deep POV?

Showing can be done in four ways:

1. Action – what the MC does, or what they witness
2. Dialogue – what IS and IS NOT being said within conversations
3. Specific & concrete detail using the 5 senses – What MC smells, tastes, hears, feels (touch, as well as body sensations), and sees
4. Inner dialogue/internal thoughts – The unfiltered thoughts that run through MC's head

You don't need to use every four ways each time, but using one or a few of these tools to “show” instead of “tell” will keep readers invested in the story and feel as though it's happening exactly in that moment.

In Deep POV, since we are so limited on this one character we have choices to make in *what* we show.

What we reveal to readers in this level of POV is a huge part of creating depth. It's not just about showing WHAT the character sees, but HOW they see/notice something, and WHY.

In a standard limited third person perspective, the author might show us a room the character enters. It's seen mostly from the character's eyes, but the author might mention several elements of the room because the author can see it all, and thus writes it as if their character can too.

However, in Deep POV, the character can't see everything the author does. And even if they could, the real question is: Would they? Would your character notice all the things the author wants them to notice?

I highly doubt it.

When your character enters a room, they have an agenda. What their eyes land on first is very specific to them as a person. For example, an empathic character might notice the people in the room and how their body language portrays the vibe. An assassin might first notice all the items in the rooms that could be used as weapons. A prisoner might notice all the escape options before seeing anything else.

So remember that what you, as the author, place in a room is not the same as what your character will pick up on and *show* [in the writing] that they picked up on it.

Remember: in Deep POV, your readers *only* see, hear, taste, touch, smell, and think what the character does. You are breaking Deep POV if you try to expand beyond the character's

experience. (I'm not telling you this to shame other POV choices, but since this class is all about Deep POV, I will point out ways in which authors may break it, meaning they've left Deep POV behind).

And here's my editorial opinion: I do not believe Deep POV scenes should ever pull out of Deep POV.

There are some stories in which the writing starts in a more limited perspective, then moves into a deeper POV. To me, this is not Deep POV, because in order to truly master Deep POV, we are in it start to finish.

Yes, you can work in other scenes from other POV characters and use a less deep POV level for those scenes if it's essential to your story. But, for any character who is a Deep POV character, stay there, don't break from it. Because then you lose that sensation and it defeats the purpose of using Deep POV in the first place.

This is why one of our earliest lessons was about deciding if your story should be in Deep POV—or at least certain characters of your story. It's a specific choice, so understanding all that this means is important in making that decision.

So, this layer is about Showing It All. And I mean all of it that only your character CAN show.

If you are worried about over-showing, remember this can be edited down later on. And I'll add that Show Don't Tell is a writing rule that has its own several (maybe several hundred LOL) layers to it to explore. It is a complex topic, and I'm solely focusing on how we use this tool to our advantage through Deep POV.

If you want a better understanding of Show Don't Tell right now, I recommend K.M. Weiland's blog site <https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/> and do a search in the search bar for articles on this topic. She's written a TON and her articles are super comprehensive with a ton of examples and tips.



Homework

For your homework, I'd like to see you apply the elements of showing with an exercise. You can use your own characters for this, or use characters from our last lesson HW. In this exercise, I'm leaving you some room to work in your own details. Remember what you know as an author may not be what your character knows.

Part 1:

In Deep POV of Character A, write a 1-3 paragraph scene in which Character A walks into an enclosed space [i.e. bar, room, office] and characters B and C are already there, deep in conversation.

A is familiar with B, but has never met C. The three of them have a common goal, but not common ideas on how to reach it.

Part 2:

Now write it from Character C's perspective.

*For Part 1 and Part 2: Be sure to explore the very limited point of view your character has. Consider how Character C already knows the space and conversation before Character A comes in. Consider how Character A has never met Character C in their life, and maybe they've also never been inside this building before. What are your characters wearing (that they'd notice of themselves and of the others)? What are they doing? Thinking? Constantly ask yourself what your POV character would pick up on—what details do they notice (all 5 senses) that contribute to who they are, their goal, and their reason for being there?

Part 3:

Reflect!

How did you feel writing this same scene but in different POVs?

What did you learn from your characters?

What are the benefits of showing such a limited perspective?

What are the struggles you came across when doing this exercise?

Did you have trouble taking yourself—as the author—out of the writing?

Add anything else—your thoughts on this, questions you have, etc. Remember, this is class and these lessons are for you to boost your confidence and experience in the many layers of Deep POV.