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Showing vs. Telling: The Pitch Wars Edition



Types of telling and how to avoid them!

by Naomi Hughes 2 years ago 360 Views ▾

 **Naomi Hughes** @NaomiHughesYA 

Okay, [#PitchWars](#)! Let's switch things up today and chat about craft. Particularly showing vs. telling.

12:41 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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 **Naomi Hughes** @NaomiHughesYA 

Telling: informing readers of events, backstory, a character's feelings, etc. You're handing data to us on a silver platter.

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12:47 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Telling makes readers passive recipients of info. You give us the puzzle pieces already put together; we just observe it.
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12:48 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Showing, on the other hands, makes readers active participants. You give us the puzzle pieces and we figure out how they fit.
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12:49 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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@NaomiHughesYA

Showing = grounding us in your POV character's head and letting us watch a scene unfold, letting us interpret its meaning.
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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Telling can also feel insulting to readers. You don't trust us to interpret meaning; you're plopping it all in our laps. [#PitchWars](#)

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Okay! On to the nitty-gritties: types of telling and how to fix/avoid them. [#PitchWars](#)

12:54 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Telling variety no 1: Characterization. This is when you inform us of a character's traits ("Bob was sweet") instead of showing. [#PitchWars](#)

1:01 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Characterization via telling doesn't engage the reader. We have to take your word that Bob is sweet; you've shown us no proof. [#PitchWars](#)

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Naomi Hughes
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Of note: characterization via telling is sometimes fine for in-and-out characters or quick, super voice-y lines of narrative. [#PitchWars](#)

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Readers will invest much more deeply in your characters if you SHOW us, through in-scene moments, who they are.

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Instead of saying "Bob was sweet," show us a (plot-relevant) scene where Bob has to walk home b/c he gave up his bus seat.

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Another type of telling: adverbs. These inform us of how a character is doing something ("softly") instead of showing.

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@NaomiHughesYA

Adverbs= fine in moderation when used intentionally (same for most telling types). But! Know the rules before you break them.

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 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Nixing adverbs can give readers more insight to the scene: "Jo's fingers drummed on the steering wheel" vs. "Jo drove nervously." [#PitchWars](#)

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 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling hands us info (Jo is nervous), while showing lets us see the scene & draw our conclusions (drumming fingers=nervous). [#PitchWars](#)




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@NaomiHughesYA

Another type of telling: infodump. This pauses a present-moment scene to hand us a huge chunk of backstory/world-building. [#PitchWars](#)


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@NaomiHughesYA

Infodump ex.: Max runs from pirates. Max stows away on a spaceship. Then Max spends two pages mulling about how spaceships work. [#PitchWars](#)

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To avoid infodump, ask
-Does the reader REALLY need to know this to understand the story?
-Do they need to know it ALL right NOW?#PitchWars

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Note: some genres/audiences are totally cool with what others would consider infodump. In adult SF & epic fantasy, it's expected. #PitchWars

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To avoid infodump, sprinkle info into the story in small batches relevant to some plot-relevant thing happening in the present. #PitchWars

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Ex: readers are going to be way more interested in how spaceship rockets work if Max is trying desperately to escape from one. #PitchWars

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Next type of telling: emotional telling. That's when you inform us of how a character feels (I was mad, he felt guilty). [#PitchWars](#)

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@NaomiHughesYA

With emotional telling, readers again have to take your word for whatever emotion the character is feeling. It doesn't invest us. [#PitchWars](#)

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You can show emotion via dialogue, physical indicators, interiority, even the tone of the narrative for main characters. [#PitchWars](#)

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Type of telling: telling via dialogue. To inform readers, your characters stiffly talk about things they probably already know. [#PitchWars](#)

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@NaomiHughesYA

Telling via dialogue makes you as the author feel very *present* to readers. It's jolting; it pulls us out of the story. [#PitchWars](#)

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@NaomiHughesYA

Telling via dialogue also happens in classroom scenes, where we have to listen to the teacher lecture students about their world. [#PitchWars](#)

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Ex of telling via dialogue:
"Tom, you know our society is built upon birth location." [#PitchWars](#)

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How to avoid telling via dialogue: dialogue should *matter* to characters. It should be personal, & work toward an in-scene goal. [#PitchWars](#)

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@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @CharlesFemia

.@CharlesFemia Classroom scenes have the same requirements as any scene: they need to intensify or change the conflict... 1/2 #PitchWars

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @CharlesFemia

.@CharlesFemia ...have a scene-level conflict, & everything in them needs to be relevant to that conflict (or another conflict). #PitchWars

1:43 PM - Jul 18, 2016

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Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @CharlesFemia

.@CharlesFemia The danger= when a scene feels like it's built around the delivery of info instead of moving the story forward. #PitchWars

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