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# Telling vs. Showing

Ever wondered what counts as telling? I made a quick-and-dirty list, along with some examples and quick fixes:

by Naomi Hughes 3 years ago 136 Views ▾





**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Contrary to belief, telling (versus showing) is NOT the devil. It is totally okay in the right places and in small doses.

11:48 AM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

BUT in the wrong places or in big doses (or when used lazily instead of intentionally), telling will bore & disengage readers.

11:52 AM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

So! Because I am bored and my baby is taking an extraordinarily long nap, I think I shall monologue on the Glorious Varieties of Telling. :D

11:53 AM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling, variety no 1: adverbs. "She sighed happily" informs us she's happy, but we have to take your word for it.

12:01 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling, variety no 2: infodump. This is where you drop a big ol' chunk of dry info (usually worldbuilding or backstory) into the narrative.

12:03 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Infodump is particularly nefarious because it means you're hitting "pause" on a present-moment scene to give us not-as-interesting info.

12:08 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling, variety no 3: characterization shortcuts. "Bob was a grumpy guy," "Jo and Bobbi hated each other," "Jake was always cheerful."

12:12 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Characterization via telling is okay for in-&-out characters or to get info across quickly. But generally, SHOW the grumpiness/hatred/cheer.

12:14 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA


Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling, variety no 4: filtering. This is when you say "he heard footsteps" instead of something more like "footsteps pounded past."


12:16 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA





Replying to @NaomiHughesYA


Filtering means you're sticking a middle man (whoever's doing the hearing or seeing or realizing) between the reader and the story.

12:20 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA




Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Filtering ALSO means your verbs are boring (felt, heard, etc.). Liven it up, kill the middle man, give readers a more immersive experience!

12:23 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA




Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Filtering is an easy fix, though: "he saw the house" becomes "the house loomed ahead," "she heard the gate" becomes "the gate creaked," etc.

12:27 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling, variety no 5: emotional telling. Almost anytime you directly name an emotion ("she was sad," "he sighed guiltily"), it's telling.

12:33 PM - Jun 29, 2015

♥ 5 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets






**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Instead of telling us how characters feel, try to show it via dialogue, actions, & for main characters, word choice in the narrative itself.

12:35 PM - Jun 29, 2015

♥ 3 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





**Naomi Hughes**  
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Telling, variety no 5: telling via dialogue. This makes conversation feel like a puppet show--unnatural, arranged for the reader's benefit.

12:39 PM - Jun 29, 2015

♥ 3 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets







 **Naomi Hughes** @NaomiHughesYA 

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Sometimes sneaky authors use telling-via-dialogue to replace infodump, squeezing in worldbuilding by having characters chat about it. :)




12:41 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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 **Naomi Hughes** @NaomiHughesYA 

Whew! Okay, I think I got all the major telling-vs.-showing offenders. Let me know if you think of any others!

12:47 PM - Jun 29, 2015

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