

Boost Free Lessons - Year 7 English

Lesson 6: Show, Don't Tell

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Worked Example 1

Rewrite this telling sentence so that it shows instead: *Ben was angry.*

1. **Telling** names the emotion and stops there, so the reader is handed a label.
2. **Showing** gives the evidence and lets the reader work the emotion out.
3. Ask what anger looks like in a body: a tight jaw, clenched hands, a sudden movement.
4. Choose two or three specific details, and never name the emotion itself.

Model: Ben's jaw tightened. He set the cup down harder than he meant to, and the tea slopped over the rim.

Worked Example 2

Improve this sentence using the senses: *The kitchen was busy.*

1. **Busy** gives the reader nothing to picture, hear or smell.
2. Showing works best through the five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch and taste.
3. Start with sound, since kitchens are noisy: oil spitting, plates clattering, an order called out.
4. Add a smell, because smell is the sense most closely tied to memory. Two or three senses is plenty.

Model: Oil spat in the pan, plates clattered into the sink, and the whole room smelled of garlic and scorched butter.

Remember: **Telling** names the feeling. **Showing** gives the evidence through specific detail and the senses. Two or three well chosen senses beat a long list, and you should never name the emotion you are showing.



Question 1: Rewrite each telling sentence so that it shows instead.

1. Sara was nervous.

2. The room was messy.

3. It was very hot.

4. The dog was excited.

5. He was exhausted.

6. The bakery was welcoming.



Question 2: Read the passage below, then answer the questions.

Maya was frightened. The torch beam shook across the corridor wall. Somewhere behind her, metal scraped against metal, and the handrail was cold enough to sting. One of her shoelaces had come untied, and she did not stop to fix it.

1. Which sentence in the passage tells rather than shows?

2. Rewrite that sentence so that it shows instead.

3. List the senses used in the rest of the passage.

4. Find one detail that shows well, and explain why it works.

5. What does the untied shoelace suggest about Maya?



Question 3: Answer the following questions.

1. Write three sentences showing a character who is nervous before a performance.

2. Write three sentences describing a beach on a very windy day, using at least three senses.

3. Explain why showing is usually more effective than telling.

4. When might telling actually be the better choice?





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Answers and Model Responses: Show, Don't Tell**Question 1**

1. Model: Sara's fingers pleated the hem of her shirt, folding and unfolding the same corner.
2. Model: Yesterday's plate balanced on a stack of books, and one sock hung from the lamp.
3. Model: The bitumen shimmered, and the seatbelt buckle was too hot to touch.
4. Model: The dog spun twice on the spot, claws skidding, and knocked the lead off its hook.
5. Model: He blinked slowly, and it took him two tries to get the key into the lock.
6. Model: Warm air rolled out of the door, thick with yeast and burnt sugar.

Question 2

1. *Maya was frightened.*
2. Model: Maya's breath came short and fast, and she pressed her back flat against the wall.
3. Sight (the torch beam), hearing (the scrape), touch (the cold handrail).
4. Model: *the torch beam shook.* A shaking beam shows her hands are trembling without naming fear.
5. That she left in a hurry and had no time to stop and tie it.

Question 3

1. Model response: Anya wiped her palms twice on her skirt. She counted the exit signs at the back of the hall, then counted them again. When her name was called, the sound arrived a second late, as though it had come from another room.
2. Model response: Sand stung the backs of my legs and the umbrella folded inside out, skittering ten metres before it wrapped itself around a bin. Salt dried tight across my cheeks. Out past the break, the water had turned the colour of old iron.
3. Showing gives the reader evidence to interpret, so they feel the scene rather than being told about it. It creates a far stronger picture.
4. Telling is better when you need to move quickly through unimportant events. Showing everything would slow the story and hide what actually matters.

