Show, don’t tell...

**Technique 1: Let the readers see it themselves...**

Simply ‘telling’ an audience that a character has an emotion can be quite dull. A sentence such as “Angela felt scared” will hardly leave the audience quaking in their shoes. So how can we make such a description more engaging and interesting? Well, how do we know that Angela is scared? Let’s try describing her reactions: “Angela’s face went ashen. Her breathing came in ragged gasps.” Rather than just being told that “Joe was happy”, let us see his lips break into a smile, or his eyes crease because he is laughing so hard.

Let’s take a description of something mundane: a tree. We could say “the tree was tall”, but how can we make it more engaging for the audience. What do we want them to be seeing? Perhaps we can use a metaphor or simile to make it more interesting: “the trees reached upwards, their branches interlacing like (to form) the roof of a cathedral” or “the trees were silent sentinels”. Try to show exactly what it looks like, and highlight the aspects that you want to emphasise.

What is in this picture? Is it just a road with cliffs? Describe the image so the reader can see what is there.
Show, don’t tell...

Technique 2: Let the readers feel for themselves...

Sometimes people get so caught up in telling us everything that they don’t let the audience make any decisions for themselves. This is a shame, because the best part about reading a book is not being told what we should feel, but to be put in a position where we are actually made to feel those emotions ourselves.

Let’s look at this example. You could simply write “she was shocked when the lights were suddenly turned off”. Or you could focus on a detail, and actually convey the situation that is intended to make us feel shocked: “The tiny insect-crawl of the second hand was the last thing she saw before the lights went out.”

Put the reader in the position of your character. Make the reader experience it for themselves, to live through the same events and experience the build-up of tension, or hear the jokes that make us feel like we’re at a gathering that is comfortable, laid-back and amongst friends.

What is in this picture? What emotions are being conveyed? Describe a situation that could lead to this reaction.
Show, don’t tell…

**Technique 3: Use strong verbs…**

For those who need a reminder, verbs are doing words (such as jump, speak, play, or learn). However, some verbs are more interesting or precise than others, and using these more interesting verbs can really enhance your writing. Take the following example: you could write “Joe walked down the street”. The verb ‘walked’ is a bit mundane, and we can be more exact depending on the action that we want Joe to be performing. We could instead write “Joe ambled down the street”, “Joe crept down the street” or “Joe strutted down the street”.

We have many, many verbs to choose from, so use them to your advantage. For example, instead of writing “Jennifer wrote her name messily at the end of the contract”, you could instead write “Jennifer scribbled her name at the end of the contract”. Do you see how it’s neater, a bit more interesting, and more precise?

There are so many verbs available – use your synonyms, and make use of them all!

What is in this picture?
Look closely. What different actions are being performed, or could be occurring? Write a description, paying close attention to the verbs you use.
Show, don’t tell...

**Technique 4: Give us the details...**

You have to be selective when writing a story, but that doesn’t mean you don’t give any details. When you are describing a character or place, you can reveal a lot of information through your descriptions. For example, you could simply write “the man was well dressed”. It’s simple, concise, but leaves a lot unknown: what exactly does ‘well dressed’ mean, and how exactly does this person look? If it’s a main character, this could be a valuable opportunity to provide some details.

Let’s have another go at that description: “The man wore an ash-grey Armani coat over a crisp linen shirt, with a red silk cravat Windsor-knotted at his throat.” Now that’s a fancy outfit! We know the person is well-dressed, rich, and that he is flashy and probably outgoing.

You can do a similar thing with describing a place. You could, for example, just write “the house was old”. Or you could focus on the details that make this house unique: “The house slouched in a yard choked with weeds, its paint faded and flaking, the lace curtains in its windows yellowed with age.” Now we have a much better idea of where the story is set, and are beginning to get the story of the house itself.

What is in this picture? Provide a detailed description of this man’s appearance, and see if you can provide details about his past or personality.
Show, don’t tell...

**Technique 5: Use dialogue for more than just talking...**

Dialogue is important, not just because of what is being said, but because of what it can tell us about the characters who are doing the talking. What language do they use? Large, precise or complex words can make a person sound intelligent, while shorter, simple words can suggest a simple mind. Similarly, using lots of “I’s” and “me’s” can make a person sound very self-obsessed. The trick is to not have every character speak the same way – they are people, and people have their own nuances, mannerisms, and words they like to use.

You can also use those interesting verbs to be more precise regarding how a character is speaking (whispered, hissed, snapped, screeched, hollered, slurred, etc). Is your character really just talking? Are they muttering? Are they shrieking? Or squawking? Or squealing? How does their voice sound? What words are they likely to use? You can use all these details to build up your characters, give them a unique personality, or subtly reveal information about them.
Show, don’t tell...

**Technique 6: Use all your senses...**

It’s fairly easy to describe what you can see. But how far would we really get in the world if we only relied upon our sight? We interact with and interpret our environment through using *all* our senses – sound, touch, smell, and taste – so why not reflect this in your writing as well? Don’t merely provide a photograph – try to place your reader in the situation and environment themselves, through a full sensory emersion.

Don’t just tell us that it is a hot day; make us feel the sun punish our exposed skin, make us hear the deafening hum of cicadas shatter the still evening air, or see the burnt brown grass or the sun’s blinding glare. Don’t just say that it was a cold morning; make us feel the chilled air bite at our fingers, let us see our breath fogging before our eyes, or hear the crunch of the frosted grass beneath our feet. Think about how the environment can make us feel, and the little things that you would notice (or perhaps otherwise overlook).

What is in this picture? Would merely saying ‘there is an avalanche’ do it justice? Imagine what it would be like to be caught here, and describe what your senses would notice.