

Exercise your *showing* skills

Get out a notebook, a laptop, a piece of paper, or your preferred choice of writing material. Below, you will find twenty examples of telling. After every example, stop reading and write down a possible revision that turns telling into showing.

Once you wrote down your solution, you can compare it to my suggestion below.

1. She was exhausted.
2. When the horse became nervous, she soothed it.
3. It was amazing to him how Betty could eat so much.
4. He was stunned by her confidence.
5. She could see how relieved he was.
6. "Really?" she said in disbelief.
7. She missed the bus.
8. She couldn't contain her excitement at winning the lottery.
9. She was xenophobic.

10. She hated when he didn't listen.

11. She worried that it was just wishful thinking.

12. Then Tina realized that in her annoyance with Betty, she had forgotten to bring her phone along.

13. Tina was jealous of Betty.

14. She blew out a breath of relief.

15. Tina watched him smile at her and felt herself blush. She realized that despite all his faults, she was in love with him.

16. It was very hot as the fire came closer. Tina was afraid that they would all die.

17. Driving an automobile was fun, she realized, even though she'd been a little afraid at first.

Possible solutions (showing)

Remember that there is no one right answer. My solutions are only meant to give you an idea of how showing could work. Your solution might be very different but just as good.

1. She sank onto the couch. Sweat made her T-shirt stick to her back. God, she'd kill for a shower! In a minute, she'd get up and take one, but right now she couldn't muster the energy.
2. The mare snorted and sidestepped. Tina paused in mid-motion. "Everything's fine, beautiful."
3. Wow. If Betty ate one more bite, the button on her pants might pop off.
4. His gaze followed her as she strode past, head held high. Wow.
5. His shoulders sagged, and the deep lines on his forehead smoothed out.
6. "Really?" she said.
7. She sprinted down the street, waving wildly, and yelled, "Stop!" The bus rumbled on without slowing.
8. She spun around the room. "I won! I'm rich."
9. "Why don't we hire a Chinese houseboy? The Harringtons have one, and they seem very satisfied with him." Her mother's frown deepened. "You know I don't like Chinese people. They are just not trustworthy." "How do you know, if you've never employed one?" "It is common knowledge," her mother answered.
10. "Did you hear what I just said?" "Yeah, sure." "What did I say?" "Can we talk about this later? My show is on."
11. Maybe it was just wishful thinking.

12. Tina patted her pockets. Damn. Her phone was missing. She must have forgotten it when she'd stormed out on Betty.
13. God, couldn't Betty stop flirting even for a second? But no, she had to flash her toothpaste-ad-white teeth as she smiled at John.
14. She blew out a breath.
15. When he smiled at her, heat shot up her neck. *Shit. I'm head over heels with this idiot.*
16. The air began to vibrate and flicker with the heat as the fireball rolled toward them.
Tina held her breath, afraid her lungs would be scorched if she sucked in even a little air. She covered her face with her arms to protect it from flying embers. Heat shot toward them as if someone had opened an oven door. It scorched her skin, even through her clothes. Oh God! They'd be charred alive!
17. The automobile plunged down the hill.
A scream escaped her. She reached up and gripped her straw hat with one hand to keep it from being swept off.
When they didn't crash against any of the trees rushing by, her tight grip on the side of the seat loosened. She raised her face into the wind, letting it cool her heated cheeks.
"This is like flying!"

For more examples and information on showing and telling, please read:

Show, Don't Tell. Learn how to bring your writing to life
by Sandra Gerth