

Tips to writing a second draft

In addition to fixing plot holes, punctuation and grammar and clearly describing the scene of your narrative, there are other techniques writers should be aware of when going through their work a second time. Each story can be broken down into scenes. Each scene should be shown with characters doing and talking and moves the action forward towards the end.

Spend some time tying the beginning and the ending together.

This means don't just tell the reader (ex: a character is acting weird)... show the reader how by what the character says and does, and let the reader decide. To convince your readers, show, don't just tell them what you want them to know.

So you must ask yourself where in the story you can show something happening instead of simply saying that it happened.

Showing, Not Telling - what does it mean?

You can add force to your sentences by allowing your readers to hear, see, and feel the activities in your essays and stories. Rather than just telling readers what happened, use the following strategies.

1. Show the action

Telling: He was angry.

Showing: Growling, he threw his soda bottle at me.

2. Use dialogue (important! Let your characters tell the story!)

Telling: I made it plain that we needed to leave the party, but he said that he wanted to stay for one more dance. Reluctantly, I agreed.

Showing: "Let's go home now," I urged.

"Come on, the night's still young," he replied. "Let's stay for one more dance."

"Okay, but that's all – just one more dance," I insisted.

3. Give concrete details

Telling: On the way home, he drove the car so recklessly that he frightened me.

Showing: On the way home, he raced his Cherokee through the narrow streets, slashed onto Morgan Boulevard, ran two red lights, and squealed to a stop in my driveway. I sat gasping in fear, unable to speak or open my door.

4. Specific is terrific!

Telling: He stood too close to me.

Showing: He towered over me, so close I gagged on his garlicky breath.

Example:

Mostly Telling:

From the way she behaved in the crowded restaurant, you could tell Sally was liked the cute boy in the black shirt. She tried a few things to get his attention, and eventually she thought she succeeded. (The author wastes no time providing the information, but the story is very thin... nothing interesting seems to be happening.)

Mostly Showing: (with dialogue)

Bored by the conversation, Sally tossed her hair and laughed. That boy had been scanning the room, and he noticed her this time. Wait -- was that a half smile? Had he just put his hand on his heart? Or was he just brushing something off of his shirt? Sally smiled.

"He's kind of cute," Sally's friend giggled.

Sally casually looked away. "Oh, I don't know," she said, twirling a curl. She let her eyes rest on the artwork, the flowers, a random face in the crowd, and found another excuse to laugh. Carefully turning her profile, she batted her eyelashes the way she and her girlfriends had practiced in middle school. That ought to do it, she thought.

Specific Nouns

Specific nouns are especially helpful when you are trying to create a clear image or word picture for a reader. Notice the difference between the two example sentences below. The first sentence contains general nouns, and it doesn't express a very clear idea. The second sentence, which includes more specific nouns, does express a clear idea.

The scientist wanted to study animals in another country. (general nouns)

Jane Goodall wanted to study chimpanzees in Tanzania. (specific nouns)

Look at the examples below. Notice that the nouns move from very general at the top to very specific at the bottom. By using a good number of specific nouns in your writing, you will make it easier for the reader to understand exactly what you are saying.

person	place	thing	idea
man	building	book	pain
artist	arena	reference book	headache
Van Gogh	Madison Square Garden	Farmers' Almanac	migraine

Vivid verbs

Avoid adverbs if you can find a strong verb to use instead.

Weak: He ran quickly down the street and jumped wonderfully over the fence.

Stronger: He raced down the alley and soared over the fence.

Name: _____

Circle the second verb, which contains a wrong tense shift, and write the correct tense of the verb above it.

1. Jamie drops out of the race after noticing one of his skates was untied.
2. After Mr. Bluefish devours minestrone, he remembered seeing a fly in his bowl.
3. Poly Panoplies plays with her one-eyed fish, washes her three-legged dog, and squeezed her deaf cat before she launders her old wig.
4. Freddie stuck Corn Flakes into cupcakes and enjoys flaky cakes.
5. Kevin works eight hours a day, but on Saturdays, he relaxes while he watched old Kung Fu movies from the 1970's.
6. The library was closed for spring break, so Vicka, the apprentice, has a week off without pay.
7. My professor liked to take off his socks while he teaches students about global warming.
8. Sometimes Dennis emails Missy but has nothing to say so he wrote "hello" a hundred times.
9. It wasn't even summer when the announcements for the new course in bungee jumping come out.
10. Frederica was extremely starving before she takes dancing classes.
11. Ricky had to go home after the school blows up.
12. Gigi loved to eat pizza when she goes for a bath tonight. That is why she always smelled so pepperoni.

Print only this last page and attach to the end of your final essay.

The second draft of your essay is due next week; be sure to improve grammar, spelling and punctuation and add more details according to the score you received for your first draft.

Use the techniques we discussed in class for improving a second draft. Do not write a new essay with a new topic. The challenge is to improve the first draft essay you have. Criteria will be higher for the second draft.