



Seven Steps to Writing Success

Step 5: Show, Don't Tell

Step 5: Show, Don't Tell

Hi,

Usually my goal is to persuade students to write 'brief, short and sweet'. However, for important scenes, writers need to totally convince the reader – and that takes time, place and space.

Here's some examples to 'show' you the importance of Step 5: Show, Don't Tell.

TELL: Cassandra, the model was really tall and really stuck up.

SHOW: Cassandra strolled into our house like she was on a catwalk. 'Hi,' she said and looked as if she was bored already. She did the long slow model walk to the nearest chair, ducking her head under the lounge room light as if she would hit it. She was tall, but trust me, she wasn't that tall.

TELL: My grandmother used to be a famous ballet dancer but now she's really old and frail.

SHOW: Ma had come to the front door to greet us. She always calls everyone 'dear'. It's easier. She's ninety one and tends to get all the names mixed up. She once used to be a great ballet dancer. She'd toured the world – now you could see all the veins stand out in her hands just from the effort of standing up. (You Choose, Ch 5 - my Year 6 novel)

TELL: The old house was really dark and creepy. Katy and I were trying to be brave.

SHOW: It was dark in the house, but the light at the top of the stairs made shadows where none should be. Weird. There should have been silence too, but all around us were these tiny creaking sounds, so low I wondered if they were real. Then came a scurry of feet, way too large to be mice.

'Rats?' whispered Katy.' I shook my head and swallowed hard.

'I don't think so,' I muttered. My mouth was dry.

If you TELL, you tend to say something straight out, and it's often boring. If you SHOW, then the writing is longer, but far more powerful.

Jen McVeity
Author, speaker, 2006 National Literacy Champion

Action Activity

In our teacher PD's these last few months, we've been playing with ideas of *Show, Don't Tell* using brainstorming to find EVIDENCE. It's lots of fun.

e.g.: What would SHOW you (i.e. give evidence) that a kid was not doing his homework.

- Messy locker, paper everywhere
- Bag not unpacked
- Half finished notes lying around
- Avoiding teachers
- Teacher nagging
- Vague answers to questions about school work – 'yeah, yeah, nearly done.'



Then you put it into one paragraph.

It was a mistake to open his locker in a hurry. Half a tonne of notes fell out, right onto the concrete - and the smell followed.

He hoped it was just his runners and not some stray bit of lunch left over from last month.

'Tony, where's your homework?' That was Ms Palotti, standing over him and tapping her foot. Loudly.

'Er...it's at home.' He put on the hard-working innocent act. 'It's nearly done, I just had trouble with question five.' Ms Palotti didn't look convinced. She frowned and her foot tapped louder.

Class activity: Get kids to form groups and brainstorm evidence for one of these:

- A teacher is getting married in secret.
- Your friends are planning a surprise party for you.
- A new kid is the son of a movie star, but he doesn't want people to know.

Quote of the month

Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand. (Chinese proverb)

It's my birthday - so let's have some fun!

You are getting this on my birthday. No, presents please <grin>. Oh, and you can stop singing! And you can even stop ringing, because after 2.00 Tuesday everyone in the office will be drinking champagne.

But of course, if you want to join in the celebrations, then do enjoy these sudden birthday offers I've decided to create.

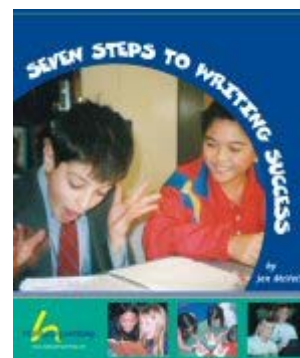
No-one in the office even knows about them yet. He, he...

So Birthday offer #1

Seven Steps Teacher Manual - 20% off

That makes it \$144, (usually \$180) for a few days only. Until Friday (31st Aug) Move fast.

No, really do stop singing, pleaaaseeee...



Birthday offer #2

Student Workbooks (class sets of 25 minimum)

Usually \$15, guess what you can buy them for? Yep, 20% off, so that makes them a mere \$12 a set. And we talking BOTH workbooks (Steps 1-3 and Steps 4-6) for that price per student. (OK, I have a calculator: So for a grade that's just \$300 instead of \$375.)

No, no please, no streamers either. There's enough mess in the office as it is....

Birthday offer #3

This one is for your parents. How about our wonderful **Top Tip Sheets to put in your school newsletters?** You asked me for these and I'm passionate about helping parents be powerful teachers too. So you can order these until Friday 31st for...

18.18% off. (Fooled you!) Yep, the newsletter pages (8 of them beautifully laid out, a full term of Seven Steps tips) are usually \$55. You can have them for \$45.

The gang in the office will be frantic when they discover what I've done. He, he, he... Won't they be busy!?! But wait, one last thing.

Birthday brilliance #4

YES, OK, OK, I guess I can **discount the electronic licence** too. This includes the Teacher Manual and the FULL licence to copy the Student Workbooks for ever and ever. OK, you can have 20% off. If you are a large school, that over \$176 dollars discount. Oh, and don't forget you get print copies of all these (1 Teacher Manual and 10 Student Workbooks each) when you order.

STOP SINGING! Really it's embarrassing. (No, that wasn't a comment on some voices...)

Just start faxing. (03) 9521 8437 Or phoning (03) 9521 8439

ORDER FORM

Jen – off to celebrate now.

Order from the website: www.highlightingwriting.com

Telephone: 03 9521 8439

Fax: 03 9521 8437



Subscribe: www.highlightingwriting.com