Telling vs. Showing

\* Summarizes key points \* Recreates experience (brings it

to life)

\* Contains few specific details \* Uses carefully chosen sensory

details

\* Tends to use vague words and \* Uses powerful verbs and nouns

“to be” verbs (is, am, are, was, were) that are specific & interesting

\* Ranges from vaguely interesting \* Engages reader’s sense(s) and

to B-O-R-I-N-G! emotions (draws them into the

experiences)

Writing becomes more interesting when descriptive techniques (showing vs. telling) are used to help the reader feel they are participating in an experience. Below are examples of moving from the general to the specific, from boring to the potentially fascinating!

I was **tired**. 🡪 I was feeling exhausted. 🡪 My body was so overcome by weariness that the moment I got home all I could think to do was crash on the couch and, armed with my remote and a bowl of popcorn, spend the rest of the rainy afternoon watching old movies on Netflix.

The skiing was **really great**. 🡪 There was beautiful powder underneath me. 🡪 An exhilaration exploded through my consciousness as I glided through the fluffy sea of powder that left me intoxicated and desiring more.

It was **fun** to swim with fish! 🡪 Swimming with fish was a new, memorable experience. 🡪 Before my first dive, I anticipated my experience to be something like swimming in a big aquarium; however, what happened was more like exploring an alien planet, complete with weightlessness, a “poisonous” atmosphere, and exotic creatures.

Here are a few examples of WHY WE SHOW from N.H. Kleinbaum’s *Dead Poets Society*:

“… avoid using the word ‘very’ because it’s lazy. A man is not very tired; he is exhausted. Don’t use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys: to woo women. And in that endeavor laziness will not do. It also won’t do in your essays.”

“We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. So medicine, law, business, engineering... these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love... these are what we stay alive for.”

Your turn: Choose two sentences from below and revise the statement by writing three or four sentences that express the idea in more detail **without** using the underlined words.

Her perfume stinks.

The fly was annoying.

It was fun to go the mall.

The weather was great.

I was afraid.

The game was exciting.

The fast food was delicious or disgusting.

I was in great pain.

The book was good.

Examples:

**The book was good.**

I flipped the back cover to confirm that it was over. The world I had been living in for days was gone and there was nothing left but the scraps and debris of a fictional world left on my heart. As I wiped away the damp tears across my cheek, I could feel the beginnings of a smile stretching across my face. I had just swam across an ocean of heartbreak, happiness, and anger, and nobody knew of this challenge but me. Coming back to reality was hard, but I picked up my next paperback and began to dive into a new world, leaving a great one behind.

**The fly was annoying.**

The miniscule black insect swarmed around my head with its vomit covered mandibles like a little sibling trying to pester my mind. It buzzed its transparent, rice paper wings through the air that I was occupying and made sure that my force field of tranquility was disturbed supremely.

**The weather was great.**

The weather was groovy enough to make me want to spread out across the field of pink and yellow flowers like the sun shines down on Earth. The big ball of fire in the sky was playing peek-a-boo with the fluffy clouds while heating the dry air like a fireplace. It’s gentle heating wasn’t enough for the cold winter breeze, which felt like a cold hand lingering across your face.