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## SPECIFIC DICTION IN SENTENCES: SHOW AND TELL

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Remember that your writing will be most effective if you specify rather than generalize. When you express emotion or use description, you should "show" the reader your subject rather than "tell" the reader about it. "Showing" means you give the reader specific details appealing to multiple senses--sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. You show your audience specific objects, images, and sensations that convey the idea rather than simply stating the idea.

**Bad use of generality:** "I was nervous and excited as I heard the news."

**Good use of specific details:** "My hands trembled and my heart quickened as I heard."

**Bad use of generality:** "It was a winter day. It was cold as I walked outside."

**Good use of specific details:** "Frost coated the ground as birds shivered in naked trees. My breath misted in the air, and every step I took crunched in the snow."

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Of course, there will be times when generalizations serve your purpose as well. Sometimes, short, stark statements add emphasis. However, specific description creates a sense of realism. It makes the reader participate in your writing. **Hint:** "telling" usually involves using a weak *to be* verb (*is am are was were be being been*), and if you can remove that verb and replace it with an action verb, you will be one step closer to "showing" with specific diction. Similes and metaphors also help.

**Directions:** Take these generalizations and transform them into specific, descriptive details. "Show" your readers these ideas without simply "telling" them in generalities.

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| 1. He was happy to see her.               | 18. The fire was out of control.           |
| 2. The morning was rainy.                 | 19. Jeffrey is a weird guy.                |
| 3. She was beautiful as she danced.       | 20. She smiled with happiness.             |
| 4. The gift was a surprise to me.         | 21. My brother carries too much luggage.   |
| 5. The coat was ragged.                   | 22. I felt ill.                            |
| 6. The music was too loud at the party.   | 23. The machine was broken.                |
| 7. They had no fashion-sense at all.      | 24. The baby was upset.                    |
| 8. My dorm room was a mess.               | 25. He was really strong.                  |
| 9. He looked very old.                    | 26. The bridge looked unsafe.              |
| 10. The parents were proud.               | 27. The advanced math problem was hard.    |
| 11. The horse ran fast around the meadow. | 28. She was poor.                          |
| 12. The sea was restless.                 | 29. Frankie was lost.                      |
| 13. He drove too fast.                    | 30. The chair was flimsy.                  |
| 14. The house was mysterious.             | 31. The house was expensive.               |
| 15. She seemed frightened.                | 32. The comedian's routine was going well. |
| 16. The food at Stokely was disgusting.   | 33. The artwork was amazing.               |
| 17. It was fall on campus.                | 34. The trip was fun.                      |