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## Rework Your Story to Get More “Show” and Less “Tell”

by Denis Ledoux

There are ways to rework your stories so that you can minimize “telling” and maximize “showing.” The biggest “telling” offense is perhaps the over-use of descriptive adjectives and adverbs.

Adjectives and adverbs often “tell” the reader what to feel or how to interpret the story instead of evoking that feeling and interpretation. While adjectives may seem to add color and movement and insight to a scene or description, they are often simply a lazy way to write. This is especially true of descriptive adjectives—adjectives like *beautiful* and *kind* and *nice*!

One possible solution to this problem is not especially difficult. Replace at least half of your descriptive adjectives and adverbs with *settings*, *dialogue*, and *actions*.

Yes half. That’s 50%.

Here are examples of how to convert adjectives and adverbs into more effective writing:

◆ into action:

*...she said angrily* might become *...she said, picking up the mail and tearing it into shreds.*

◆ into setting:

*We were poor* might become *In the living room, the linoleum rug was ripped along the edges and black streak marks showed where the boards beneath were uneven.*

◆ into dialogue:

*She was passive-aggressive* might become *She said, “I’m not angry. I haven’t given it a second thought, you bastard.”*

Whenever I present this option in a workshop, someone says, “But you tell us all the time to be more concise in our writing. In fact, you have

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the 10% rule that we need to eliminate that much from our text before we turn it out on the world. What gives?"

They're just different rules. The reworking I'm suggesting here does not produce a shorter more economical text. In fact, it usually results in a longer text. Length is not its goal. More evocative writing is.

Replacing 50% of your descriptive adjectives with dialog and action produces a more impactful text.

Try it and see if you don't like the results.

### Exercise

Go through a lifestory that you have already written and which you consider to be finished. Underline all the adjectives and adverbs in this story. Replace at least half of these with action, setting, and dialogue.

Doesn't this exercise make you appreciate the need to linger, to keep your stories from premature conclusion?

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