

## Description: Telling vs. Showing

When teaching description, we encourage students to “show” readers their subjects rather than “tell” readers about them. To make telling vs. showing distinction more concrete, offer the following discussion/examples and ask students to develop sentences illustrating the differences.

### Discussion & Examples

“Telling” your reader something involves making a judgment. It puts your reader in a passive position. It can be boring because it doesn’t require any active thinking or imagination.

For example:

The owl is powerful.

(Can you see this? How big? What color? How fast? How strong?)

On the other hand, “showing” enables your reader to participate in your description, use his/her imagination, and make the judgment him or herself.

For example:

The owl’s broad wings bend inward. Every feather is swept toward its body, as if it is ready to extend its wings in the next swift stroke.

### Now you try:

1. Choose one photo at [National Geographic Animals](http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-of-the-day/animals/) (<http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-of-the-day/animals/>) or another visually interesting web site
2. Create a chart like that below.

a. On the left, “Tell” (or make three judgments) about your National Geographic photo

b. On the right, revise your description and “show” your readers your subject, engaging his or her imagination.

For example:

Telling	Showing
The owl is powerful.	The owl’s broad wings bend inward. Every feather is swept toward its body, as if it is ready to extend its wings in the next swift stroke.
The monkey is curious	The baby langur monkey, safe within his mother’s arms, stares intently at the camera.
The pig is hairy	Long, stiff bristles cover the pig’s pink body so that it’s almost white.

