

Show, Don't Tell

When Actions Say More Than Your Words

Hi there...



My Name Is: Beth

I am...

- One of the founders of Sim Central.
- A lover of writing since before I knew it was a thing I could do for fun.
- A GM/AGM for two games and a player on three others across a few different fandoms.

I got my start with Star Trek simming back in 2001.

When I'm not writing I'm chasing kids, working with universities, or reading.



Show, Don't Tell

The kind of writing advice that almost feels trite considering how often it is given.

- Have you ever read something that gives you important information about the story without actually explicitly telling you that information?
 - What was that experience like for you as a reader?
 - What do you remember about it most?



Before we start...

“My big brother reaches home in the dark hours before dawn, when even ghosts take their rest. He smells of steel and coal and forge. He smells of the enemy.

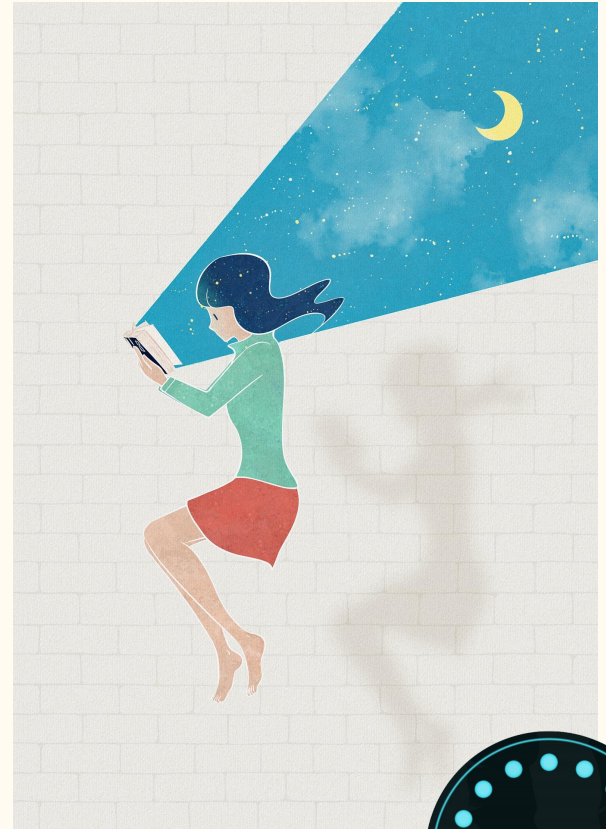
He folds his scarecrow body through the window, bare feet silent on the rushes. A hot desert wind blows in after him, rustling the limp curtains. His sketchbook falls to the floor, and he nudges it under his bunk with a quick foot, as if it’s a snake.”

- Sabaa Tahir, *An Ember in the Ashes*



Today we will...

- ★ Look at show don't tell in dialogue and in scene setting.
- ★ Practice some of the more difficult “showing” in each.
- ★ Look at a few examples where showing is done well and discuss what about them is so successful.





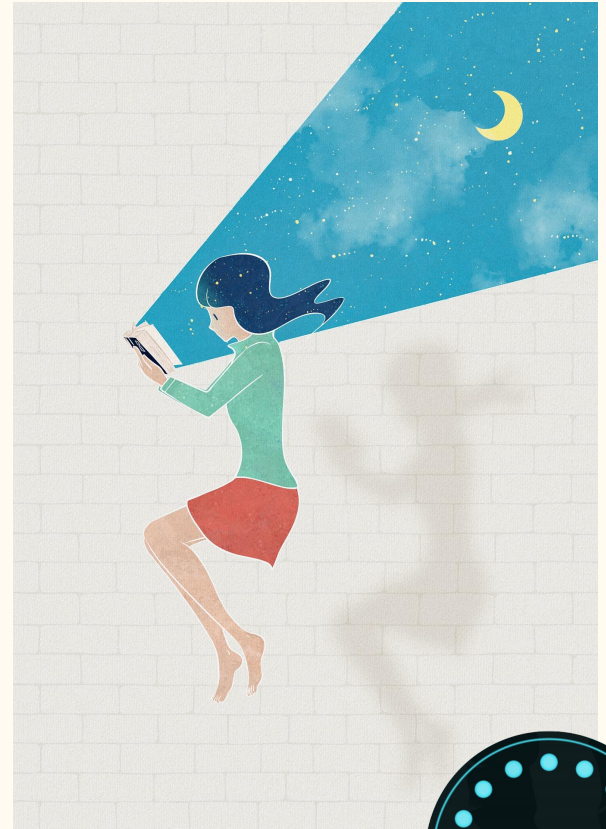
“Dialogue should simply be a sound among other sounds, just something that comes out of the mouths of people whose eyes tell the story in visual terms.”

- Alfred Hitchcock



Dialogue

- ★ When you are writing dialog what do you find most difficult to “show?”
- ★ What is your favorite type of body language to describe? Your least favorite?
- ★ What is it like when the person you are writing with tells rather than shows their character’s reactions?



Dialogue

The cat-like, almond shape of brown eyes blinked up at the shadow that had cast over his reading. "Hi-Hi. Um. Irynya." Noah winced while he pulled out an earbud, "Sorry, um, music. What-did... cuh-can I help?" He asked, clearly having not been able to hear what she'd said.

Irynya grinned, a small apology written across her features as she did so. "Oh, sorry," she said, lifting the tray in two hands as if to indicate Noah's ears. "I didn't notice those. Mind if I join you?" She indicated the empty seat across from him with her head, waiting expectantly for his confirmation.

Noah blinked in a moment of processing and then his eyes widened in realization, "Oh uh, yeah. Yeah sure. Um, One-one sec." Noah's long arms quickly began to gather, stack and set aside his work and play to clear space on the opposite side of the table. "There. Um." He gestured at the seat as he pulled both earbuds out of his ears and lifted his butt enough to push them into the small pocket in his uniform.



Dialogue - The Hard Ones - Hands



Dialogue - The Hard Ones - Facial Expressions





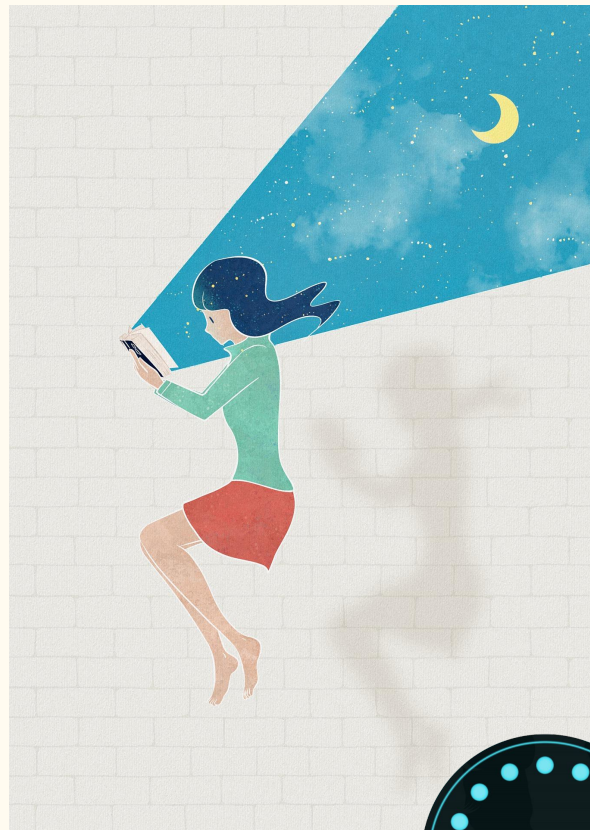
“Places are never just places in a piece of writing. If they are, the author has failed. Setting is not inert. It is activated by point of view.”

- Carmen Maria Machado



Scene Setting

- ★ When you are setting a scene what do you find most difficult to “show?”
- ★ What sense do you use most to set a scene? Least?
- ★ What is it like working with another writer whose scene setting is



Scene Setting

“The door to the establishment swung open not long afterward, with a force behind it sufficient to make it clack rather loudly against the wall. It was enough of an oddity to draw the eyes of a great number of patrons, and once their attention was seized, the object of their curiosity seemed satisfied with the results. Standing in the now wide open doorway stood an elderly man with a sour expression on his face. The din of voices that had been making idle conversation throughout the establishment came to an abrupt end as they took in the spectacle that was a grumpy looking Admiral busting through the front door.

The man behind the bar seemed to be the only one in the entire joint that didn't seem a bit phased by the man, "Look what the cat dragged in."



Scene Setting - The Hard Ones - Taste



Scene Setting - The Hard Ones - Smell



Thank You!

Want to chat further?

Find me on Sim Central: <https://discord.gg/simcentral>

Email me: beth@simcentral.org

