

## Chapter 3 Tell First, and then Show

The world is absurd, but do I know what you mean? Maybe, or maybe not. If you *tell* me only that your girlfriend is “beautiful,” it is too abstract for me to imagine what she looks like and how lovely she truly is. However, if you *show* me that she has magnificent black hair with light brown highlights, and that she walks with the grace of a snow leopard, then I have no problem seeing what you see.

*Telling* is not enough. You have to *show* as well. Say what you are going to say and then illustrate it with your own concrete details.

All essay writing is about telling and showing. If you are asked to write an essay about the best TV show you are currently watching, you tell first what the TV show is, and then show why it is so great that it has become your favourite. If you are asked to write about the games you most enjoyed before the age of ten, you tell first what they are, and then show how you played those games, and discuss why you liked them so much. If you are asked to comment on a short story, you first tell how you feel about the story and then show why and how you like (or hate) it.

If you apply for a special program or a university, you will be asked why. You will also tell the reasons first and then show in detail why and how. If you want to study a certain field, you tell first which field you want

**Nothing is more important than what I am about to say: First, we tell them what we are going to tell them. Second, we tell and show them what we told them we were going to tell them in three, developmental paragraphs. Last, we say—in the conclusion—SEE, I DID IT. I JUST BEAT THE SYSTEM BY ITS OWN RULES.**



to go into and then show with detailed reasons.

It is the same thing if you wish to get a particular scholarship or convince people you can do a job. You tell why and then show the details of your education, skills, and motives.

Telling and showing can also get you a brand new PC. That is what happened to Frank. Frank was a serious-looking Korean boy who complained to us again and again that his computer was as old as he (12 years), but his mother wouldn't buy him a new one (think in terms of Korean thrift here). We told him to write her a five-paragraph essay, telling first that he needed a computer, then showing in detail how he (and she) would benefit from the new computer. His mother was finally convinced. Money fell from the sky, and the snazzy new computer appeared.

Tell first, then show. Simple.

**Despite that the reasons for going to university are self-evident, it is just another hoop they want you to jump through. Why? We have to assume that people who will not jump unquestioningly through hoops are undesirable. Did George Bush jump through hoops to get through Yale and Harvard? Think about it. Paul Begala, political pundit, says it is really fun to watch Bush try to finish a sentence. It is like watching a drunk fat guy trying to cross an icy street. In short, all schools are for sale. I know this because I have brokered deals with parents and fancy schools. And I don't charge them for this service. I am paid in the fun I get just watching the schools writhe. In another book, I'll tell you about one deal I liased between Oxford University and a ten million USD cheque.**



All students who want to enter the undergraduate program at the University of British Columbia (UBC) are required to pass a writing test called Language Proficiency Index (LPI). One of our students went to take this exam when he was 14. Normally you don't take it until the university age of 18.

The following is what he wrote for the LPI Topic,

***What is the best TV show you have seen?***

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*Inuyasha*: The Best TV Show Currently Running

In my opinion, a good television show should be suitable for most, if not all, viewers, have a good plot and script, and air at a reasonable time. One such show is the Japanese animation (anime) *Inuyasha*. It is, for me, the best TV show currently running. To explain why I think so, I will expound on the three criteria mentioned above.

*Inuyasha* was originally produced in Japan, where morals and values may differ from ours, but it still provides entertainment for its intended audience: families. *Inuyasha* is a show oriented toward close groups of people of varying ages to gather together and enjoy. Because it is animated, most people unfamiliar with anime will probably call the show a cartoon. This is not true. In *Inuyasha*, one can find emotional drama, depth, and character development, which one would not expect to see in usual cartoons like *Bugs Bunny*. In addition, the bright, vivid colours and unique drawing style create a visual presentation that can impress even adult viewers.

*Inuyasha* takes place in a strange fantasy land. When one of the main characters, Kagome, falls down the well of a Shinto temple where her family resides, she travels back in time to the

Japanese feudal era. There she meets the dog-eared half-demon Inuyasha. She also discovers that she possesses the Shikon Jewel, or Jewel of Four Souls, which holds immense power. Pursued by many because of the jewel, Kagome accidentally breaks it. She and Inuyasha must team up to retrieve the shards and reunite the jewel. Already in the first episode a door is opened for heroic adventures and the chance to meet many unique and humorous characters. Because of its plot, *Inuyasha* (in Japan) has surpassed 200 episodes and is still as popular as ever.

*Inuyasha* airs every Friday in Canada from ten o'clock to eleven, two episodes per week. Being the end of the week, the time is not so much of a problem for younger children who have to go to bed early. It is not so early, either, as to interfere with an important date. Having two episodes a week also allows the show to get going enough to maintain the viewers' interest for another week. This show was only recently introduced to North America; I believe the schedule works well with the viewers it has now.

Shows like *The Simpsons* and *Friends* may be more popular, but *Inuyasha* takes the drama and humour (with a little action in between) to a good degree, and it is presented in such a way as to be suitable for all viewers. I hope there will be more shows like *Inuyasha*.

439 words. LPI essay.

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It isn't surprising that the student passed the exam in a breeze although many people older than he find the test extremely hard.

Another student of ours passed it at age 12. The following is his LPI essay with the topic,

*What is useful and frustrating about the Internet?*

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### The Internet, a Double-Edged Sword

Like most nice things, the Internet is both frustrating and useful in many ways. People use the Internet for almost everything: communicating, searching for information, shopping, etc.; however, this also leads to all kinds of frustrations when the Internet is not available.

One of the annoyances of the Internet is that whenever it is unavailable, we feel cut off from the rest of the world. In fact, I used to throw tantrums a great deal when my brother took all the time on the computer, which limited my time to use the Internet (this is no longer a problem since we recently got a second computer). I assume other people would also feel this way, considering the amount of time they spend on it nowadays. That is why whenever there are blackouts or technical problems, we are extremely irritated. It is even more exasperating when we can't get on a certain website we really want to get on—for no apparent reason—, or a certain down-

**Notice the expert use of parentheses and dashes.**



loaded file has infected our computer with a deadly virus.

People use the Internet for all kinds of purposes. Some use it for communication through instant messenger and e-mail. They can conduct a survey or simply chat with many friends at the same time. Some use it for information. They search through websites posted by other people. Some use it to share work, so others can see or use it. You can do this on your own website, or on the server of someone else who is happy to allow you to do so. Or, you can use public sites such as [mediaminer.org](http://mediaminer.org) and forums. All of these are very convenient to use.

As you can see, the Internet is like a double-edged sword, containing many uses, but rendering us helpless when it is gone. If one day something happened to our technology-based world, I can't imagine how people would continue to live.

316 words. LPI and IELTS essay.

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Note that this is a four-paragraph essay. We recommend five, whenever possible, because most passing sample LPI essays are five-paragraph (75 %).

Nancy is a pretty girl with long, shining, black hair. She came to Canada two years ago. When she first came to us, she constantly complained that she had nothing to write about. We told her to tell and show. She now says that she doesn't know when to stop. The following is one of her essays:

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### My Favourite Childhood Games

Everyone has childhood games. I had played many fun games before the age of 10. Some of them are long forgotten, but I do remember three games I enjoyed most: "Follow the Words," "Dodge Ball," and "Super Turtle."

"Follow the Words" is a passed-down traditional game in my family, used to train children's spelling skills. My grandmother played with my mother, and my mother played with me, and I think I will play with my children when I have them. It is a simple game with a minimum of two players. You simply have the first player start with a word, for example, "apple," then the second player says a word starting with "e," like "egg," and the third player follows with a word that begins with "g," such as good, God, goose, so on and so forth. When the last player finishes, it is the first player's turn again, going round and round. The rules of this game are that the words can't be repeated, and that there is a time limit for each player to think of a word.

Not good to use fun as an adjective—yet.



You first Tell (say what you are going to say; in this case she tells us that she is going to write about her favourite childhood games) and then show (illustrate with your own concrete experience. She shows us with the examples of "Follow the words," "Dodge Ball" and "Super Turtle.")

The best part about this game is that you can play it anywhere and anytime you want. My mother used to play this game with me almost every day, and we had much fun together.

School is also a great place to play games. For some reason, I played nothing but “Dodge Ball” during my first and second grade physical education classes. The game is played with two teams (16 people or more in each team) on two connected squares. Within each team, half occupy one of the squares, while the other half surround the opposing one. The players inside the square are counted as “in,” while the players outside are counted as “out.” When the game starts, team A players who are “out” will try to hit a team B person in the square with the ball. If the team B person is hit, and the ball bounces on the ground, he or she will be removed from the square and counted as “out.” If the team B player catches the ball, he will then pass the ball to his comrade outside the square in order for the person to hit a team A player who is “in.” Once you are “out,” you cannot go back “in.” When the other team’s players are all out, you win. I was never tired of this game because it was so much fun that everybody laughed from the beginning to the end of the class.

When we couldn’t go outside, my brother and I spent a great deal of time together playing “Super Turtle,” which is a game based on “Rock, Paper, Scissors.” We added to it certain hand gestures and songs in order to make it more interesting. The songs were from the movie, *Ninja Turtle*. To start, you do “Scissors, Paper, Rock” to see who wins or who loses. If it is a tie, both players sing one of the Ninja Turtle songs. If one wins, the winner will pretend to hit the loser’s face with his fist, while the loser quickly covers up his face. The players repeat those moves and do them faster and faster until one of them messes up the hand gestures or forgets the songs; then, he loses. I always won at first, but then my brother got older and became much better. We still play the game once in a while just for old time’s sake.

Many games are passed down by tradition or invented by

children themselves. They all have one purpose: supplying children with fun and helping them develop their physical, mental, and social skills. I am still grateful to my parents, my school, and my brother for all the fun and education I had when I was little.

643 words. LPI and Provincial Exam essay.

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Generally, this essay is a bit long. Remember, the more you write, the less time you have to proofread (if it is an in-class essay); the more over the limit you write, the more opportunities you create for errors. Normally 350-450 well proofed words is what you should shoot for.