

WRITING BASICS

WHAT EVERY AUTHOR SHOULD KNOW
BEFORE SUBMITTING A MANUSCRIPT



AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

WENDY DAVY

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Know Before Submitting a
Manuscript

Wendy Davy

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Table of Contents

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION 2: SHOWING VS. TELLING	2
SECTION 3: POINT OF VIEW	8
SECTION 4: DIALOGUE, KEEPING IT REAL... 	16
SECTION 5: CONFLICT AND ROMANTIC TENSION.....	23
CONCLUSION.....	30

Section 1: Introduction

Thank you for purchasing my self-guided workshop: *Writing Basics: What Every Author Should Know Before Submitting a Manuscript*. My name is Wendy Davy and I'm excited to share with you a few important aspects of writing I've learned over the past few years. I am a multi-published author with several full-length romance novels and short stories contracted with White Rose Publishing.

Through the publishing process, working with editors and doing research on my own, I've come to understand several important writing concepts. This workshop covers some of the most common mistakes many authors make. Whether you are new to the writing world or already published, my goal is to help you grasp the concepts that often confuse or intimidate writers.

Section 2: Showing vs. Telling

You probably have heard this advice before: Show don't tell. But, what does it really mean and how do you recognize the difference between the two?

When a writer *tells* a story, the reader *observes* what's going on and is less likely to become emotionally attached to a character. *Showing* a story allows the reader to *experience* the story along with the character. Showing the scene provides insight into the character's emotional state in a way that draws readers in and makes them care about the characters.

How do authors convey a scene in an entertaining manner without telling? We show the story through dialogue and actions.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES:

Telling: Derek felt protective of Jane.

Showing: Derek maneuvered in front of Jane, shielding her from the knife-wielding intruder.

Telling: Jake was angry.

Showing: Jake ground his teeth and fisted his hands as he strode out the door.

Telling: Neil thought Penny was beautiful.

Showing: Neil's breath lodged in his throat. Penny stood in the doorway, her auburn waves cascading

down her shoulders and her precious, emerald eyes glimmering with warmth and compassion.

Telling: Joe could see Julianne through the window. She saw him and looked happy.

Showing: Joe parted the curtains and met Julianne's gaze through the window. Her eyes widened and a broad smile spread across her face.

Telling: Mary looked frightened and left the room.

Showing: Mary's hands shook and her wide eyes darted from person to person. She let out a strangled cry, spun on her heel and dashed for the exit.

Telling: Betty heard Gary come inside and could tell he was upset. She guessed something bad had happened at work.

Showing: The door opened and slammed shut. Gary's booming voice echoed in the hall. "You wouldn't believe what happened today." He stepped into the doorway, his face contorted into a grimace. "I got stuck in a broken elevator for three hours and my boss blamed me for showing up late!"

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Keep an eye out for these common "telling" words.

Watched

Saw

Thought

Heard

Noticed

Felt

Realized
Knew
Was
Were
Looked
Decided

Note: These words are *indicators* to help you spot instances of telling, but keep in mind that the goal is not necessarily to remove all instances of these indicators. Sometimes these words are needed. Be aware, but be logical and wise when editing your manuscript.

ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

As writers, we need to be as direct and concise as possible. Using active voice lends itself to strong writing and engaging characters by keeping the focus on the subject.

Active voice: shows the subject doing the action. Another way to look at it is the subject takes “ownership” of the action.

Passive voice: is when the subject is being acted upon. This changes the focus of the sentence and weakens the writing.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Passive: The horse is being led by Mary.

Active: Mary is leading the horse.

Passive: The car was driven by Gerry

Active: Gerry drove the car.

Passive: The examinations will be taken by the students.

Active: The students will take the exams.

Passive: The roses were picked by Helen.

Active: Helen picked the roses.

SECTION 2 ASSIGNMENT: SHOWING VS. TELLING AND ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

Rewrite the following passage by *showing* the story rather than *telling* it. Remember to look for telling words and passive sentences. Add sensory detail and use active voice to show the story. Once you have completed your own version, take a look at my revised version below this passage.

Savannah pulled the oar through the water as if her life depended on it. Because, it did. Caught in the strong current, she realized the boat would be swept out to sea in a matter of minutes. She was tired. She exerted pressure against the oar, but she noticed the small rental boat was heading toward the ocean anyway. She looked at the dead motor, wishing she could fix it.

She didn't see any other boats and was about to panic. It was a hot day. She thought

the heat would suck the life from her as the boat was being led out to sea by the rip current.

The shoreline was getting smaller; the ocean looked wider. She was scared. Thoughts of a terrifying death by dehydration or sharks made her decide to continue. She slashed the oar through the water, stroke after stroke. As the boat drifted out of the inlet she noticed a small island in the distance. She felt adrenaline and hope sear through her. She decided she might live after all.

Please complete this assignment before moving on to the next page.

REVISED VERSION OF SECTION 2:
SHOWING VS. TELLING AND ACTIVE VS.
PASSIVE VOICE

Savannah pulled the oar through the water as if her life depended on it.

Because, it did.

Caught in the strong current, the rental boat would be swept out to sea in a matter of minutes. Her muscles screamed as she exerted pressure against the oar, but the small craft continued to head toward the crystalline ocean. The dead motor sat idle, and no other boats were in sight. Never before had she wished she were a mechanic.

The shoreline grew smaller; the ocean wider. Savannah struggled to maintain calm as panic clawed its way up her throat.

Her pulse raced.

Fear gripped her heart.

Thoughts of a terrifying death by dehydration or being eaten by sharks spurred her to continue.

Sweat dripped from her forehead and ran in rivulets down her back. Heat from the sun rays threatened to suck the life from her as the rip current continued to tug the boat out to sea. She slashed the oar through the water, stroke after stroke. As the boat drifted out of the inlet, a small island appeared in the distance. Adrenaline and hope soared. She might live after all.

Section 3: Point of View

Point of view (POV) is the vantage point from which the story is being told. We are “seeing” the story unfold from one character’s viewpoint at a time. The author can relay what the character is thinking and feeling by using POV effectively.

WHAT TO AVOID:

Head Hopping

A common mistake many beginning writers make is to hop from one character’s head (point of view) to another. Head hopping is generally confusing and often frustrating for the reader. Years ago this was common practice in romance writing. Now, it’s nearly obsolete.

We love our characters and want to show what they’re thinking and how they’re feeling at all times. We want the reader to know how the hero feels about the much anticipated first kiss when it’s happening, but we also want the reader to experience the first kiss from the heroine’s perspective. So, how do we decide which character’s viewpoint to ‘show’ the scene from?

Consider which character has the most to lose in that scene, or the one who is impacted the greatest from what is happening, and then write in that

character's viewpoint. If you can't decide, try writing the same scene in different points of view before choosing which works best.

How often to change POV

That's up to you. Some authors prefer to keep to one POV per chapter, some change mid-scene with a marked break in between. Others keep to one POV throughout the story. Whichever way you choose, make sure to stay in one POV long enough to allow the reader to become emotionally attached to the character and what's happening in the scene.

TIPS:

If using more than one POV, make sure to keep to the hero and heroines viewpoints. It is generally unacceptable to show the POV of secondary characters in modern romances, unless he/she is a villain.

Visualize yourself in the place of the character. What does she see, hear, smell and taste? What does she feel?

Although she can guess what the other characters are thinking, she can't *know* or *hear* their thoughts.

When not in a character's POV, use physical actions to convey reactions and emotions.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Head Hopping:

"You have to stay here." Rex's sense of urgency mounted with each passing minute. "I'll go and get help."

"I can't let you go alone. It's too dangerous." Panicked, Ellen grasped his arm. Now that she'd found him, she couldn't imagine living without him.

"I'll be fine as long as I know you're safe." Rex pulled away and immediately missed the warmth from her touch.

In the above passage Rex couldn't know Ellen's thoughts. (Now that she'd found him, she couldn't imagine living without him.) He also wouldn't know she's panicking unless she "showed" her emotions in some way.

Fix this by keeping to Rex's POV:

"You have to stay here." Rex's sense of urgency mounted with each passing minute. "I'll go and get help."

"I can't let you go alone. It's too dangerous." Ellen grasped his arm.

"I'll be fine as long as I know you're safe." Rex pulled away and immediately missed the warmth from her touch.

Here's an example using one of my novels, *Night Waves*:

Head Hopping:

"How many women have been abducted?" He hesitated only a moment. "Serena's the

third."

"What happened to the other two?"

Nick had to be careful. He could not give out any more information than could be found in the local newspapers. "They've been found."

Fear gripped Cali and her insides turned cold.

"Alive," he added quickly.

At first glance, this might sound OK to you. But, be careful. In this example, we are in Nick's POV and he can't see Cali's internal reaction. (Her insides turning cold.)

Keeping to Nick's POV:

"How many women have been abducted?"

He hesitated only a moment. "Serena's the third."

"What happened to the other two?"

Nick had to be careful. He could not give out any more information than could be found in the local newspapers. "They've been found." The heat shimmering in her gaze turned to ice-cold fear. "Alive," he added quickly.

To stay in Nick's POV, I used Cali's change in expression to convey how terrified she is by his statement.

SECTION 3 ASSIGNMENT: POV

Rewrite this passage using only Savannah's POV.

Savannah managed to maneuver the boat to the small island. Minutes later, she hopped into the shallow water. The aqua-marine waves washed over her legs as she dragged the craft onto the shore. Palm trees and wild vegetation greeted her, along with sounds of various creatures.

"You're on my island."

Savannah's heart slammed against her ribcage and she looked for the owner of the gruff, deep voice. A man holding a long spear emerged from the thick foliage and stalked straight toward her.

He came within inches and ran his narrowed gaze over her. He didn't like anyone encroaching on his property or into his life. "I value my privacy. I don't allow visitors here."

The sheer size of the man should've knocked the bravery out of her, but considering her options, she had nothing left to lose. "My motor died. I had no choice but to pull ashore."

His piercing blue eyes darted to the motor and then trailed over her. She appeared harmless enough with her wide, innocent eyes staring back. But, he'd been wrong before. After a moment, he scanned the surrounding beach and asked, "Are you alone?"

Her stomach plunged and vulnerability stole over her. She wanted to deny the truth, but figured he'd find out eventually. "I...I rented this boat so I could explore the reefs,

but the current caught me.”

He shook his head. This woman was the third stranded vacationer he'd had to deal with in the last month. He shifted the spear from one hand to the other. "Tourists." Even saying the word left a bitter taste on his tongue.

Dear Lord, is this man dangerous? Savannah took a step back. "What are you going to do with t-that spear?"

A wry smile lifted his lips but he said nothing. Stepping aside, he yanked the boat farther up the beach and looped the attached rope to a tree. Finished with his task, he crossed his arms and studied her as if deciding what to do with her.

Please complete this assignment before moving on to the next page.

REVISED VERSION OF SECTION 3 POV:

Savannah managed to maneuver the boat to the small island. Minutes later, she hopped into the shallow water. The aqua-marine waves washed over her legs as she dragged the craft onto the shore. Palm trees and wild vegetation greeted her, along with sounds of various creatures.

“You’re on my island.”

Savannah’s heart slammed against her ribcage and she looked for the owner of the gruff, deep voice. A man holding a long spear emerged from the thick foliage and stalked straight toward her.

He came within inches and ran his narrowed gaze over her. “I value my privacy. I don’t allow visitors here.”

The sheer size of the man should’ve knocked the bravery out of her, but considering her options, she had nothing left to lose. “My motor died. I had no choice but to pull ashore.”

His piercing blue eyes darted to the motor and then trailed over her as if he debated whether or not to believe her. After a moment, he scanned the surrounding beach. “Are you alone?”

Her stomach plunged and vulnerability stole over her. She wanted to deny the truth, but figured he’d find out eventually. “I...I rented this boat so I could explore the reefs, but the current caught me.”

He shook his head and shifted the spear from one hand to the other. “Tourists.” He grimaced as if the word left a bad taste in his mouth.

Dear Lord, is this man dangerous? Savannah took a

step back. “What are you going to do with t-that spear?”

A wry smile lifted his lips but he said nothing. Stepping aside, he yanked the boat farther up the beach and looped the attached rope to a tree. Finished with his task, he crossed his arms and studied her as if deciding what to do with her.

Section 4: Dialogue, Keeping it Real

Our goal as a writer is to keep the reader turning pages. In order to do this, it's important to avoid writing stilted, tedious or just plain boring conversations. Characters should talk just like you and me: Naturally.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Observe and study real life conversations.

Ever noticed how people don't always answer your questions? It may be frustrating, but it's reality. Remember this when writing conversations in your beloved manuscript. If Joe hero answers every question Jane heroine asks, she's either learned the art of extracting information from a man like no other has before her, or he's not 'acting' real. Also take note on how people tend to interrupt others while they are speaking, and how often one person dominates the conversation. It's also natural for people to pause and stumble through their words at times.

Here's an example taken from *Night Waves*:

The thought of an irate man waving a shotgun at Sheriff Justice made Cali's heart skid, and she swallowed. "I suppose the sheriff's used to

handling situations like that...right?"

"Oh, yeah." Helen waved absently. "Nick's been through much worse situations before. He can handle it. Don't worry. He'll be back to look for your missing friend."

"Oh, I didn't mean..." Cali took a deep breath and let it out. "I just...I'd hate to see anything happen to him."

"Ahh. I see." The woman's grin returned in full force.

Cali cleared her throat and edged toward the door. "I mean...well, you know. I'd hate to see any officer hurt in the line of duty. Or off duty. Or anytime." She wondered what kind of fool Helen must think of her now...

In this example, it's clear through the dialogue that Cali is flustered. If she spoke in clear, complete sentences it wouldn't sound realistic.

Men and women think, act and speak differently.

Women tend to go into more detail when talking. Men generally speak in as few as words as possible to get their point across, and are less likely to talk about how they feel. But, we do like our heroes to be compassionate and understanding, right? So, if the hero only speaks in mono-syllables, the reader can grow as frustrated as the heroine. The trick is finding the right balance.

Use the setting to keep conversations realistic.

In writing a scene, consider the setting the