

SHOW AND TELL

“Show, don’t tell” is the mantra of the novelist, dramatist, and poet. Creative writers learn to convey key emotional information by means of physical details: the storyteller invokes primal terror by spinning a tale about a child alone in a dark forest; the poet represents the whole history of human grief with “an empty doorway and a maple leaf.”¹ “Show *and* tell,” in contrast, is the mantra of the stylish academic writer, who illuminates abstract ideas by grounding theory in practice and by anchoring abstract concepts in the real world.

As a starting point, nearly all stylish academic writers ply their readers with well-chosen *examples*, *examples*, and more *examples*. For example, philosophers Glyn Humphreys and Jane Riddoch open a highly technical article on action and perception by posing a provocative opening question immediately followed by an illustrative case in point:

What is an object? . . . Consider watching someone walk behind a set of railings, a circumstance in which all the parts of their body are not visible at a given time. The lay answer, that the object is the person behind the railing, fails to account for how we see the fragmented parts of the person as a single “thing.” How does our visual system construct the whole object, when the sensory evidence for the object is fragmentary?²