

Writing Tips and Lessons

by Carl Sommer

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Good Writing

Good writing is an art that can be learned and developed. Many can write, but few write materials that engage the reader. Following are pointers that I've learned from years of study and writing.

I've searched and read many popular books, and I asked myself, "What do most books that are best sellers have in common?" They tell many stories.

If you want to become a successful author, become a storyteller. And don't be afraid to use your personal experiences.

Hook the Reader With an Interesting Beginning

The most important thing in good writing is the beginning. Below are some examples of beginnings from Another Sommer-Time Stories™ :

King of the Pond

Once there lived in a small pond a happy group of tadpoles. They had lots of fun together, except when Tombo was around.

Book: "I'm the biggest, the fastest, and the strongest tadpole in the pond!" boasted Tombo to his friends. "Try to beat me in a race."

Tilly swam up beside the noisy tadpole. "Tombo, when are you going to learn to stop breaking up our games? We were having lots of fun playing before you zoomed in."

If Only I Were...

Once there was mouse named Missy who had a big problem.

Book: Once there was a mouse—a wee, little mouse—named Missy.

She had lots of fun, but the wee, little mouse had a very BIG problem.

You Move You Lose

Once there were two stubborn bear cubs named Stubby and Prissy. A rabbit and a beaver disagreed as to who was the most stubborn.

Book: Once there was a young cub named Stubby. Bucky Beaver thought Stubby was the most stubborn bear in the forest.

Ricky Rabbit disagreed. He thought Prissy, Stubby's sister, was the most stubborn bear.

Passive Voice—Active Voice

In most writing, endeavor to use the active voice instead of the passive voice because it is more direct.

Passive Voice: When using the passive voice, the subject receives the action as expressed by the verb: *The ball was hit by Phil.*

Active Voice: When using the active voice, the subject performs the action as expressed by the verb: *Phil hit the ball.*

Use Descriptive Language or Show—Don't Tell

One of the most important lessons to learn in good writing is to show what is happening by using descriptive language instead of just telling about an event. When writing, don't just tell a story; try to paint an interesting picture with words. Following are examples of showing and telling:

Tell: Proud Rooster walked to the tree and told those looking to watch him as he began to climb.

Show: Proud Rooster stuck out his chest and walked up to the tree. "Just watch me!" he crowed as he began to climb.

Examples of Show Don't Tell*

Tell: A car raced down the street, and Davy jumped back onto the sidewalk.

Show: Zoommmmm!!!! went a car as it raced down the street. Davy jumped back onto the sidewalk, barely getting out of the way. "Hey!" shouted Davy. "You're going much too fast! I could have been killed!"

Tell: Dad was proud that Davy played a great game.

Show: "I'm so proud of you," said Dad. "You played a great game."

Tell: Proud Thomas wanted to win the race so he could become a famous king.

Show: "If I win," boasted Thomas, "I'll be famous!" He stuck out his chest and bellowed, "For I...will be the next king!"

Tell: Sangu was sad because he was lost. Now he wished he had listened to his mom when she tried to teach him to use the sky as a map.

Show: "Oh, how I wish I had listened to Mama when she tried to teach me how to use the sky as a map," groaned Sangu. "Now I can't find my way home!"

Tell: Christopher often visited Dr. Finkle. One day Dr. Finkle told Christopher that he was working on a time remote that would speed up time. Christopher was excited when he heard about this invention.

Show: One day Christopher asked him, "What are you doing today, Dr. Finkle?"

"I'm experimenting with something that speeds up time," explained the old inventor.

Christopher's eyes popped wide open. "Speeds up time?"

"Yes," said the kind old doctor. "You dial the time you wish to skip into the remote, and zap—time goes forward."

Tell: Teddy was happy that his new bike would bring back his smile.

Show: "Hooray!" shouted Teddy. "This bike will surely bring back my smile!"

Tell: Missy the mouse thought it was not fair that she was so little, had big ears, and a long skinny tail. Missy wanted to look like Horace the cat,

Show: "It's just not fair!" she cried. "Why do I have to be so little? And why must I have such a skinny tail and big ugly ears?"

Missy finally drifted off to sleep, moaning and groaning, "If only I were like Horace!"

Tell: One day some older squirrels showed Johnny and his friends a giant acorn. Acorns were the squirrels' favorite food. One of the older squirrels told him he could find big acorns at Mr. Smith's farm. Johnny wanted to go there to get big acorns.

Show: Then one of them [older squirrels] pulled out a giant acorn.

"Wow!" said the young squirrels. Acorns were their favorite food!

"Whew-wee!" Johnny yelled. "That's the biggest acorn I've ever seen! Where did you find it?"

"Across the meadow and over the fence on Mr. Smith's farm," answered the oldest squirrel.

Tell: Tilly told Tombo that he had better be careful because a fish or a bird might come and eat him. But Tombo just laughed. Tombo thought that they could never catch him because he was the biggest and fastest tadpole in the pond.

Show: Tilly swam over to Tombo and said, "You better be careful. When you jump out of the water, a fish might have you for dinner or a bird might swoop down and swallow you up."

Tombo laughed and said, "They'll never catch me! I'm the biggest, the fastest, and the strongest tadpole. I'm King of the Pond! I'm not afraid of anything!"

*Examples are from the award-winning Another Sommer-Time Story™ series.

Change These Scenes That Tell Into Scenes That Show

(Make up your own scenes.)

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2. Tell: Proud Thomas wanted to win the race so he could become a famous king.

3. Tell: Sangu was sad because he was lost. Now he wished he had listened to his mom when she tried to teach him to use the sky as a map.

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