SPECIFIC DICTION IN SENTENCES: SHOW AND TELL

Remember that your writing will be most effective if you specify rather than generalize. When you express emotion or use description, you should "show" the reader rather than "tell." "Showing" means you give the reader specific details appealing to all five senses--sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. You show your audience specific objects, images, and sensations that convey the idea rather than simply stating the idea.

Bad use of generality: "I was nervous and excited as I heard the news."

Good use of specific details: "My hands trembled and grew damp, and my heart pounded in as I listened."

Bad use of generality: "It was cold as I walked outside. Everything was frozen."

Good use of specific details: "Frost coated the ground in white patterns as the birds shivered silently in ice-flecked trees, and my breath misted in the air as I stepped outside. Every step I took crunched in the snow."

Of course, there will be times when generalizations serve your purpose as well. Sometimes, short, stark statements add emphasis. However, specific description creates a sense of realism. It makes the reader participate in your writing. Hint: "telling" usually involves using a weak *to be* verb (*is am are was were be being been*), and if you can remove that verb and replace it with an action verb, you will be one step closer to "showing" with specific diction. Similes and metaphors also help.

Directions: Take these generalizations and transform them into specific, descriptive details. "Show" your readers these ideas without simply "telling" them in generalities.

1. He was happy to see her.

2. The morning was rainy.

3. She was beautiful as she danced.

4. The gift was a surprise to me.

5. The coat was ragged.

6. The music was too loud at the party.

7. They had no fashion-sense at all.

8. My dorm room was a mess.

9. He looked very old.

10. The parents were proud.

11. The horse ran fast around the meadow.

12. The sea was restless.

13. He drove too fast.

14. The house was mysterious.

15. She seemed frightened.

16. The food at Stokely was disgusting.

17. It was fall on campus.

18. The fire was out of control.

19. She stood very still.

20. She smiled with happiness.

21. She ran in terror.

22. I felt ill.

23. The computer malfunctioned.

24. The baby was upset.