

## Stage 4: Step 2: Showing and Telling Highlight

### Who Should Do This Step? *You*

(If you're working with a reading partner, you can both do it.)

Highlighting is a wonderful review tool because it turns your writing into a visual field in which structural elements and patterns become instantly clear.

While a personal narrative can take many different shapes and be organized in a wide variety of ways, one basic characteristic of this genre is that it MUST contain some balance between:

### Showing

**“zooming in” to immerse the reader in a scene with details that make it come alive**

### and Telling

**“zooming out” to provide context for what is happening or explain the significance of an experience**

**Highlight all of the “showing” parts of your essay in one color and all of the “telling” parts in another color.**

To give you an idea of what this looks like, see these highlighted Stories of Self on the website:

- Eli Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection*: [storiesofselfworkshop.com/showandtell\\_clare.html](http://storiesofselfworkshop.com/showandtell_clare.html)
- Sherman Alexie's "Rebel Without a Clause": [storiesofselfworkshop.com/showandtell\\_alexie.html](http://storiesofselfworkshop.com/showandtell_alexie.html)

If you're working with a reader, have them highlight your essay separately from you. (Either copy-paste your essay into a new document for them to highlight digitally, or print out a copy for them to highlight manually.)

Take a look at your highlighted essay and talk about it with your partner. If you **disagree** about which parts are “showing” vs. “telling,” talk it out! Figure out why you felt you were doing one thing, while it was perceived in a different way.

You don't necessarily need to come to an agreement or be 100% sure about what is "showing" versus "telling"--showing and telling can sometimes be difficult to distinguish, or happen within the same paragraph or sentence. But it will be useful to reflect on what constitutes "showing" vs. "telling" regardless.

The balance between "showing" and "telling" does NOT need to be 50/50 or alternate at a 1:1 ratio throughout the essay (i.e., one paragraph of showing, one paragraph of telling.) For example, look again at the stories of self above, highlighted to show the balance between showing and telling. Notice that these authors vary in whether they begin with "showing" or begin with "telling," how they alternate between the two, and which one has more weight.

However, if your essay is solidly one color the entire time and then contains only a sentence or two of the other color at the end, that's an immediate sign that the balance is probably off.