

## Telling vs. Showing

### Telling vs. Showing

Strong, well-written statements of purpose show readers how your experiences are connected to each other instead of simply telling them what happened in your life.

**Telling means that you essentially list experiences from your resume or CV using prose.**

**Telling:** *In spring of 2019, I led a class project as a student of Dr. Ima Lopez. Our project entailed developing an ergonomic blood testing kit for individuals with diabetes and limited hand dexterity. We used feedback from individuals who could benefit from the device to improve our design with each iteration. After that, I interned at Big Company and worked on....*

Note: No explanation is given as to why the writer is telling a reader any of this.

**Showing provides details about how those experiences shaped your research interests, advanced your knowledge, etc. and tell your reader why you are sharing the information.**

**Showing:** *In spring of 2019, I led a class project as a student of Dr. Ima Lopez. Our project entailed developing an ergonomic blood testing kit for individuals with diabetes and very limited hand dexterity. We used feedback from individuals who could benefit from the device to improve our design with each iteration. Prior to doing such research, I did not understand how difficult checking one's own blood sugar can be if you cannot move your hands easily. Being a part of a research team that included end users in the design process not only taught me how invaluable their feedback is but also made me realize that I wanted to continue to be a part of research that can improve the daily lives of others. My team ultimately created a device that is now awaiting FDA approval and that will positively impact the quality of life for many. The experience developing the blood test kit led me to seek out an internship at Big Company in order to gain more skills in....*

**Note 1:** The writer tells the reader about their experiences but also shows how those experiences shaped other decisions. The writer answers the question "why are you telling me this?" for a reader.

**Note 2:** Your actual essay should be more technical and use much more of the language in your field.

**Commented [BP1]:** create hyperlink to the "general essay types" document here once uploaded.

### Eight Important Points to Help You Show

Write chronologically if you can so you can trace the evolution of your goal and decision to go to graduate school logically and in the order things happened.

You can use the points to add depth to descriptions of your research experiences, co-ops, internships, and other projects in any discipline. The points will also help you show instead of tell your readers.

1. For experiences at Tech or other universities: full name of the lead professor(s) on the project you worked on. Leave out graduate students who will not have finished their degree by the time you apply.

For industry experiences, you can usually skip this point. Leave out the names of supervisors unless you conducted research and that person has been published research.

2. specific project goal/objective

3. why readers should care about the work/why is the work important/what broader impact beyond your discipline for society in some way?)

4. your specific role

5. what you did in technical terms (avoid going step by step though)

6. problems/challenges you faced and how you overcame them

7. results (publications, presentations, extension of your learning, etc.)

8. how the experience shaped your decision to do what came next (this also creates a good transition to the paragraph and experience that comes next)