

Creative Writing

Transform telling passages into embodied sensory writing — using sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and physical sensation — with a translation key explaining each change.

Difficulty: Beginner → Intermediate

Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini

Use Case: Revision, Line Editing, Craft Improvement

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Why This Prompt Exists

Most writers know “show don’t tell” but don’t know how to execute it.

You get:

- abstract emotion labels (“she was furious”)
- telling through adverbs (“he said angrily”)
- no sensory ground for the reader to stand on
- passages that summarize instead of immerse
- revision that replaces one tell with another tell

But showing is not describing more.

It is translating emotion into sensation.

- Anger lives in the body (clenched jaw, hot face, shallow breath)
- Sadness has textures (heavy limbs, thick throat, blurred vision)
- Fear has sounds (blood in ears, distant traffic, someone’s laugh)
- Every abstract emotion has a physical vocabulary

Without sensory translation, writing stays on the surface of feeling.

This framework forces AI to be a sensorium engineer, not a thesaurus.

The Prompt

Assume the role of a line editor specializing in sensory detail, embodied writing, and the elimination of emotion labels.

Your task is to rewrite a passage that "tells" into a passage that "shows" using only sensory details.

Before generating, analyze:

- what emotion or state the passage is labeling
- what physical sensations accompany that emotion
- what the viewpoint character would actually perceive

Then generate:

1. The original passage (as provided by the user)
2. A rewritten version using only:
 - What the character sees (light, color, movement, shape)
 - What the character hears (sound, silence, quality of noise)
 - What the character smells or tastes (if relevant)
 - What the character touches (texture, temperature, pressure)
 - What the character feels in their body (heart rate, breath, tension)
3. A "translation key" explaining which sensory detail replaced which told emotion
4. Three general principles for showing vs. telling that apply to this

passage

INPUTS:

Original Passage (telling version):

[PASTE PASSAGE HERE]

Point of View:

[FIRST PERSON / THIRD PERSON LIMITED / THIRD PERSON OMNISCIENT]

Character's State (if not obvious from passage):

[E.G., "grief, not yet raw, the kind that makes everything taste like cardboard"]

Sensory Strengths of This Writer (optional):

[VISUAL / AUDITORY / TACTILE / OLFACTORY / ALL EVEN]

RULES:

- No emotion labels (angry, sad, happy, afraid, lonely, etc.)
- No adverbs describing dialogue (he said sadly)
- Every sentence must contain at least one sensory detail
- The translation key must be explicit (line-by-line if helpful)
- The three principles must be actionable, not platitudes

How To Use It

- Run this on your "telling-est" paragraph first — the contrast will be dramatic.
- The translation key is for learning, not for publication. Keep it.
- If the rewritten passage feels longer, that's fine. Showing takes more space than telling.

- Don't show everything — showing is for important moments. Telling is for transitions.
- After a few rounds, you'll start writing sensorily on the first draft.

Example Input

Original Passage (telling version): “He was nervous about the meeting. He didn't know if he was ready. The room felt intimidating, and he was afraid he'd say something stupid.”

Point of View: Third person limited

Character's State: Low-grade anxiety before a high-stakes presentation

Why It Works

Most “show don't tell” advice fails because it's a rule without a method.

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- complete elimination of emotion labels
- sensory substitution as technical skill
- translation key for learning transfer
- actionable principles, not clichés
- practice on the writer's own words

Great showing doesn't describe emotion — it builds a world the reader feels their way through.

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