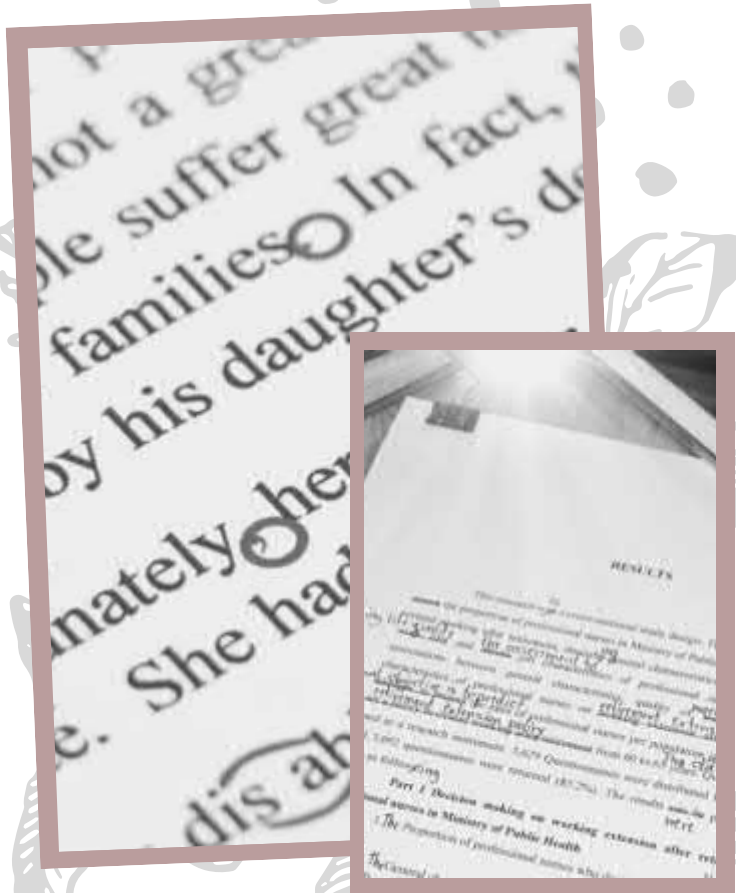


Using 'show, don't tell'

as an editorial business tool

Louise Hamby
FICTION EDITOR & PROOFREADER





Are you scratching an old itch to move into a different area of editorial expertise? Wondering how to turn that into reality? ‘Show, don’t tell’ isn’t just a writing technique. It’s a principle that works for business marketing too ...

Shown versus told prose

Fiction editors and writers will be familiar with the phrase ‘Show, don’t tell’. In a nutshell, it’s about enabling the reader to *experience* story rather than being *told* to experience it. It’s not that telling is always wrong, but showing works a treat particularly when readers need to access information beyond a viewpoint character’s internal experience. This single example offers a flavour.

Tilde was sitting on the park bench, her back to me. I asked her how she was and she turned. Her eyes were bloodshot, the lids fat and pink. She wiped her nose with a tissue, leaving a trail of snot across one cheek.

Tilde isn’t the viewpoint character so if the writer were to tell us what’s going on internally – that she feels upset, that her nose is blocked, that her eyes sting – it would be head-hopping.

However, because we’ve been *shown* observable clues – the colouration of the eyes, the swollen lids, the tissue, the snot – we can access her emotions and physical experiences anyway.



The *told* business narrative

Pru Freeder has been working with academic publishers for as long as she can remember but she yearns to specialize in editing for **independent medical writers**. She has the knowledge and the training, but she's not pulling in the clients.

Pru has a list of all her achievements on her website – editing courses, speaking engagements, qualifications etc. – all of which tell everyone how excellent she is. The problem is, her shopping list mirrors thousands of other editors'. And it is just a list – like a CV or a menu. It's uninspiring.



The *shown* business narrative

There is an alternative to the menu of excellence. Instead of telling everybody how great she is, Pru could show it.

When we show our ideal clients that we're into what they're into, we nudge them into understanding what we're all about, even though they're not in our heads. And that leads to an emotional connection that's more powerful than a menu.

Pru could create resources – articles, booklets, videos or audio feeds – that answer her ideal clients' questions and solve their problems ...

Questions Pru could answer ...

- how to find a medical editor
- where to find medical writing work
- how to make medical writing accessible to the public
- how to use inclusive language in medical writing
- how to communicate statistics reliably in medical writing
- how to create a reference list in Vancouver style
- how to abbreviate medical journal titles according to AMA style
- what's different about medical journalism
- how to write a web synopsis of a regulatory document
- how to self-edit a clinical study report





The immediacy of a shown business narrative

The beauty of the shown narrative is that the focus isn't on how long we've been doing X or Y but on the way we make clients feel in the moment. It's an **emotional connection** that has immediacy:



Emotional Response 1

I had a problem;
Pru solved it.

Emotional Response 2

I need a medical editor;
Pru's the perfect candidate.

Emotional Response 3

I need someone I can trust;
Pru's proved her worth.

The hard graft of showing

This approach requires effort. And so it should. It's the price we pay for owning a business that serves our perfect clients.

However, the rewards – earning the fee we want, editing the materials we most enjoy for the people we like best, who respect the agreed terms and conditions and wait for us to be available – make it worthwhile.

If you want to turn an itch into an active specialist client base, ask yourself whether it's time to start showing rather than telling.



About Louise

Louise Harnby edits fiction for crime, mystery and thriller writers, and offers marketing, business development and fiction editing training for fellow editors.

Website: harnby.co/fiction-editing

Courses: harnby.co/courses

Books: harnby.co/books

