Show, Don't Tell

Outside of "Write What You Know," many creative writing teachers have the same piece of advice for aspiring writers: "Show, Don't Tell."

As an editor, it's easy to recognize the moments where writers are having a harder time with the story, where they're struggling with something that isn't quite working, and where the prose becomes stiff, or even dry. **These are the moments when you're using description or exposition instead of action or dialogue in a scene.** But when you're editing your own work, how do you recognize when you're showing and not telling? Here are five easy tips to keep in mind when you're revising your work before publishing it on Wattpad:

#1: Words Instead of Action
If your character is describing what's happening instead of being in the action, take a step back and put them into the situation. Instead of saying, "They were fighting," describe the fight, every insult, every instance of physical interaction, all the gory details.

#2: Use Dialogue Instead of Description
If two characters are having a conversation, but you're just describing it vs. letting each character speak for themselves, try writing it out as dialogue. This will immediately speed up the scene and get your readers engaged, as well as help define your characters.

#3: Try to Avoid Exposition
Sometimes, it makes narrative sense to speed up the storytelling by summarizing different parts of your characters' lives. There isn't enough space in a typical novel to include every single detail of the days, weeks, months, even years of your story. You have to make decisions, but when you're summarizing, make sure it's not impacting the action of the story or slowing down the plot. Focus on exposition for backstory, for anything taking place "off stage," and allow yourself the freedom to make sure the action is where you hold the reader's focus.

#4: Plot First, Description Second
When you're revising your work, take a minute to focus on the elements of plot that are necessary to move your story forward. Make sure you don't impede your storytelling with too much unnecessary description. You want to make sure the focus stays on the action. Sometimes, if you're spending too much time setting the scene, you'll lose the reader before anything juicy starts to happen!

#5: When In Doubt, Cut It!
If you're unsure if you're telling and not showing, chances are, you are - so try a little experiment. Cut out the paragraph, the scene, or the description. Ask yourself, does the story still make sense? Then you'll know that it's extraneous, and can probably go...

Editing, revising, rewriting - it's all a part of the process of the
evolution of your story. Just keep these quick thoughts in mind, and your prose will be stronger
for it!