Choose Descriptive Words to Show Rather Than Tell

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
• Learn how to choose descriptive words that show rather than tell.
• Practice choosing words that show rather than tell.
• Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Explain Choosing Descriptive Words

Say: When I write a procedural text, I tell the reader how to do something. I need to choose my words carefully because I want it to be easy for readers to follow the steps. I use words that describe things so readers can make pictures in their minds. For example, instead of just telling readers “there is a tree outside my house,” I could write, “the cherry tree outside my house is full of light pink, fluffy blossoms.” Today I’m going to show you how to use descriptive words that show instead of tell so you can use these kinds of words in your procedural texts.

Model Choosing Descriptive Words

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

1. First, put the bread in the toaster. When it pops up, put it on the plate. Next, use the butter knife to spread butter on one side of each slice.
2. After that, put the cheese between the sides of the bread with no butter.

Modeling Text

Read example 1. Say: I like the word pops in the second sentence. I can almost see the toast popping out of the toaster, and I know what I should expect to see as I follow the instructions. In the next sentence, the writer describes the word knife with the word butter and says to “spread butter on one side of each slice.” This description helps me make a picture in my mind of what I’m supposed to do. Thanks to the writer’s descriptive words, I know I need a knife that’s better for spreading rather than cutting. I also know I only need to spread butter on one side of each slice. If the writer had left off that description, I might’ve spread butter on all sides of the bread!

Read example 2. Say: The writer describes exactly where to put the cheese: “between the sides of the bread with no butter.” The writer could have written, “put the cheese between the bread,” but then the sandwich might not have turned out right. This description makes it easy to follow the directions. I’m going to underline these words and phrases and label them “descriptions that show.” Underline and label the identified words and phrases.
2. Rehearse

Practice Choosing Descriptive Words

Write the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Use topping with your pancakes.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with a partner to revise or add to the sentence using descriptive words. Encourage them to describe what kind of topping to put on the pancakes, how to put it on, or how it should look when finished. Remind students to use specific words that help readers make pictures in their minds. Pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain the descriptions they wrote.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their revised sentences and explain their word choices. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their procedural texts.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that we can choose descriptive words that show rather than tell how to follow instructions. This can help us write better procedural texts. As you write your procedural texts, remember to use descriptive words. This will help readers follow your directions because they can picture in their minds what you ask them to do.

Ask students to identify a section of procedural text where they could add descriptive words to make directions clearer. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section of their procedural texts where they used descriptive words.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Display photographs or illustrations of the steps for making a grilled cheese sandwich (these are available if you are using the interactive whiteboard resources). Invite students to act out each step. Support students by identifying key vocabulary, for example, first, bread, toaster, knife, butter, and cheese. Ask them to choose one picture and describe it in any way they can, including using gestures and simple descriptive words such as the colors they see.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Supply the following sentence frames to help them add to the practice text:

First, ______.

Then, pour ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: descriptive/descriptivo(a); procedural text/el texto de procedimiento.