SHOWING VS. TELLING

Telling
Each morning I ride the bus to school. I wait along with the other people who ride my bus. Sometimes the bus is late and we get angry. Some guys start fights and stuff just to have something to do. I’m always glad when the bus finally comes.

Showing
The bus arrived. It discharged its passengers, closed its doors with a hiss and disappeared over the crest of a hill. Not one of the people waiting at the bus stop had attempted to board. One woman wore a sweater that was too small, a long skirt, white tights, orange socks, and house slippers. One man was in his undershirt. Another man wore shoes with the toes cut out, a soiled blue serge jacket and brown pants. There was something wrong with these people. They made faces. A mouth smiled at nothing and unsmiled, smiled and unsmiled. A head shook in vehement denial. Most of them carried brown paper bags rolled tight against their stomachs.

Telling
I slowly sucked the stick and felt a warm sensation fill my chest. A chill ran down my spine as I smiled and exhaled.

Showing
I slowly lifted my cigarette until it touched my lips. I sucked the stick and a cloud of warm smoke filled my chest. Suddenly, I felt nauseated and my chest felt like a time bomb ready to explode. I spit the smoke out and coughed. My eyes began to water, but I managed to show a grin.

Telling
She looked depressed.

Showing
Her eyes told of her pain: deep, set-back, reaching inside of herself. Dark caves formed where her cheeks were. Her mouth was a hardened straight line, down at the corners.

Now try doing your own revisions for the following telling statements. Show, don’t tell. That is, use specific details to reveal the object, mood, person, etc. rather than give a summary word or phrase that generalizes the subject.

1. She has a good personality.
2. The party was fun.
3. My parents seemed angry.
4. The movie was frightening.
5. The concert was fantastic.
6. The jocks think they’re cool.
7. I was embarrassed.
8. My room was a mess.