NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

SHOW...DON’T TELL.

“Make up a story... For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don’t tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief’s wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear’s caul.”
—Toni Morrison, *The Nobel Lecture In Literature, 1993*

BE SPECIFIC.

“I have always lived violently, drunk hugely, eaten too much or not at all, slept around the clock or missed two nights of sleeping, worked too hard and too long in glory, or slobbed for a time in utter laziness. I’ve lifted, pulled, chopped, climbed, made love with joy and taken my hangovers as a consequence, not as a punishment.”
—John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

ADD SENSORY DETAILS.

“When I was very young and the urge to be someplace else was on me, I was assured by mature people that maturity would this itch. When years described me as mature, the remedy prescribed was middle age. In middle age I was assured greater age would calm my fever and now that I am fifty-eight perhaps senility will do the job. Nothing has worked. Four hoarse blasts of a ship’s whistle still raise the hair on my neck and set my feet to tapping. The sound of a jet, an engine warming up, even the clopping of shod hooves on pavement brings on the ancient shudder, the dry palms and vacant eye, the hot palms and the churn of stomach high up under the rib cage. In other words, once a bum always a bum. I fear this disease incurable. I set this matter down not to instruct others but to inform myself....A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we not take a trip; a trip takes us.”
—John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

USE CONCRETE IMAGES.

“Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off - then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.”
—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*