



Player Project: Week 7

Showing, not telling

TWO WAYS TO ACHIEVE THIS ADVANCED LEVEL OF GMING



Part One: Learn how to allow the players to shape the adventure

The art of GMing is communicating a great story - an adventure - without telling the players the story. Wait ... that can't be right? Actually, it is! A Game Master or "GM" guides player-characters through a story without forcing or dictating how they experience that story. This means a GM is showing the players what's around them – characterizing it in descriptive ways – vs. telling them – relating what's happening before a player can act.

LETS LOOK AT AN EXAMPLE ...

The player-characters are preparing to sleep inside a room at a tavern when a knock is heard at their door. This door has a small hole in it allowing the players to see who is in the hallway.

AN EXAMPLE OF SHOWING

The players see a cloaked figure, not more than four feet tall, with muddy boots and a nervous manner. The figure is alone and it looks anxiously to your door.

AN EXAMPLE OF TELLING

You open the door and see a cloaked figure, not more than four feet tall. One of its hands is concealed beneath its cloak as it shoves the door open wider and walks into your room. The telling part here is the GM allowed the door to be opened and then allowed the figure to push pass the player(s) without any word or action from the player(s.)

A SECOND EXAMPLE ...

The players step into a house from an exposed porch. Moments ago, they had seen three, unknown figures come into the house.

THE SHOW EXAMPLE

The room the players walk into is crowded with furniture, with couches, chairs and side tables packed into a room with just a single, small window. At first glance, there is no sign of the three figures previously seen, although you can hear noise coming from deeper into the house.

THE TELL EXAMPLE

The room the players walk into is crowded with furniture and upon the ground are a number of hand-sized spiders that quickly notice your presence and descend upon you! (Telling part is giving away the presence of small creatures when a PC has so many other, bigger items to notice – couches, chairs – upon first walking in.



ADVANCED GM TACTIC: SHOWING NOT TELLING



Part Two: How showing vs. telling works in environmental scenes

Nowhere is descriptive narrating more important than in environmental scenes, and particularly those that are key to your adventure. Here's one way to treat the more important scenes that your players will come upon.

First off, either picture the scene in your head or better yet find a photo or art piece that reflects the environment that you want the players to experience. Then think about how the players will experience the TOTAL environment and how your description will change as the players progress through that environment.



The key is to break up the environmental scene into different "chunks." Then, once you've done that, identify what the players will see at each section. Make sure and note surprise findings that high Perception scores will uncover.

Don't forget your rangers and druids! These players won't necessarily look at eye-level like a lot of player-characters but rather at tracks on the ground and even nature itself to determine clues about the area.

Lets use the above picture as an example - and break it into three different areas that we'll describe as GMs.

FIRST AREA – This is where the PCs will enter the scene. For this example we'll say at the back of the snow cave. For Perception purposes, all players will see the icy walls and a calm, small lake in the center of the cave. A strong Perception might see unnatural ripples in the lake or large chunks of ice missing from the cave walls, indicating a large creature entering or exiting the area.

SECOND AREA – This would be a close-up view of the lake, probably noting how clear the water is and perhaps the depth of the lake.

THIRD AREA – This would be the forested area, with perhaps sights of wildlife toward the back of the thick, ancient trees.



ADVANCED GM TACTIC: SHOWING NOT TELLING



Part Three: The exercise



YOUR PROJECT: Take this scene and break it up into three descriptions

Write down how you would describe three scenes from the above picture, making sure you use descriptive words and not commit the players to any one direction. After all, they may never get to the second or even third location!

FIRST LOCATION (Outside the cave)

Perception - Before the players step into the cave, what would they see? Would they hear or smell anything?

Survival – Are there tracks leading into the cave? How many? What kind?

SECOND LOCATION (Looking into the cave)

Perception - (Your answer here)

Survival – (Your answer here)

For fun – What could be a surprise here? A creature, a trap or perhaps more mysterious, like a grave ...

THIRD LOCATION (Back of the cave)

Perception - (Your answer here)

Survival – (Your answer here)

For fun – What could be a surprise here?