

How to Avoid Info-Dumping By Asking Why

A common problem among writers is info-dumping, which is putting a ton of information on the page that slows your story down. Two common forms of info-dumping are in descriptions and dialogue that doesn't advance the plot or character development of the story.

Here's an example of info-dumping that does nothing to advance the story or show the reader anything meaningful about the character:

The house was set back a ways from the road, two-stories of stone with cream-white walls and black trim. The lawns were expansive, lush, and green. In the driveway were two very expensive cars, a Lexus and a Mercedes. He stepped inside the house with its' high ceilinged foyer and richly-patterned rug underneath him. To his right was a huge living room that was bigger than his entire apartment, and there was the man who had called him to come here in the first place with a job offer.

Why is this considered info-dumping?

It's a very basic description that doesn't have any real emotion behind it. The sentence structures are written saying this-and-that with no reason as to why the character notices these details. If the purpose is to set the scene, it needs to be done in order to give the reader an insight into the character.

So how can we rewrite that previous paragraph to keep it from sounding like an info-dump?

Let's get into our character's head and see and feel things from his point of view.

He couldn't believe a house could be set so far back from the road in the heart of San Antonio as he got out of his car and stepped onto the grass, sinking a little into the lush green as he made his way up to the house. He stepped inside and looked up at two-stories of open space then saw off to his right was a single room that was larger than his entire apartment. And in that room was the man who said he had the job of a lifetime to offer him, and by the looks of the house around him, the job could come with more money than he'd ever made before.

But at what price?

He stepped into the room to find out.

As you can see with the rewrite I started off the first two sentences with ‘He’ so we’re in our character’s POV. So instead of saying ‘*The house was set back*’ we hear the character’s thought about that (‘*He couldn’t believe a house could be set so far back...*’).

This first sentence shows that this house won’t be like anything our POV character has seen before. And why would that be? The answer to that needs to be a part of your story and that’s why you need to have not only the physical descriptions, but also your character’s thoughts and feelings about what they’re seeing. And most of all, there needs to be a hook after the initial setup to show **WHY** the character is in this setting but without stating every detail of that, too.

Another type of info-dumping can happen is when there is a lot of dialogue that has very little to break it up like the example here:

“What’s your name?”

“Mark.” He replied without looking up at her.

“So, what were you doing here?”

“Guarding a group of executives visiting the oil fields down here.”

“Oh, so where are they?”

“They’re safe.”

Here’s a rewrite of the previous set of dialogue to break it up a little and put a little internal reaction to it.

“What’s your name?” Jillian asked as she studied her rescuer.

“Mark.” He didn’t look up at her as he rummaged through the backpack he’d been carrying.

“So, uh, what were you doing here?”

“Guarding a group of executives visiting the oil fields.” Mark sat back a little but still didn’t look up at her.

“Oh, so where are they?”

“They’re safe.”

Well, that was good, Jillian thought to herself. And even though she felt like Mark was being honest with her, she wasn’t sure how much he might be holding back, either.

In my rewrite, I wanted to show that Jillian was trying to learn more about the

situation and Mark was barely cooperating. And though she felt like Mark was being honest with her, she also has a suspicion he might not be telling her everything either. And that suspicion creates a question of **WHY** that would be, which in turn will keep the story going for the reader.

And that single question, **WHY**, is the most crucial to ask with anything you write. Because in order to get a reader interested in your story, you want them to be asking **WHY** things are happening in the story. You want to show them through the character's actions, thoughts, and feelings what's going on in the story so if you put something on the page, it has to be the character's POV, not yours (the author).

In conclusion, here are some points to remember to avoid info-dumping:

Keep things in your character's POV at all times. Read your sentences back and if they are basic declarative sentences with no POV insight from your character then rewrite.

You can 'show' and not 'tell' by letting dialogue and your POV character's reaction set the scene and not inject yourself (the author) into the scene as a third-person narrator.

Make sure your scenes will get your readers asking **WHY**. This will make them want to know what happens next, which is how you hold your reader's interest all the way to the end.