

## DIALOGUE

Why use dialogue?

1. To move the story forward.
2. Reveal Character
3. Give story a sense of Place
4. Remember the “Rule of 3.”
5. Break up long passages.
6. Practice writing dialogue. Listen to people speak.

### DO’s of Dialogue

1. Use it! Quotation marks enliven the reader.
2. Let your characters talk as real people do. Use contractions, slang and colloquialisms.
3. Get some action into your dialogue. Action can replace attribution and put your characters into the scene: “No,” John said. He shuffled through the stack of paper on his desk and pulled his schedule from the bottom. “I can’t be there.”
4. Put tension into your dialogue. Gives the reader an exciting, “what will he say next?” attitude.
5. Create a new paragraph for each speaker. Quotation marks always go outside the punctuation. Ex: “But where will I go?” Marcy sank down into a chair. “I don’t belong to anyone now.” She said, “I’m alone now.”

### DON’Ts of Dialogue

1. **Stilted language.** Dialogue that does not sound like natural speech.
  2. **Filler** Dialogue that does not further the scene and does not deepen your understanding of the characters.
  3. **Exposition** Dialogue that has the character explain the plot or repeat information for the benefit of the audience. Also called “**You know**” **syndrome**. Don’t put info the author needs to convey into character’s mouths. Examples: information loading and encyclopedic description.
  4. **Naming** Having one character use another character’s name to establish identity. People almost never say other people’s names back to them, and if they do it is a character trait typical of a used car salesman.
  5. **Overuse of Modifiers** Too many dialogue modifiers such as *shouted, exclaimed, cried, whispered, stammered, opined, insinuated, hedged* and a million others. Modifiers such as this can sometimes be useful, but are often annoying and used as a crutch for poorly designed dialogue.
  6. **TALKING HEADS.** Weave action between dialogue so reader sees action, expressions and setting. **RULE of 3:** If more than 3 sentences, consider adding a beat.
- Past Perfect Flashbacks.** Use past perfect “had” to offset flashbacks or back story. Not necessary to use every time, but now and then to remind the reader.
- Careful with Dialect.** Unless you’re Mark Twain, don’t try to imitate word for word a dialect. Readers get confused and lots of apostrophes can be difficult reading.