

Workbook Dialogue Sample

Workshop leader, Allison Amend explains dialogue this way: "The realism of good dialogue is something of an illusion. Readers of fiction have a higher expectation for dialogue than the conversations of real life. Fictional dialogue needs to have more impact, focus, relevance, than ordinary conversation."

Use dialogue to:

- Create Conflict
- Convey Emotion
- Advance the Plot
- Set the Scene
- Develop Character
- Replace Exposition
- Break Up the Narrative

Dialogue tag: describes a manner of speaking and comes before or after dialogue.

Dialogue tag: "I need coffee," he said.

The reader tends to pass over "said" or "asked."

If you feel the need to explain how a character says something (e.g. shouted, murmured, or mumbled) then dialogue might not be strong enough. If your dialogue is strong enough, then a tag only repeats what you've just shown the reader.

Use dialogue tags to -

- Identify the speaker
- Prevent reader confusion and/or loss of interest
- Mimic speech's natural rhythms
- Make long dialogue sections digestible
- Elevate, maintain, or break tension
- Provide opportunities to insert action or description

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Descriptive beat: a sentence before, after, or to break up dialogue that describes a character's response or action.

Descriptive Beat: "Hand me a mug." He reached for the pot.

For descriptive beats: pick quality descriptions that reveal the character's personality, motivation, and/or add to the setting and emotion of the story.

Tips:

- Start a new paragraph every time speakers change.
- If the speaker is cut off, use an em dash.
"I'm sorry, I—" A fist in his face ended his apology.
- If the speaker's words trail off, use an ellipsis.
"I'm sorry, I..." He couldn't go on without crying.
- Real dialogue is often boring; instead give the "flavor" of real dialogue.
- Assign distinctive speaking patterns to each character.
- Act out events, rather than describe them, "Then — *bam!* I'm on the sidewalk."
- Avoid simple back-and-forth exchange; use a combination of sidestep, silence and action.
- What are your characters feeling while exchanging dialogue?
- What is going on around them?
- Is there more there than the words alone?

