

Title of Session: Dialogue

Creator: Janet Beasley

Curriculum: NOVICE

- *This particular section may need to be divided into multiple sessions. There is a lot to cover, but all is necessary to write effective dialogue in fiction.*

Definition: Dialogue represents the conversations between characters.

Goals: By the end of this session enthusiasts should have a solid understanding of how to use effective dialogue in fiction, use correct punctuation, and know the difference between beat and tag.

Tools: Flip chart or wipe off board

Appropriate markers

Ice Breaker:

- List a few popular activities on the flip chart or wipe off board i.e. snowboarding, watching a movie, being chased by a dinosaur, etc.
- Have the enthusiasts divide into 2 groups
- One group will be the “characters” the other group will be the “authors”, then they can swap after a few actions
- Have the author group choose one of the popular activities listed
- The author group will then write a quick dialogue regarding the action chosen.
- Author group then calls for characters to step forward, and gives their dialogue to the characters.
- The character(s) must come up with their own tone inflections, mannerisms, actions, etc. that fit the chosen activity and dialogue and act out the scene.

Example of Ice Breaker:

- Author group chooses snowboarding
- Author group then writes a quick narrative of the scene, and dialogue. It can be funny, scary, sad, happy, etc.
- Author group then selects their characters from the other group
- Selected characters step forward
- Author group reads their narrative, which sets the scene, and hands the characters their dialogue
- Characters then act out the scene incorporating the narrative, and use the provided dialogue.
- After first round teams can switch, authors become characters and characters become the authors.

Example of Ice Breaker Narrative and Dialogue:

Bob slid to a perfect stop, picked up his snowboard and brushed it off. He jumped when his girlfriend exclaimed from behind him, “It’s great to see you here, but I thought you were going to be studying all afternoon.”

Bob thought before he spoke. “Uh, uh, yeah. I was going to do that, but I decided I’d rather just go snowboarding. I didn’t call you because...because...”

Sally figured by his expression he had snuck out without his mom knowing. She said, “Well, it doesn’t matter, I’m just so glad you’re here. There’s no one else I’d rather snowboard with than you.” Sally hugged Bob, and her ski poles slapped together, or so she thought.

“Ouch!” When Sally looked behind Bob she saw a girl she did not recognize. “Oh, sorry about that. I didn’t see you there.”

Bob turned and said, “Oh. It’s you! What a surprise to see you.” His laugh sounded nervous to Sally.

The girl stepped back and said, “Yeah, it’s me. You told me to meet you here.”

Sally pulled Bob back by the shoulder, got in his face and said, “Oh, really? And who is *she*?”

Activity:

When you were on the “Character” side of the Ice Breaker you may or may not have noticed that the “Characters” did not have to say things like, “I’m going to talk now,” before they started their lines, or “I said,” after they said their lines.

When you were on the “Author” side of the Ice Breaker you may or may not have noticed that the dialogue you wrote probably included he says, and she says. And your narrative provided the action that carried the scene.

This is exactly how dialogue differs in fiction writing from real life day to day dialogue. Authors must add in certain things to make the dialogue not only seem real, but also flow and sound natural in the reader’s head.

When it comes to leading your reader through a conversation there are multiple tricks, tips, and tools to do such.

Dialogue Basics:

- Believe it or not, dialogue can be one of the most difficult elements of fictional writing. There’s much more to it than two characters talking back and forth.
- There are things to consider such as beat and tag, and punctuation. Dialogue must flow and not be choppy, sound realistic, and provide action.
- Every time the dialogue moves to another character, a new paragraph must be made.

Example:

Sam asked, "Can we go to the store today?" He started looking for the car keys and disappeared into the kitchen.

"I was just at the store. Can we go tomorrow?" Jill sounded sweet, but Sam really needed some more toothpaste.

"I'll just go myself." Sam grabbed the keys on the kitchen counter and sighed.

Dialect, Slang, and Messed Up Sentences:

If you do your own research you will find a multitude of opinions regarding these things in dialogue. When used properly any of these can help build character, plus it reveals "who" might be talking.

Dialect can be drawn from an existing one, or the author can create a new one. In Janet Beasley's *Hidden Earth Series Volume 1 Maycly the Trilogy* you will find a brand new dialect. There are chukkons on the world of Maycly who have their own way of talking. Though it is an unknown dialect, the author has left enough of the "real word" so readers can follow along easily, yet get a feel for how a chukkons talks.

Example of created dialect: Taken from Janet Beasley's *Hidden Earth Series Volume 1 Maycly the Trilogy Book 1 Two Altered Worlds*

Charleo laughed. "Here be yer taggerts me friend. Ye shouldna be a-takin' me so serious." A few of the others in the Pipe Shoppe who knew Charleo could be heard giggling at that remark.

"Now let's see: one, two, three, four, and five."

"What be this? Ye dunna trust yer old pal Charleo? Countin' in front of me. Shame, shame."

"Sorry. Just force of habit there. No hard feelin's?"

"None be taken. I was only a-pullin' yer leg. Now I s'pose I'll be a-needin' some pipe stuffin's ta smoke in this wonderful pipe." Charleo ran his fingers over the pipe stuffing jars. "How about...umm...this one. I'll be a-havin' me a laund of the 'E'er So Sweet'."

"Ooooo, tis one of me favorites." Jobi inhaled deeply with every scoop until he had dished out a laund on the scale, and added a pinch more.

"How much be I owin' ye fer it?"

"Ah, nothin'."

"I'll be a-givin' ye somethin' fer it, ye crazy wee fella."

"No arguin' now. Yer first pipe stuffin's be on me."

Charleo realized there was no budging Jobi. "I'll be sure and make a point of showin' yer fine piece of work ta everyone. And I be a-thankin' ye from the bottom of me heart." Charleo gave a nod and a wink to Jobi.

"And ye be welcome from the top of mine. Will I be a-seein' ye at Pub Pete's this evenin'?"

"Nae, not this twilight. There be special thin's I'll be a-doin' at the cottage with me family, but I'll be a-seein' ye there fer sure tomorrow."

“I’ll tell Pub Pete and his patrons ye said hello...and that ye cried like a wee chukkonette when ye opened yer new pipe.”

“I s’pose I canna be a-stoppin’ ye.” Both laughed.

“Good enough then. Thank ye fer yer patronage...*and* yer friendship—it be a-meanin’ so very much ta me and me family.” Charleo could hear the sincerity in Jobi’s voice.

“Ye be more’n welcome...fer both.”

You’ll notice that the narrative is in plain English while the dialogue carries the dialect.

Slang lends itself to possibly making or breaking an author. If you are not familiar with an actual slang, you need to research it extensively before you start. Janet Beasley did just that when she wrote Volume 2 Planet Land in the Hidden Earth Series. This particular novel is based on the old west and a lot of the territory’s and era’s slang were incorporated.

Example of slang: Taken from Janet Beasley’s *Hidden Earth Series Volume 2 Planet Land ~ The Adventures of Cub and Nash*. (The slang terms are bolded)

Blackjack’s trotter boxes scudded hard as Night Crawler dragged him in a choke-hold toward the stairs. Blackjack gurgled an offer, “Hey Nighty. Whadda ya say we settle this like real men.”

“Why?”

“Put yourself in my boots. Would ya *really* wanna to be turned over to the law, or would ya *rather* be given a chance to make things right?”

Night Crawler stopped and tightened his grip. “I don’t give a toffer’s hanky what ya think right now.

Messed Up Sentences are one way a character can develop through dialogue. By rearranging the words in a spoken sentence the character takes on a whole new “feel.” This can be as tricky as dialect and consistency must be followed throughout the story.

Example of messed up sentences: (These type sentences were probably made most famous by a very popular little green guy)

“To the bad side you will go. No stops will you make. Anxious are you?”

Beat and Tag:

Beat and tag are the elements throughout dialogue that let a reader know who is talking, and how he/she is reacting to a situation.

- **Dialogue Tags** are the shorties of the dialogue elements. They are the he saids she saids, and the he askeds she askeds portions. Referring to them as dialogue “alerts” instead of tags may make it easier to remember. A tag, or “alert,” quickly lets the reader know who said what.
 - **Example:** Mike said, “I’ve never seen the water so clear.”
 - Never think you are over using Dialogue Tags throughout your entire novel. Think of tags as the “French fries” of your dialogue. Just like with any hamburger, you usually expect to get French fries. You don’t think about them as you eat them, but you know they set off a burger without question. Same with the Dialogue Tags, he saids and she saids are the “French fries” of the story because most readers don’t even notice them, yet they set off the dialogue without question to keep a reader straight on who’s saying what.
 - Dialogue can become cumbersome if written poorly. Though using the he saids she saids all throughout your story is fully acceptable, if we break their use down further into a single conversation we find that using Dialogue Tags over and over slows the action or flow, especially when the dialogue is short and sweet.
 - That said below is an example of how NOT to use Dialogue Tags.

Roxie opened her purse and said, “Phil, did I give you my contact case?”

Phil said, “No.”

Roxie said, “Then I wonder where I put them?”

Phil said, “I have no idea, maybe they’re in the glove box.”

Roxie said, “Are you sure I didn’t give it to you?”

Phil said, “I am positive.”

Roxie said, “Well, I guess I’ll have to run back inside before we leave.”

Phil said, “OK.”

- Did you notice how the he says she says became too much in this single, and simple conversation, breaking down the flow? Below is the similar dialogue from above. Several tags have been removed, but yet you will find that you will be able to keep up with who is saying what.

Roxie opened her purse, began to dig, and said, “Phil, did I give you my contact case?”

“Nope. Maybe it’s in the glove box.”

“You’re sure I didn’t give it to you?”

“Positive.”

“Great, then I’ll have to run back inside.”

- **Descriptive Beats** are actions a character may take before, during, or after dialogue to let the reader know whether the character is angry, sad, scared, etc.

Example:

Roxie dashed to the car, got in, slammed the door and began rummaging through her purse. “Phil, did I give you my contact case?”

Phil rolled his eyes. “Nope.” He shook his head when she looked at him.

Before Phil could get another word in edge wise Roxie threw the loose change back down in her purse and said, “Well that’s just great. I’m not seeing it. Are you sure I didn’t hand it to you?”

An obvious sigh of frustration let Roxie know Phil’s patience was wearing thin. “For the last time, NO, you did not hand it to me. Why don’t you check the glove box? Maybe it’s in there.”

“Ouch! Darn it! I hate this glove box. I always bend my nail backwards trying to open it.” She pilfered through the tissues, maps, stuck ketchup packs, and other miscellaneous items. She shoved the glove box shut and opened her car door. “Great! I’m going to have to run back in the house and check.”

Phil leaned his head back on the headrest and closed his eyes.

Punctuation

On the flip chart of wipe off board write/draw the following punctuation symbols:

,
“ ”
,
.
!
?
...

Ask enthusiasts to identify each of the punctuation marks:

. = period

, = comma

“ ” = quotations

, = single quotation

! = exclamation point

? = question mark

How are each of these used?

- **Periods** are final, and that is final. ☺ Periods reflect the end of a sentence. SIDE NOTE: In dialogue you may find it necessary to use fragments, but keep in mind that a complete sentence must contain a noun and a verb.
- **Commas** are used to separate clauses within a sentence, or a list of items.
 - They are also used at the end of a sentence in place of a period should the author be using a dialogue tag such as *he said, she said*. In this case the period is placed after the tag. **Example:** “I can’t believe they forgot to get the eggs,” Maggie said.
 - They can also be used to set off the dialogue when used in conjunction with a tag or beat at the beginning. Example: Maggie said, “I can’t believe they forgot to get the bread.”
- **Quotation Marks** are the standard punctuation to let your readers know that someone is speaking. **Example:** “I certainly don’t want anything to do with that mess.”

- **Single Quotations** are used in multiple ways.
 - The first is to show possession of something. This is known as an apostrophe. **Example / apostrophe:** Steve’s gaming device was the best he had ever seen.
 - The apostrophe is used in the word Steve’s showing the gaming device belongs to him.
 - The second is to shorten two words into one, making the single quotation create a contraction. **Example / contraction:** He hadn’t been to breakfast as of yet.
 - The word hadn’t is a contraction of the words had not.
 - The third is using a single quotation on each end of a thought within the dialogue. **Example / thought:** Judy thought, ‘I must be a fool for loving him all this time.’ **SIDE NOTE:** The words contained in thoughts can also be conveyed by using italics. **Example / thought / italics:** Judy thought, *I must be a fool for loving him all this time.*
 - The fourth is using single quotations around dialogue within dialogue. **Example / dialogue within dialogue:** Hillary whispered, “When he shouted ‘Let them all die,’ I didn’t realize we were included in that group.”
 - Should the dialogue within the dialogue end the sentence the punctuation would appear as follows, “In the end he said to me, ‘I only hope we will see each other again one day.’”
- **Exclamation Points** are to be used sparingly, if at all. When using an exclamation point you do not necessarily need to use a descriptive beat or tag. **Example:** Lars watched the drag car take off. “Holy Toledo that’s fast!”
 - Exclamation Points are very, very rarely used in narrative.
- **Question Marks**, even though one of the simpler punctuations, can be tricky. Of course they come at the end of a question, but it is not always necessary to use a tag of *he asked*, *she asked* when asking questions in dialogue if the speaking character has been established. It is one of those punctuation marks that carry’s itself fairly well.
 - What happens when a question mark appears as the last punctuation before the quotation marks? It becomes the “comma” so to speak. So if a tag or beat **is** used it will start with a small case word. **Example:** “How in the heck did I get here?” he asked.

Write this sequence of dialogue on the flip chart or wipe off board:

Where did they go

Who

Ranger Roger and his big dog Tail

Gary shrugged

Missy blurted They went to the dog park to play

I hope he doesn’t try one of his doggie escape tricks

Me too

I never thought of that but you’re right with his size if he does escape he’ll frighten everyone when he comes running to jump on them

I think I’ll go look for them

Can I go too

Sure Missy let’s all go

Now have the enthusiasts make up some character names, add in the proper punctuation - tags and beats to make this dialogue interesting from a reader's point of view. Make certain it is clarified who is talking and who they are talking about.

Example:

Pete walked into the living room and was surprised to only see Gary sitting there. "Where did they go?"

"Who?"

"Ranger Roger and his big dog, Tail"

Pete did not like that Gary shrugged and said nothing.

Missy ran in and blurted, "They went to the dog park to play."

Gary laughed. "I hope Tail doesn't try one of his doggie escape tricks."

Pete scowled. "Me too."

"I never thought of that but you're right with his size if he does escape he'll frighten everyone when he comes running to jump on them." Missy had a frightened face.

Pete walked toward the front door. "I think I'll go for a car ride and see if everything's all right."

"Great idea!" Missy ran to the door. "Can I go too?"

"Sure Missy. Let's all go." Pete motioned to Gary. Gary sighed, put the magazine down, and loped to the door.

Discussion:

- Which do you find more helpful, beat or tag?
- Do you think in real life it would be easier to use beat and tag when we talk?
- What is your take on slang, dialect, and/or off the wall sentence structure in fiction dialogue?

Session: Dialogue**Creator: Janet Beasley****Handout: NOVICE****What is dialogue?**

It represents the conversations between characters.

Is it easy to write?

Though dialogue seems like it should be easy to write, it can become tricky and difficult to produce in a flowing manner when it comes to writing.

When do I start a new paragraph when I'm writing dialogue?

Every time the dialogue moves to another character, a new paragraph must be made.

Can I write using a dialect?

Yes, but be sure you have researched the dialect in depth. If you are creative you can even make up your own new dialect, however, be careful and watch the continuity within the dialect throughout the entire story – it all must match.

Can I use slang?

Yes, with caution. The same guidelines should be followed as with dialect. Research is a key as there will be readers who may use the particular slang you are writing. In addition the author should take care in not using the slang to “downgrade” a character – this can be construed as very disrespectful to your readers.

Do I have to write my sentences in the correct order of words, or can they be messed up?

They can be messed up, but keep in mind you want your readers to be able to “flow” through the words and not get bogged down. When this happens readers often times move on to the next book. Though messed up sentences are doable the practice briefly falls into the dialect category as it will not necessarily come across as offensive, but the continuity each time that particular character speaks needs to be spot on.

What are dialogue tags?

Dialogue tags are best known as the he saids she saids that precede or follow dialogue. They are the shorties of the dialogue elements. Referring to them as dialogue “alerts” instead of tags may make it easier to remember. A tag, or “alert,” quickly alerts the reader to who is saying what.

Can I overuse dialogue tags?

Yes and no.

- Yes, if you are using them in front of or after every single sentence of dialogue in a single conversation.
- No, when you consider how many times they may be used throughout an entire novel.

What is a descriptive beat?

Descriptive beat refers to the actions described in a narrative that a character may take. It can appear before, during, or after dialogue to let the reader know whether the character is angry, sad, scared, etc.

Is dialogue written in the same we talk in every day conversations?

No. Dialogue is written in such a way readers will know who is talking, how they feel, and how they react.

Think about how you talk to someone in “real life” then compare that to how you would actually read the same dialogue in print. Without beat and tag you would have no idea who is speaking, or how they are acting or reacting to a situation.

How does using punctuation in dialogue vary from using it in regular narrative?

Punctuation in dialogue is often times placed in different sections within sentences. For example in addition to being used to separate items or thoughts a comma in dialogue is also placed at the end of a sentence, before the quotation marks, if a tag is being used. Another example would be using single quotes inside of dialogue to show that the person who is speaking is repeating what someone else said; the single apostrophe/contraction becomes considered a quotation mark.

Title of Session: Dialogue

Creator: Janet Beasley

Curriculum: ADVANCE

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Activity:

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Example:

Roxie dashed to the car, got in, slammed the door and began rummaging through her purse. “Phil, did I give you my contact case?”

Phil rolled his eyes. “Nope.” He shook his head when she looked at him.

Before Phil could get another word in edge wise Roxie threw the loose change back down in her purse and said, “Well that’s just great. I’m not seeing it. Are you sure I didn’t hand it to you?”

An obvious sigh of frustration let Roxie know Phil’s patience was wearing thin. “For the last time, NO, you did not hand it to me. Why don’t you check the glove box? Maybe it’s in there.”

“Ouch! Darn it! I hate this glove box. I always bend my nail backwards trying to open it.” She pilfered through the tissues, maps, stuck ketchup packs, and other miscellaneous items. She shoved the glove box shut and opened her car door. “Great! I’m going to have to run back in the house and check.”

Phil leaned his head back on the headrest and closed his eyes.

Punctuation

On the flip chart or wipe off board write/draw the following punctuation symbols:

- ,
- “ ”
- ‘ ’
- .
- !
- ?
- ...

Ask enthusiasts to identify each of the punctuation marks:

. = period

, = comma

“ ”= quotations

‘ = single quotation

! = exclamation point

? = question mark

How are each of these used?

- **Periods** are final, and that is final. ☺ Periods reflect the end of a sentence. SIDE NOTE: In dialogue you may find it necessary to use fragments, but keep in mind that a complete sentence must contain a noun and a verb.
- **Commas** are used to separate clauses within a sentence, or a list of items.
 - They are also used at the end of a sentence in place of a period should the author be using a dialogue tag such as *he said, she said*. In this case the period is placed after the tag. **Example:** “I can’t believe they forgot to get the eggs,” Maggie said.
 - They can also be used to set off the dialogue when used in conjunction with a tag or beat at the beginning. Example: Maggie said, “I can’t believe they forgot to get the bread.”
- **Quotation Marks** are the standard punctuation to let your readers know that someone is speaking. **Example:** “I certainly don’t want anything to do with that mess.”
- **Single Quotations** are used in multiple ways.
 - The first is to show possession of something. This is known as an apostrophe. **Example / apostrophe:** Steve’s gaming device was the best he had ever seen.
 - The apostrophe is used in the word Steve’s showing the gaming device belongs to him.
 - The second is to shorten two words into one, making the single quotation create a contraction. **Example / contraction:** He hadn’t been to breakfast as of yet.
 - The word hadn’t is a contraction of the words had not.
 - The third is using a single quotation on each end of a thought within the dialogue. **Example / thought:** Judy thought, ‘I must be a fool for loving him all this time.’ SIDE NOTE: The words contained in thoughts can also be conveyed by using italics. **Example / thought / italics:** Judy thought, *I must be a fool for loving him all this time.*
 - The fourth is using single quotations around dialogue within dialogue. **Example / dialogue within dialogue:** Hillary whispered, “When he shouted ‘Let them all die,’ I didn’t realize we were included in that group.”
 - Should the dialogue within the dialogue end the sentence the punctuation would appear as follows, “In the end he said to me, ‘I only hope we will see each other again one day.’”
- **Exclamation Points** are to be used sparingly, if at all. When using an exclamation point you do not necessarily need to use a descriptive beat or tag. **Example:** Lars watched the drag car take off. “Holy Toledo that’s fast!”
 - Exclamation Points are very, very rarely used in narrative.

- **Question Marks**, even though one of the simpler punctuations, can be tricky. Of course they come at the end of a question, but it is not always necessary to use a tag of *he asked*, *she asked* when asking questions in dialogue if the speaking character has been established. It is one of those punctuation marks that carry's itself fairly well.
 - What happens when a question mark appears as the last punctuation before the quotation marks? It becomes the "comma" so to speak. So if a tag or beat **is** used it will start with a small case word. **Example:** "How in the heck did I get here?" he asked.

Add these punctuation marks and words to your flipchart or wipe off board

-- **Dash**

- **Hyphen**

; **Semi-colon**

: **Colon**

() **Parenthesis**

. . . **Ellipsis**

How are these used in dialogue?

- **Dash** A dash is used to denote a break in a sentence
 - **Example:** The dragons – most of them red – chased after the helpless prey
- **Hyphen** Hyphens are used in joining words and/or separating syllables. It is used when your word needs to be broken in half at the end of a line and continued on the next.
 - **Example of joining words:** The blue-orange bird flew to its nest.
 - **Example of separating syllables:**
I went to the beach and saw sail-
boats with colorful sails flapp-
ing in the breeze
- **Semi-colon or Semicolon** A semicolon is used to separate elements within the same sentence that are major.
 - **Example:** I added, "Mom and dad love cherry ice cream; I like chocolate best."
- **Colon** A colon is most commonly used when creating a list
 - **Example:** Savanna said, "Jerry will be bringing the supplies: pencils, pens, paper, and scissors."
- **Parentheses** Parentheses enclose words to clarify something in the main sentence
 - **Example:** I couldn't hold my excitement and blurted, "I got to take Cindy (the expert violinist) to the concert."
- **Ellipsis** An ellipsis can denote a multitude of things: a word - part of sentence - or entire section is missing, a pause in thought or action, or an awkward moment.
 - **Example:** Mom wanted the truth, but I heard myself straying far from it when I said, "I was on my way home and a...lion...yeah, a lion, that's it, jumped out and attacked me."

Write this sequence of dialogue on the flip chart or wipe off board – use no punctuation, beats, or tags:

It was an orange red sunset but I much prefer watching the sky turn pink and purple
Not me the orange red sunsets are definitely for me
Did either of you think to get a picture or did you just stare at it
Are you kidding I got tons of pictures
Well I didnt when the purple and pink didnt show up I packed up my camera
Youre such a party pooper you could have at least tried to enjoy the sunset anyway
Youre one to talk you didnt even show up for the event
It doesnt matter I climbed up into the tree house with my latte and enjoyed the sunset through the trees with whipped cream on top
Where were your cats they're always with you you cant live without them when youre home
what are their names again

The cat the one with the all black nose climbed right up with me but the other cat the one thats scared of everything in the house hid under the bed when I went to the door as usual

Now have the enthusiasts make up some character names to use, then add in the proper names and punctuation, and fix the sentence structure, capitalizations, tags and beats to make this dialogue interesting from a reader's point of view. Make certain it is clarified who is talking and who they are talking about.

Example of above:

Chad was first through the door. "It was an orange-red sunset; but I much prefer watching the sky turn pink and purple." He dropped his camera bag gently on the coffee table.

Tiffany put her camera bag next to Chad's and said, "Not me the orange red sunsets are definitely for me."

Lila looked at both of them. "Did either of you think to get a picture or did you just stare at it?"

"Are you kidding me?" Tiffany pulled out her camera and began to scroll through the previews for Lila. "I got tons of pictures."

"Well I didn't." Chad folded his arms in disgust then continued, "When the purple and pink didn't show up I packed up and headed to the car."

"You're such a party pooper." Tiffany agreed with Lila. Lila added, "You could have at least tried to enjoy the sunset anyway."

"Your'e one to talk. You didn't even show up for the event." Chad huffed.

Tiffany laughed when Lila said, “It doesn’t matter. I climbed up into the tree house with my latte with whipped cream on top I might add, and enjoyed the sunset through the trees.”

“Where were your cats? They’re always with you. You can’t live without them when you’re home. What are their names again?”

Lila tossed Chad a smirk and said, “Buzzard (the all black one) climbed right up with me but the Sophie (the one that’s scared of everything) hid under the bed, as usual, when I went to the door.

Discussions:

- Do you think texting, tweeting, and sharing on social media sites is slowly pushing **correct** punctuation and written dialogue to the wayside? If so, how are people going to be able to read books – digital or paperback – and understand them? What can be done to alleviate the “invisibility” of these practices?
- Can you name a fictional novel that does not contain any dialogue?
- When someone is talking to you, what “hints” do you use to know how they, feel, or are reacting, or are getting their point across? Is it body language? Their tone of voice? Their mannerisms? How would you incorporate those things into your dialogue?

Session: Dialogue

Creator: Janet Beasley

Handout: ADVANCED

What is dialogue?

It represents the conversations between characters.

Is it easy to write?

Though dialogue seems like it should be easy to write, it can become tricky and difficult to produce in a flowing manner when it comes to writing.

When do I start a new paragraph when I'm writing dialogue?

Every time the dialogue moves to another character, a new paragraph must be made.

Can I write using a dialect?

Yes, but be sure you have researched the dialect in depth. If you are creative you can even make up your own new dialect, however, be careful and watch the continuity within the dialect throughout the entire story – it all must match.

Can I use slang?

Yes, with caution. The same guidelines should be followed as with dialect. Research is a key as there will be readers who may use the particular slang you are writing. In addition the author should take care in not using the slang to “downgrade” a character – this can be construed as very disrespectful to your readers.

Do I have to write my sentences in the correct order of words, or can they be messed up?

They can be messed up, but keep in mind you want your readers to be able to “flow” through the words and not get bogged down. When this happens readers often times move on to the next book. Though messed up sentences are doable the practice briefly falls into the dialect category as it will not necessarily come across as offensive, but the continuity each time that particular character speaks needs to be spot on.

What are dialogue tags?

Dialogue tags are best known as the he saids she saids that precede or follow dialogue. They are the shorties of the dialogue elements. Referring to them as dialogue “alerts” instead of tags may make it easier to remember. A tag, or “alert,” quickly alerts the reader to who is saying what.

Can I overuse dialogue tags?

Yes and no.

- Yes, if you are using them in front of or after every single sentence of dialogue in a single conversation.
- No, when you consider how many times they may be used throughout an entire novel.

What is a descriptive beat?

Descriptive beat refers to the actions described in a narrative that a character may take. It can appear before, during, or after dialogue to let the reader know whether the character is angry, sad, scared, etc.

Is dialogue written in the same we talk in every day conversations?

No. Dialogue is written in such a way readers will know who is talking, how they feel, and how they react.

Think about how you talk to someone in “real life” then compare that to how you would actually read the same dialogue in print. Without beat and tag you would have no idea who is speaking, or how they are acting or reacting to a situation.

How does using punctuation in dialogue vary from using it in regular narrative?

Punctuation in dialogue is often times placed in different sections within sentences. For example in addition to being used to separate items or thoughts a comma in dialogue is also placed at the end of a sentence, before the quotation marks, if a tag is being used. Another example would be using single quotes inside of dialogue to show that the person who is speaking is repeating what someone else said; the single apostrophe/contraction becomes considered a quotation mark.

When using Descriptive Beats what are three important factors to remember?

- Your verbs should carry your character's mood
 - **Example:** Racing downstairs and into the kitchen Pete bounced into his chair, "I can't wait to see what dad has to say about my grades this time."
- Don't turn the beats into exposition (too long)
- Don't tell what is going to happen, then turn around and show it using the Descriptive Beat
 - **Example:** Blain was already upset and was going to throw the wrench across the garage. Blain threw the wrench across the garage. "I wish I could be a good mechanic like dad used to be."

Can a Descriptive Beat be used in the middle of a dialogue?

Yes. When wanting to drive home the point of a credible action, Descriptive Beat is the perfect tool.

- **Example:** "What do you mean..." Jeff snapped his fingers, "...it can happen that quick?"