

## Formatting Dialogue

### 1. Use dialogue to show the exact words a character speaks.

"This is stupid," the boy complained. (dialogue shows exactly what he said)

The boy complained that it was stupid. (just reports what the character said)

### 2. Always use a comma between the dialogue and the dialogue tag.

*Examples:*

"I'm leaving," she said.

He said, "I'm going to Mexico."

### 3. Commas, periods, and exclamation points always go *inside* the quotation mark.

"I'm tired," she whined.

He said, "This is so boring."

### 4. Question marks go *inside* if the dialogue is a question, and *outside* if the entire sentence is a question.

Dialogue question: She asked, "Can we please go to the movies?"

Entire sentence question: Did she say "Let's go to the movies"?

### 5. Only **ONE** punctuation mark – always the stronger one. (? and ! are stronger than . and ,)

WRONG EXAMPLE: She said, "We can go to the movies!".

### 6. Always capitalize the first word of dialogue, even if it's not the beginning of the sentence.

My Dad always says, "Don't count your chickens until they're hatched."

The teacher looked at me and said, "Congratulations! You have detention."

### 7. Sometimes authors will split up a line of dialogue with a dialogue tag. In that case, the second part is not capitalized (because it is a continuation of the sentence).

"Pretty please," I begged my Dad, "let me go to the prom."

"You are *not* going anywhere, young lady," my Mom shouted, "until your room is spotless!"

### 8. Each speaker gets his or her own paragraph, with his dialogue and his actions.

Joanne looked at her boyfriend and sighed. "I'm sorry."

"What do you mean, you're sorry?" he shouted, obviously furious. He turned and walked away.

"Joe!" she called after him.

### 9. It is **NOT** necessary to have a dialogue tag for every spoken sentence. Especially if you start a new paragraph for each speaker, this is not needed. Often you will use actions to show who is speaking rather than dialogue tags.

#### Example 1

"Mom, do I need to eat my liver?"

"Yes, you do. I had to when I was a kid. Ask your grandma."

"Is that true?" asked Max. "Did she have to eat this stuff when she was my age?"

"Yes, Little Max. She did, just like you should."

#### Example 2

Sally said, "John, don't eat too much cake!"

Her fiancé dashed to the front door. "You should've told me sooner." He opened it just in time, throwing up on the front porch.

She shook her head and frowned. "I shouldn't have to tell you such things."

"Right," he said and wiped his mouth on his flannel sleeve

"You bet I'm right. And you're better clean off my new welcome mat."

#### Example 3

"Oh, no!" cried Sally, "John, I think I'm going to be late!"

"What? Has your watch stopped again?"

Sally shook her wrist before examining the timepiece. "Again!" She tore it off and threw it on the floor. "This is the third time this week."

"Don't leave it there. Why don't you take it back and get a refund?"

"Because, I lost the receipt."

"You don't always need one," said her boyfriend after retrieving it from the green shag carpet.

With her left eyebrow arched, she asked, "Are you sure?"