

Writing Dialogue

Writing dialogue—a conversation between two or more characters—is easy if you follow these guidelines:

1. All words spoken by a character must be surrounded by quotation marks. A direct quotation can come at the beginning or the end of a sentence.
2. A direct quotation begins with a capital letter. If a quotation is interrupted, the second part begins with a lower-case letter.
3. A direct quotation is set off from the rest of a sentence by commas. If a direct quotation is interrupted, commas are placed before and after the interruption. The comma before a direct quotation falls outside the quotation marks. The comma—or any punctuation—after a direct quotation falls inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

Ted smiled and thought, "I can't wait to get to the ball game!"
"Yes, I am the one who baked the chocolate cake," admitted Granny
"Jim," she said with a grin, "I'm going to make sure you lose this match."

4. Dialogue is less formal than other kinds of writing. To make your characters sound natural, you may use short sentences and contractions in dialogue.
5. In a conversation between characters, start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.
6. Be careful not to use the word "said" too often. Use other livelier verbs, such as "whispered," "yelled," "mumbled," "cried," and "confessed."

Writing Assignment

Complete one (or more) of the following assignments:

1. Create two characters: a younger person deeply in need of affection and warmth and an older person willing to give it. Write a one- to two-page conversation between the characters. The details (their relationship, situation, etc.) are up to you, but make the reader care.
2. Using yourself and your best friends as the models, try writing a fictionalized conversation among three or more characters. Try to capture the style of your crowd's real-life speech: slang, rhythms, who interrupts whom, etc.
3. Write a dialogue between abstract characters, such as Love and Hate, Happiness and Sadness, Greed and Generosity, etc.