

Writing Dang Good Dialogue Cheat Sheet



Dialogue can...

- Show instead of tell
- Deliver exposition organically
- Develop characters
- Advance the plot
- Affect relationships and build tension

Dialogue Tags

Noun/pronoun + speaking verb

Noun/pronoun: the character's name or pronoun that references who is speaking.

Speaking verb: Describes what was just said. Could be says/said, a synonym, or something more descriptive.

Add some flair

Include adverbs, action, or other details to enhance your attributions.

What aren't dialogue tags?

It's not a dialogue tag if it isn't describing how something is said.



- She said
- He declared
- They whispered
- The magician recited
- The killer yelled
- My best friend joked

- She said excitedly.
- He declared to the crowd.
- The magician recited, feeling the spell form at her fingertips.

- She sighed.
- He growled.
- They kicked.
- Charlotte shrugged.
- The werewolf whimpered.

Formatting

1. New paragraph per speaker
2. Contain with quotation marks (including punctuation)
3. Place and connect attributions properly
4. Break up long dialogue into multiple paragraphs

Punctuation

Punctuation at the end of dialogue can connect or disconnect it from attributions.

Comma

Connects dialogue to tag

Period

Disconnects dialogue from what follows

Question/Exclamation

Can connect or disconnect

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Pro tip: Small talk stinks.

Three Steps to Writing Dialogue

Every piece of dialogue wants to say something, doesn't do it obviously, and then is dressed up nicely for your book.

	MEANING	LIKE	NOTE
1. You want to say something	A character wants to express something or find something out	Why did you do that? Is something wrong? How do you feel? Are we safe?	These are far too basic and awkward for someone to ask in most situations.
2. Obscure it with voice and situation	How would a character say that without being so blunt?	Did you think about the consequences? You look like you haven't slept. That argument was intense, huh? Did you arm the security system?	No two characters say the same thing in the same way. Everyone is influenced by their unique voice and the circumstances they're currently in.
3. Add some flair	Turn it into something worth reading	Mention the setting. Add in dialogue tags. Use pacing to your advantage. Show what it all means. Intersperse talking with action.	This is where your creativity and artistry come in. Work with the pace, add sensory details, and immerse your reader.

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Pro tip: What's unsaid can speak volumes.

Writing Authentic Dialogue

Character Voice

Each character should be unique

Subtext

The meaning behind the words

Dialect/Accents

Be intentional and respectful

Mirror Real Life

It's your best learning source

Be Consistent

Don't change voice halfway through

Avoid Cliches

Seriously, they're the worst

Understanding Voice

Voice is governed by...

- Personality
- Background
- Motivations
- Defense mechanisms
- Coping mechanisms
- Emotional state

Elements of Voice

Diction

What is said and how it's said.

Pacing & Rhythm

How quickly, jarringly, or lyrically something is said.

Body Language

Communication is rarely just verbal.

Tone

Their attitude on a subject.