

Writing Effective Dialogue

When writing dialogue, choosing your words can be a daunting task. Especially when you consider that there is no shortage of people out there willing to get book quotes tattooed on their body to prove their literary accomplishments. Finding your own “Always” or “Okay” is part of the journey, and it can be as exciting as it is challenging. Dialogue has the power to breathe life into your story and your characters, and place you into a new experience that you were never actually there to see; however, the caveat is that the dialogue has to be **good**.

What makes good dialogue?

Overall, dialogue should be able to achieve two things: **be purposeful and be compelling**. Dialogue should always have some reason for existing, be it to develop an important plot point, flesh out your character, or even to simply set the scene. **If the dialogue isn't achieving anything, then it's only taking up important real estate in your story.**

Secondly, dialogue should be compelling. Good dialogue finds that precise balance of believable, but also interesting.

Believable dialogue is specific to the context of your story, and can mean different things depending on the genre of your story, but there are a few tips that can help you regardless of whether you're talking within castle walls or studio apartments.

Say it out loud.

This might feel uncomfortable at first (and recommended to be done within the comforts of your own home), but can be immensely helpful in finding a flow in conversation. Saying the back-and-forth out loud can help you find the natural pauses and syntax that make sense. If it sounds awkward and uncomfortable when spoken, odds are it's not that pretty on paper, either.

Pay attention to subtitles, read other stories or read scripts.

In case you needed another reason to have a Netflix binge, it can actually be helpful to your writing! Sometimes writing out dialogue from some of your favourite shows, or reading the subtitles to see how it's written out can really help you visualize how dialogue can be delivered.

Pay attention to how people talk around you

This is specific to stories that are set in the same timeframe or area that you're writing within. While actually writing down what everyone says directly in front of them may get you some weird looks, it's helpful to make mental notes of the way people speak or any verbal quirks they



have. People are always talking, and listening can help you write more believable dialogue. The real world, while it may be frightening, can be the best place to hone your writing craft.

Write scenes in only dialogue

As always, continuing to write is the best way to improve. Writing scenes of only dialogue as practice can be very helpful in mastering the flow of conversation. Trying to build an entire relationship using only dialogue can really test the boundaries of how you're using it. It also gives you an opportunity to look critically at the dialogue you've written to see whether or not it plays a role in driving the story forward. Does this interaction showcase a character quirk, or develop the plot, or give the reader valuable insight to a certain detail? If the answer is no, odds are it can get cut.

Dialogue is a powerful tool. When done effectively, it can be the key to making someone fall in love with your story.