

DIALOGUE TECHNICALITIES

1. Every time a new speaker speaks, begin a new paragraph. Indent that paragraph! Put quotation marks around the spoken words.

“Only five weeks until graduation,” he said jumping up and down.

“Yay. Happy for you. I’m a junior and I have four EOC tests in the next two weeks, so shut up. Would ya?”

2. In the following lines of dialogue, underline the capital letters and circle punctuation marks:

“Go to prom with me,” he ordered.

“Are you going to prom?” he asked.

She asked, “Will you go to prom with me?”

“Will you go to prom with me?” He handed her a bouquet of roses.

“Will you, Sara,” he begged, “please, please, go to prom with me?”

3. Put commas around direct address, or interjections. In the following lines of dialogue, circle the commas and underline the direct address or interjection.

“Mom, can I go out tonight?”

“Can I go out tonight, Mom?”

“As I was saying, Mom, I want to go out tonight.”

“Man, that was scary.”

“Hey Dude, what’s up?”

“I’ll be back by midnight, okay?”

5. When including description with dialogue, keep the description in the paragraph with the speaker to whom it refers.

CORRECT:

Andrea saw Darien walking across the quad and waved him over.
Hey, buddy,” she said. “Where ya been?”
He shook his head and then answered, “Like you don’t know.”

INCORRECT:

Andrea saw Darien walking across the quad and waved him over.
Hey, buddy,” she said. “Where ya been?” He shook his head and
then answered,
“Like you don’t know.”

6. If only two people are talking, and you have established your speakers, you don’t need dialogue tags after every line.
“Hey!” Karen shouted across the park.
“Hey, what’s up? What are you doing here?” Brian asked as he jogged to her side.
“Waiting for you, of course. Don’t you know I am your personal stalker?”
“Well, I couldn’t ask for a cuter one.”
7. In general *said* is a more sophisticated speaker tag than words such as *chortled*, *emoted*, *gulped*, *sighed*. You might think *said* is too repetitive, but readers read it like a period—the eye just skims over it. Use another word only if it is important and readers can’t infer from the context. *He whispered*.
8. In general, in speaker tags, avoid adverbs. *She said wistfully*. *He chuckled obnoxiously*. *She sighed dramatically*. Write the dialogue well enough that we get the emotion from context. You can have some descriptive sentences stand alone. *“I still miss him,” she said. She sighed dramatically.*