

Write Your Novel - Week 2

How to Format Dialogue in a Novel

Use Inverted Commas to Indicate Spoken Word

Whenever someone is speaking, their words should be enclosed in quotation marks.

'Let's go to the beach.'

We are taught to use double quotation marks when writing stories or quoting in essays, but published novels use single quotation marks so use them in your manuscript.

Dialogue tags stay outside the quotation marks

Dialogue tags attribute a line of dialogue to one of the characters so that the reader knows who is speaking. Dialogue tags stay outside the quotation marks, while the punctuation stays inside the quotation marks.

'There was blood everywhere,' Karen explained.

If the dialogue tag comes before the dialogue, the comma appears before the first quotation mark.

Karen explained, 'There was blood everywhere.'

If the dialogue ends with an exclamation mark or a question mark, the tags that follow begin in lowercase. The dialogue punctuation still goes inside the quotation marks.

'There was blood everywhere!' she explained.

Use a separate sentence for actions that happen before or after the dialogue

If an action occurs before or after the lines of dialogue, it should be given its own sentence.

For instance, if Daniel gasps and then speaks, it would look like this:

Daniel gasped. 'You're dying?'

Use double quotes when quoting something within the dialogue

If a character is quoting something or somebody else within their dialogue, use double quotation marks to indicate that the character is quoting someone else.

Sam started to cry. 'When you said, "I never want to see you again!" it hurt my feelings.'

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Use a new paragraph to indicate a new speaker

Any time you change speakers, you should begin a new paragraph with an indent. If the speaker performs an action after speaking, you should keep that speaker's action in the same paragraph. Then, move onto a new line in the next paragraph when someone else begins speaking. This helps the reader know who is speaking and who is performing the action.

'Danny, I'm going to need you to take a look at this,' said Captain Mark. He gestured to the photograph on his desk.

'My God,' muttered Captain Mark. His eyes darted from the photograph to his empty coffee cup. He knew it was going to be a long night.

Start with a lowercase letter if action interrupts dialogue

If action comes in the middle of a sentence of dialogue, the first letter of the second fragment should be in lowercase.

'At the end of the day,' he bellowed, 'there's always more soup!'

Long speeches have their own rules

If a person speaks for a long period of time which necessitates a new paragraph, the dialogue formatting rules are slightly different than normal. The opening quotation marks are placed at the first part of the first paragraph as well as each subsequent paragraph. The closing quotation marks, however, are placed *only* at the end of the last paragraph.

Jasper took a deep breath and began. 'Here's the thing about sharks. They're vicious, vicious creatures. They only know how to do one thing: kill. Have you ever seen a shark in the open water? Probably not. Because if you had, you'd already be dead.

'I saw a shark once. I was scuba diving off the marina, looking for starfish to give to my sick wife. She believes that starfish are good luck. Well, one man's fortune is another man's folly. All of a sudden I found myself face to face with a great white. My heart stopped. I froze up. I knew that was the end. If it hadn't been for that pontoon boat, we wouldn't be having this conversation.'

Em dashes indicate interruption

Em dashes (not to be confused with hyphens) are used to indicate interruptions and abrupt endings in dialogue. When formatting dialogue with em dashes, the dashes should be placed inside the quotation marks.

Bethany began to speak. 'I just thought we could —'

'I don't want to hear it,' interrupted Abigail.

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To type an em dash, press down and hold the Alt key while typing 0151, or copy and paste the above!

Don't add additional punctuation when using ellipses

If you're writing dialogue that ends with an ellipsis (three dots indicating a pause), you should not add a comma or any additional punctuation. Ellipses are used to indicate the trailing off of dialogue.

Lindsay let out a low whistle. 'I guess this is the end of the line...' she said, her voice trailing off.

Source: www.masterclass.com