

Using Dialogue

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn what dialogue is, as well as how to appropriately punctuate dialogue in sentences and paragraphs. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Dialogue in Writing

2. Punctuating Dialogue

1. Dialogue in Writing

Dialogue is the way you talk about talking; it is a conversation that is recorded or invented in writing.

This means that any written dialogue is the transcription of a conversation between people—either fictional people having a conversation that the author made up, or real people having a conversation that the author accurately recorded.

In narrative writing, both fictional and nonfictional dialogue make up the conversations between characters.

There are lots of reasons to use dialogue in a piece of writing, but they all depend on the context and the type of writing you're doing.



TERM TO KNOW

Dialogue

In writing, something that is said by a real or invented person.

2. Punctuating Dialogue

If you're going to write out some dialogue, you need to show your readers that the words are being spoken. Thus, the most important tool you have is the quotation mark, which is a punctuation symbol used to set off dialogue.

Setting off dialogue means distinguishing it from the other kinds of sentences and words surrounding it. To show that something is a piece of quoted text or a piece of dialogue, you need to add beginning and ending quotation marks.

⇒ EXAMPLE *"There's no place like home."*

What if you were putting this quotation into a sentence that identified the speaker?

⇒ EXAMPLE *"There's no place like home," Dorothy said.*

Note that the sentence ends after "Dorothy said," as opposed to immediately after the quotation marks. Notice too, then, that there is a comma separating these two clauses.

The comma lives inside the quotation marks. That's important because a comma is a punctuation symbol used in multiple ways to indicate a pause or particular organization. So here, the comma tells you to pause and indicates that what's inside the quotation marks is the actual quotation while what's outside is not.

You also know that in real life, conversations sometimes get interrupted. It's possible to show that disruption in writing, if and when you need to interrupt a piece of dialogue to add something in.

In that case, you'd use the quotation marks and the comma to show where the dialogue is and where it isn't.

⇒ EXAMPLE *"There's no place like home," Dorothy said while clicking her heels together, "and I want to go back."*

See how the first comma separates the dialogue and the interruption, and another comma separates the interruption and the next piece of dialogue? Then the whole sentence ends with a period inside the quotation mark.



TRY IT

Now it's your turn. The following sentence lacks any proper punctuation. See if you can tell where to put the quotation marks, period, and commas: *Dorothy clicked her heels together and said There's no place like home*

Where should you put the quotation marks?

+

Around the quotation. Even if you didn't know that Dorothy said, "There's no place like home," you'd have a hint about where the quotation starts because of the introduction "and said."

Where should you put the period?

+

After "home" because it goes at the end of the sentence, but inside the quotation marks.

Where should you put the commas?

+

Remember that there should be a comma to separate the quotation from an interrupting clause, but there isn't an interruption here. There is, however, an introduction, underlined below.

Dorothy clicked her heels together and said, "There's no place like home."

Thus, a comma should go between the clause "Dorothy clicked her heels together and said" and the quotation.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **dialogue in writing** is something that is said by a real or imagined person. You also learned how to **punctuate dialogue** by using quotation marks to designate where the dialogue begins and ends, commas to set off the dialogue from the rest of the sentence, and a period to complete the sentence. Finally, you practiced creating grammatically correct sentences with quotations, even when those quotations are being introduced or interrupted.

Best of luck in your learning!

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TERMS TO KNOW

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