

RULES FOR WRITING DIALOGUE

The following rules should help you learn to write dialogue properly. Notice the punctuation in the following examples, especially. In addition to these hints on form, please remember that dialogue should be natural for the characters speaking (be sure to keep in mind your characters' personality traits).

1. Use quotation marks around the words which the character says:

“It’s sure cold out here,” Mark said.

2. Begin a new paragraph each time a different person speaks – this can help to cut down on the number of dialogue tags required.

“Did you say your prayers tonight?”

“I meant to, but I got to trying to cipher out how much twelve times thirteen is, and –“

“Oh, we are lost beyond all help! How could you neglect such a thing at such a time as this?”

Remember to indent the beginning of each dialogue paragraph, just as you would in any other type of writing.

3. Only the exact words of a person are in quotation marks. Also, when splitting a quotation with a dialogue tag, do not capitalize words which do not begin new sentences.

“I really don’t know,” he said, “whether she loves me or not.”

4. When several sentences are quoted together to form a paragraph, put just one set of quotation marks around the whole quotation. (except for dialogue tags).

5. Periods and commas are always placed inside the quotation marks.

6. An exclamation point (!) or a question mark (?) is placed inside the quotation marks when it punctuates a quotation, but outside the quotation when it punctuates the main sentence.

She looked at me and asked, “Are you alright?” (? punctuates the quote)

Did the teacher really say, “Finish this today”? (? punctuates the main sentence)