

**Tough Talk:
Writing Effective Dialogue**
Presented by Laurie Marr Wasmund
Author of *My Heart Lies Here* (2012)
Clean Cut (2014)
To Do Justice (2016)
To Love Kindness (2017)
To Walk Humbly (2019)

Do Some Field Work

- Eavesdrop, eavesdrop, eavesdrop!
- Study body language, hand gestures, facial expressions, and other physical action that people engage in while talking.
- Study dialogue in the great short stories and novels.
- Watch television shows (especially soap operas). Study screen plays and plays.

Dialogue is not Conversation

- Dialogue is always interactive.
- Dialogue is always based on relationships.
- All dialogue is open to interpretation through the character's own needs, wants, fears, desires, etc.
- It must have direction.
- It must carry some sort of resolution, closure, or promise.

Keep It Natural

- People don't always speak in full sentences.
- Grammar often goes out the window.
- Dialogue must fit the situation and emotion of moment.

Make Use of Dramatic Techniques

- Begin the dialogue at the latest possible moment.
- Create tension between values/attitudes.
- Know the subtext.
- Employ non-sequitur.
- The less said, the better.
- *What isn't said is just as important as what is.*

Make It Real

- Recognize the importance of "silent space."
- Recognize the importance of timing.
- Think about how informal speeches are structured.

Create an individualized way of speaking for each character.

Know the task of the dialogue

- Suggest character's psychology.
- Convey information (exposition).
- Reveal an important character trait (e.g., insecurity, fear, arrogance, etc.).
- Evoke emotion in the reader for the character and/or the situation.
- *Dialogue should always advance or "turn" the plot or make character move in another direction/gain another perspective.*

Know the purpose of each line of dialogue

- What are the character's intentions?
- Why is it important to him/her to do this?
- Why is it important to do this at THIS moment?
- What questions does his/her speech raise for the other character(s)? What questions does it raise for the reader?

Use Dialogue Tags Sparingly

- Good: Use "said" or "asked" as tags for 99% of dialogue.
- Better: Replace "said" or "asked" with gestures to add variety, develop a character's personality, or create a lasting visual for your reader.
- Best: Write dialogue that is clear and strong enough so that you don't need to use tags.
- Use tags to create rhythm in your character's speech and to imply "beats" between statements.

The Mechanics of Dialogue

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. Indent the beginning of each dialogue paragraph, just as you would in any other type of writing.
3. 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.
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.

Copyright©2021 by Laurie Marr Wasmund

Visit me at lostranchbooks.com or lauriemarrwasmund.com

Email me at lost.ranch.books@gmail.com