

Writing Help Sheet: Writing Dialogue

Whenever we talk back and forth with anyone, we make use of conversation. Dialogue can help develop characters and move the plot of the story forward. Each time there is a new speaker, you should start a new paragraph.

1. Indent the first line of each paragraph.
2. Begin the first word of a sentence with a capital letter.
3. Begin the first word that each speaker says with a capital letter.
Example: Alice looked around and asked herself, “Where am I?”
4. The words that are actually spoken by some person must be separated from the rest of the sentence by commas.
Example: Mr. Smith answered, “It is the truth.”
To give the quotation strong emphasis, you can use a colon.
Example: Here are Scott’s own words: “Time will rust the sharpest sword.”
5. Place quotation marks around the words that someone says so that these words stand out clearly from the rest of the sentence.
Example: Shakespeare said, “All the world’s a stage.”
6. Place single quotation marks around all words quoted within a quotation.
Example: Mother said, “Mary made this remark: ‘That will never happen again.’”
7. Dialogue between characters must be divided into paragraphs. Each time a new person speaks, or there is a change in the speaker, there must be a new paragraph. Each speaker must stand alone in a paragraph by himself.

Read this conversational story called “Fire!”

Fire!

“Look! There goes the fire engine. I wonder where the fire is?” said Mr. Johnson to his neighbor, Mr. Clark.

“It looks as if it’s my mill,” said Mr. Clark, and he hurried off in the direction of the fire.

“I’m sure it’s not your mill that is burning,” commented Mr. Johnson as he followed.

Mr. Clark then shouted, “Why, it’s the post office! The firefighters are already spraying water on the flames. They’re swift workers. Look at them! They’re daring all right. This building will be saved.”

But his last words were incorrect.

“No, you’re wrong,” the other man answered. “The building is gone. See! There its roof falls in! Our post office is no more. Where are we going to get our mail tomorrow?”