

# DIALOGUE

## PUNCTUATION

A comma separates dialogue from its dialogue tag, and periods and commas ALWAYS go inside the quotation marks.

**Incorrect:** "You should be proud of your **name**", Lin said.

**Correct:** "You should be proud of your **name**," Lin said.

The same is true of periods:

**Incorrect:** "You should be proud of your **name**". Lin turned her back on him before she could say something she might regret.

**Correct:** "You should be proud of your **name**." Lin turned her back on him . . . etc.

To punctuate dialogue divided by a dialogue tag, place a second comma after the tag, and after any words that come between the tag and the continuation of the sentence.

**Incorrect:** "If you try," he **said** his smile **persuasive**. "**You'll** find it's easier than it looks."

**Correct:** "If you try," he **said**, his smile **persuasive**, "**you'll** find it's easier than it looks."

## SPACING

If indentations are used in the text, **indent the first line of dialogue**. When one character stops speaking and the focus moves to another character's speech or actions, begin a new paragraph.

**Incorrect:** "Watch out!," She yelled. "Do you want to get **hurt**?" **He** shrugged and made a face. "Not really."

**Correct:** "Watch out!" she yelled. "Do you want to get hurt?"

**He** shrugged and made a face. "Not really."

## CAPITALIZATION

The first word of dialogue is always capitalized.

**Incorrect:** He said, "**we** can be there by morning."

**Correct:** He said, "**We** can be there by morning."

When dialogue is divided by a speaker attribution, begin the second half of the sentence with a lowercase letter, not an uppercase one.

**Incorrect:** "We can be there by morning," he said, "**If** we get started right away."

**Correct:** "We can be there by morning," he said, "**if** we get started right away."

Never capitalize the dialogue tag. A lowercase letter follows the punctuated dialogue.

**Incorrect:** "Yes, it's **mine**," **Said** the woman.

**Correct:** "Yes, it's **mine**," **said** the woman.

# SHOW, Don't Tell

Showing allows the reader to follow the author into the moment, to see and feel and experience what the author has experienced. Here are some tips that will help make your writing more vivid and alive for your reader.

1. **Use dialogue** - Dialogue allows the reader to experience a scene as if they were there. Instead of telling the reader your mom was angry, they can hear it for themselves:

“Justin Michael,” mom bellowed, “Get in here *this instant!*”

Dialogue can give your reader a great deal about character, emotion and mood.

2. **Use sensory language** - In order for readers to fully experience what you're writing about, they need to be able to **see, hear, taste, smell, and touch** the world around them. Try to use language that incorporates several senses, not just sight.
3. **Be descriptive** - Being descriptive is more than just inserting a string of descriptive words. It's carefully choosing the *right* words and using them sparingly to convey your meaning.

**Telling:** He sits on the couch holding his guitar.

There's nothing wrong with that sentence. It gives the reader some basic information, but it doesn't create an image. Compare that sentence with this:

**Showing:** His eyes are closed, and he's cradling the guitar in his arms like a lover. It's as if he's trying to hold on to something that wants to let go.

The second example takes that basic information and paints a picture with it. It also uses *figurative language*—in this case, the simile “cradling the guitar in his arms like a lover”—to help create an image.

4. **Be specific, not vague**

Instead of writing, “I felt sadder than I ever felt before,” take the time to try and describe what that feeling was, and then decide how best to convey that feeling to the reader.

**Telling:** I'll never forget how I felt after Fido died. I was miserable.

**Showing (good):** If I live for a thousand years, I'll never forget how utterly and terribly alone I felt after Fido died. Months and months went by, and it seemed like every little thing reminded me of him. I don't know if I'm ever going to get over his death.

**Showing (better):** Whenever puppies in the pet store window distracted me from our walk, Fido flattened his scruffy ears, growling. But he always forgave me. As his sight faded, the smell of fresh air and the feel of grass would make him try to playfully leap. Eventually, at the sound of my voice, his tail thumped weakly on the ground. This morning, I filled his water bowl all the way to the top--just the way he likes it--before I remembered.