

Dialog

Dialog is a conversation and an important part of writing novels.

On the second page there are three dialogs. Read the first two. What is the difference? Why doesn't the first sound real? What's changed in the second one? There is the use of pronouns, informal speech, contractions, incomplete sentences, speaker is cut off...Dialog isn't supposed to be "proper" writing. It's supposed to sound like you speaking.

The third dialog is written as if it were in a book.

As long as you know who is speaking. You don't need "he said", "she said" which are called speech tags. You can use action tags or descriptive tags which tell what the person is doing or describe something about that person in order to show who is talking. You can see examples of this in the dialog, lines 4 and 6 (labeled below).

Here are some grammar rules for writing dialog. In () you will see what lines are examples of this rule.

Each new speaker starts a new paragraph. (1-6)

Commas, periods, etc. go inside of the quotation marks. (1-6)

Quotation marks enclose everything that is being said. (1-6)

Quotation marks can close and then open again in the middle of a sentence. (5)

Commas end most quotations if they are followed by a speech tag. (5)

Periods instead of commas should be used if the tag is not a speech tag. (4, 6)

You can use an exclamation point or question mark instead of a comma. (1)

The punctuation goes inside the quotation marks. (5-6)

A speech tag starts with a lowercase letter unless it is a proper noun. (1, 5)

Make sure it is clear who is speaking.

Be sure to describe how they are saying things (shyly, snidely) and what the characters are doing (smiling, hanging their head).

1 - "Hey!" called Mary to get Tom's attention. "What's up?"

2 - "Nothing. Who's this?"

3 - "This is—" Mary started to say, but the new girl jumped in.

4 - "I'm Susan." She was almost as tall as Tom and looked right into his eyes. "I'm her new neighbor. I'm starting school here."

5 - "Nice to meet you," he said with a smile, "and welcome."

6 - "Thanks." Susan returned the grin.

Mary: "Hello, Tom. How are you today?"

Tom: "Hello, Mary. I am fine today. Who is your friend with you?"

Mary: "This is Susan."

Susan: "I am Mary's new neighbor. I am going to begin going to school here."

Tom: "It is nice to meet you, Susan. Welcome to our school."

Susan: "Thank you, Tom, for welcoming me."

Mary: "Hey, Tom. What's up?"

Tom: "Nothing. Who's this?"

Mary: "This is..."

Susan: "I'm Susan. I'm her new neighbor. I'm starting school here."

Tom: "Nice to meet you. Welcome."

Susan: "Thanks."

"Hey!" called Mary to get Tom's attention. "What's up?"

"Nothing. Who's this?"

"This is—" Mary started her introduction, but the new girl jumped in.

"I'm Susan." She was almost as tall as Tom and looked right into his eyes. "I'm her new neighbor. I'm starting school here."

"Nice to meet you," he said with a smile, "and welcome."

"Thanks." Susan returned the grin