



Reading On The Move

Elements of Fiction: Dialogue

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. Having dialogue in a story helps to make the story more interesting, as well as helps the reader to get to know the characters more in depth.

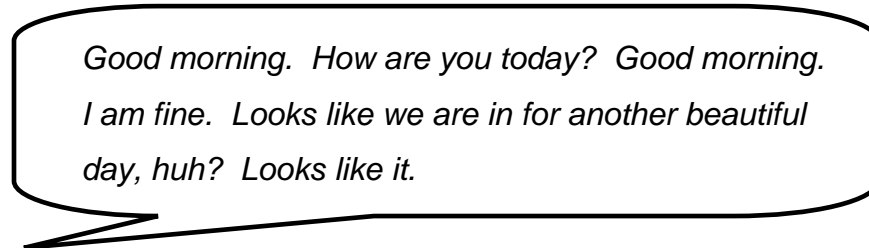
There are some rules to keep in mind when writing dialogue:

- Two speakers cannot speak in the same paragraph. Each time the speaker changes, there must be a new paragraph.
- When reading a play, you will see the name of the person speaking before the dialogue.
- When reading dialogue in prose, you will see quotation marks around all spoken dialogue.



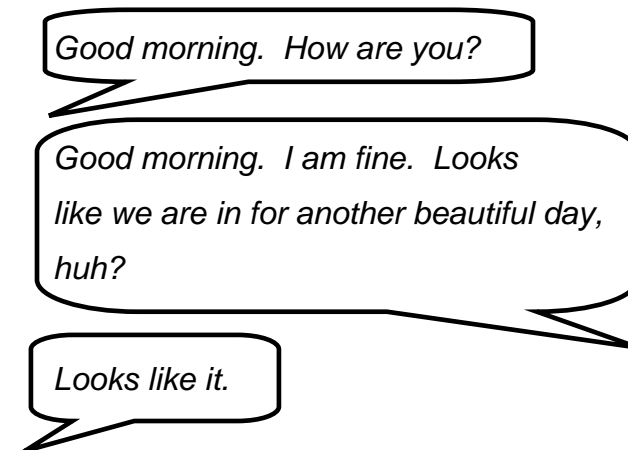
Example:

Here is a conversation:



Do you know who is talking in this conversation? Do you know how many people are talking? No. So, let's break this conversation down into speakers.

First, we need to make sure each time the speaker changes there is a new paragraph.



Now we need to identify the speakers.

If this were dialogue in a play (drama), it would look like this:

Julie. *Good morning. How are you?*

Jack. *Good morning. I am fine. Looks like we are in for another beautiful day, huh?*

Julie. *Looks like it.*

If the dialogue were from a novel, it would look like this:

“Good morning. How are you today?” said Julie.

“Good morning. I am fine. Looks like we are in for another beautiful day, huh?” said Jack.

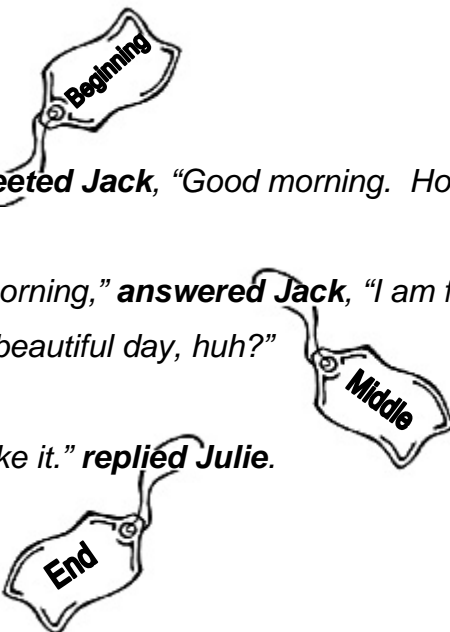
“Looks like it.” said Julie.

Each of these sentences has the **speech tag** “*said Julie*” or “*said Jack.*”
Speech tags identify who is speaking.

Now that each speaker is identified, the reader has a good understanding of the conversation that is taking place. But, do we find anything out about the characters or the situation in this dialogue? No.

Speech tags do not always belong at the end. They can be at the beginning, middle, or end. This helps with the flow of the conversation and also makes the dialogue more interesting for the reader. For longer dialogue, once a good rhythm has been established, speech tags are not always used. This usually happens when there are only two speakers.

Example:



Julie greeted Jack, "Good morning. How are you today?"

"Good morning," answered Jack, "I am fine today. Looks like we are in for another beautiful day, huh?"

"Looks like it." replied Julie.

So, now we know who the speakers are. But, do we know what is going on in this story? Not really. We need some narrative sentences to fill in the blanks for us!

Using narrative sentences helps to show the character's actions and thoughts. By inserting these sentences into the dialogue the reader is able to see what the characters are doing and what is going on around them while the conversation is taking place. Narrative sentences are not part of the dialogue. Sometimes these sentences help to identify the speaker. In those cases, there is no need for a speech tag.

Example:

The diner door snapped shut behind her. Julie was attempting to fix her wind-blown hair when she spotted him, "Good morning. How are you today?"

"Good morning," Jack said as he sipped his coffee. He nodded his head, inviting Julie to join him at his table. "I am fine. Looks like we are in for another beautiful day, huh?" he said sarcastically as he gazed out at the dark clouds that were rolling in.

Julie slipped off her coat and slid into the booth across from Jack. She made one more attempt to fix her hair and said, "Looks like it."

The narrative sentences in this dialogue paint a picture for the reader. The use of narrative sentences also reduces the amount of speech tags needed in the dialogue.



Using what you have learned about dialogue, read the story on the next pages and answer the questions that follow.

Spring Defeats Winter

A long time ago there lived a very old man. He had long white hair, and wore white deerskin clothes. His eyes were a cold blue and his nose had a hook, like an icicle. Any place that he walked, the ground turned very hard. When he looked at plants or trees, their leaves turned brown and fell to the ground. If he breathed on a river or pond, it immediately turned to ice. All the birds flew away when he came near.

This old man was walking around the forest looking for a place to make a lodge. Finally he found a clear spot in the forest where the trees had died. He put the tree trunks together and covered them with bark. He made a fire on the ground, but it burned with a cold, blue flame. His only friend, the North Wind, came and sat down with him.

One morning they both woke up with a strange feeling. They looked outside and saw that the snow was moving away from them. They could also see some water flowing in the river, and a few tiny green buds on the trees.

“This is awful!” spoke the North Wind. “I’m not staying here.” He flew far away to his home in the place where the snow stays the whole year.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door of the lodge.

“Go away!” said the old man. “No one is allowed in here.” But he could see that the ice on his door was beginning to melt. It finally fell off completely.

A young man came into the lodge and sat down by the fire. He stirred it with a stick and it began to grow warm. The old man began to grow hot, and sweat covered his face.

“Who are you and why have you come in here? I’m going to freeze you with my breath!” said the old man angrily.

“Don’t you know who I am? I am young and strong. My friend is the South Wind. Wherever I walk, flowers and grass spring up. All the birds and animals come back to see me and welcome me with their happy cries. It’s time for you to leave.”

The old man started growing smaller and smaller. Soon there was nothing left of him but a tiny puddle of water. Soon this, too, disappeared, and a bunch of white flowers grew there.

Once again, the young man, Spring, had defeated old man, Winter.

1. The first three paragraphs are examples of what type of writing?
 - a. dialogue
 - b. narrative
 - c. persuasive

2. Paragraph begins what type of writing?
 - a. dialogue
 - b. narrative
 - c. persuasive

3. Starting with paragraph four, underline all the speech tags used in this story.

4. In paragraph nine there is no speech tag used. Who is speaking? Explain why you know this.

← Answer Key

1. b
2. a
3. “This is awful!” spoke the North Wind. “I’m not staying here.” He flew away far to his home in the place where the snow stays the whole year.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door of the lodge.

“Go away!” said the old man. “No one is allowed in here.” But he could see that the ice on his door was beginning to melt. It finally fell off completely.

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Once again, the young man, Spring, had defeated old man, Winter.

4. The young man, Spring, is speaking. We know this because the last paragraph of the story tells us who the young, strong man is.