

Writing Good Dialogue.

by: Nicole Murphy There's nothing that kills a scene like hackneyed dialogue. Just stop and think about the average B-Grade Hollywood Movie. Sure, at times the plot is bad and the characterisation woeful but most of the time, what stops it from being a good movie is the dialogue. Cringe-worthy dialogue. So, how do you write good dialogue? There are a number of factors and the most important one is: don't try too hard. Not every thing out of a character's mouth has to be scintillating. Sometimes, the best dialogue comes about because it's so simple and normal. So relax. You need to let your characters speak. If they are highly educated, they will probably speak with great grammar and have a high vocabulary. If they left school at fourteen and have worked for five years in the local abattoir, their language is likely to be more colourful. If your character is a chatterbox, let them ramble. If they are the strong and silent type, let them be silent. Don't force words into their mouths and don't try to make them conform to your own views of good communication. Good dialogue flows. The characters react to what another character has said. For example: "I went to the show the other day." "Really? Was it any good?" "Not bad. The dogs were cute but the cows were too noisy." "I was talking to George the other day." Huh? How did talk about the show bring George into the conversation? To make it flow, it needs something more like: "I went to the show the other day." "Really? Was it any good?" "Not bad. The dogs were cute but the cows were too noisy." "Speaking of dogs, I was talking to George the other day..." If you aren't sure if your dialogue flows, the classic way to test it is to read it aloud. You'll hear any problems, just like you do in the bad Hollywood movies. Better still, get your family and friends to act it out for you. It gets them involved in your writing and you can stand back and really observe and listen to what is going on. The other thing dialogue needs is connection to the action of the story. Stop and think about the conversations you have. They are always related somehow to the action of your day, whether it's a conversation you're having as you catch the bus to work or a conversation with a work colleague or catching up with your partner at the end of the day. Keep the dialogue connected to the characters, the setting and the plot by surrounding it with action. The example above is quite bland. But surround it with action and it comes alive. Carrie sat down, opened the sugar packet and sprinkled it in her tea and then stirred it. "I went to the show the other day." "Really?" Sophie took a long sip of her coffee. "Was it any good?" Carrie shrugged. "Not bad. The dogs were cute but the cows were too noisy." She poured milk into her tea. Sophie put her coffee cup down and leant forward, eyes sparkling. "Speaking of dogs, I was talking to George the other day..." Now the dialogue seems real, because we can picture the characters and their setting. We also get an idea of how they're feeling. Carrie's shrug tells us the show didn't really thrill her. Sophie's sparkling eyes tell us she's got something exciting to say. So spend a bit of time developing your dialogue, and your stories will be much more successful.

About the Author

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