

Tag Lines, Action Beats, Character Voice and other Dialogue Nuances (Dialog or Dialogue... However you spell it, it causes problems)

Dialog, definition: Conversation between one or more characters (one is internal debate or _____) that is essential to developing the _____, establishing _____, and/or moving _____ forward.

#1) Dialog has strict formatting. You can only do it one way.

Every time you change _____ you need to start a new _____.

This includes non-verbal _____ or _____.

As much as possible, avoid _____ and use _____ instead.

Dialog exercise version 1: For the next three minutes we need to talk.

Dialog exercise version 2: I need a volunteer to choose the subject from the slips of paper. Now we talk for three minutes again.

How did they compare? Which was more interesting? Why?

#2) Most _____ dialog always/never shows up in a book.

#3) But, dialog must sound _____ or no one will read it.

#4) So how do we do that? What tools do we have at our disposal? The components of effective dialog are _____ and _____.

So how do we decide how to add in action beats? These are simply whatever the character _____.

What about voice? How do we help that come to life on the page? Give your character key _____, mannerisms, and _____.

To effectively master your dialog, you must know your character well!

See character worksheet.

Exercise #3: Trying for tight dialog, we will first do a three-word argument. This has two characters, but neither can say more than three words.

Exercise #4: We're going to compose a dialog between three or four characters arguing. On the first time each person talks, we may use a tag line. For the remainder of the dialog, use only action beats, if necessary. Try to make the characters voices so distinct that we don't need to type in anything to explain who is talking. We'll do one of these together as a group and then you'll do one on your own.

Dialog format drill. This drill focuses on tag lines.

Revise each sentence below, adding quotation marks and other punctuation where necessary.

Sample The view from the mountain is absolutely amazing Iris exclaimed.

"The view from the mountain is absolutely amazing," Iris exclaimed.

1. Do you see why I couldn't wait to get here said Stephen.

2. Wouldn't it be wonderful to stay and watch the sunset Peter asked.

3. I'd love to do that said Marie but we forgot to bring flashlights to guide us back down.

4. Maybe you forgot to bring a flashlight said Carol. I never go hiking without one.

5. Hooray cheered Marie. Does that mean we can stay

6. Maybe we should ask Harry said Ray. He's the one who has to carry two backpacks.

7. Oh, right said Harry. You know as well as I do that the packs will be lighter on the way down

8. Did Harry say the packs will be lighter

9. Ray, how can you say the climb was easy. You were a mile behind me!

10. Marie said I'm starving! Lets eat first and argue later, okay?

Now, use your dialog passage that you brought with. Highlight all the tag lines, underline all the action beats, and circle wherever you nailed character voice.