

## Guidelines for Writing Narrative Dialogue

*Dialogue is conversation in writing. Having characters talk to one another makes a story more believable. (Note: Rules for writing dialogue can vary greatly. For the purposes of this course, we will follow the rules outlined below.)*

- Every time you change speakers, start a new paragraph.
  - When starting a new paragraph to show a change of speaker, the first sentence of the new paragraph should contain the dialogue.
- Identify the speaker only when it is otherwise confusing.
  - When identifying the speaker, do so as early as possible in the paragraph.
- Use realistic dialogue which suits the character saying the words. For example, your character may use very informal language which may feature slang and contractions.
- A quoted line of dialogue can be its own sentence inside a larger sentence with a capital letter at the beginning and a comma, a period, an exclamation mark, or a question mark at the end.

**Example 1 - Comma:** "I'm planning a trip to Australia," said John.

**Example 2 - Period:** John said, "I'm planning a trip to Australia."

**Example 3 - Exclamation Mark:** John yelled, "I'm planning a trip to Australia!"

**Example 4 - Question Mark:** John asked, "Are you planning a trip to Australia?"

- Quoted dialogue can contain more than one sentence.

**Example:** "I'm really tired," mumbled Tony. "I think I'm gonna go to bed as soon as this movie is over. What time is it, anyway?"

### Common Mistakes

- Using a comma where a period is required:
  - Frank smiled as he spoke to Alice, "You look very happy today." (INCORRECT - comma after Alice should be a period.)
- Placing commas outside the quotation:
  - "It's breakfast time", yelled Mom.
- Placing periods outside the quotation:
  - George said, "You need to pay attention".
- Using inappropriate words to introduce or describe dialogue:
  - a. Angus questioned, "Are you okay?" (questioned is wrong - asked is correct)
  - b. "Do you have any water?" said Billy. (said is wrong - asked is correct)