

# Multi-Genre: Writing Dialogue and One- Act Plays



## Dialogue

Let's begin by reading dialogue contained in a movie's opening scene. As we read this screenplay look for elements of effective dialogue.

# Dialogue

What are the elements of effective dialogue?

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# Dialogue

- Insistence on tension makes dialogue perfect for multigenre writers to dive to the heart of matters and reveal conflict, controversy, dilemmas, and opposing viewpoints

# Dialogue

- Effective dialogue contains “an essential element of conflict.”
- “Small talk doesn’t contain tension or conflict so you won’t find much of it in published writing.”

# Examples of Tension

- School: Principal accuses student of cheating
- Jackie Robinson: Tells his wife he wants to quit
- Immigrant Children: “What are you doing here?”
- WWII: Nazi’s conversation with Jewish prisoner

# Examples of Tension

Make of list of moments of tension you could include in your project



# Dialogue Tips

- It should be brief, because in life we seldom say more than a few sentences at a time
- It should add to the reader's present knowledge
- It should omit, or quickly pass over, the routine exchanges of ordinary conversation

## Dialogue Tips Cont.

- It should sound spontaneous but avoid the repetitions of real talk
- It should keep the story moving
- It should reveal something about the speakers' personalities, both directly and indirectly
- It should show relationships among people

# Tacking on Detail

- Sometimes inexperienced writers will discover the useful tool of tacking on detail to a dialogue with a present participial or adverbial phrase.

"It's too late," she said, closing the door.

## Tacking on Detail Cont.

- Tacking on detail is a useful technique but writers must pay attention to what words literally mean. The tacked-on phrase means that the action contained in it occurs simultaneously

## Example

“Ah, I love the smell of the ocean. It’s so strong you can taste it,” he said as he sucked the air deep within his lungs. Jennifer looked at him and laughed in her shy airy way.

## Tacking on Detail Cont.

- I understand why Jennifer laughed. Try saying the sentences while simultaneously sucking air deep within your lungs.
- Even when the dialogue and tacked-on detail can be physically performed together, writers should avoid the habit of tacking detail onto every dialogue tag.

## Lacking on Detail (Absurd Example)

“Where are you going?” He asked, barring the door.

“To see my lover!” She exclaimed as she picked up the monkey wrench from the dining room table.

“You’ll not leave this house tonight,” he said, pulling on a football helmet.

“You just wait and see,” she said, stepping assuredly toward him.

## Tacking on Detail Cont.

- Dialogue can fail because of the way it is presented
- The main task of a writer is to create dialogue that moves and has substance, advances and reveals characters, contains the ring of truth, and creates the illusion of actual speech.



# Format Examples

**Him****My Voice****My Mind**

<p>- Hi Ayshia, This Is Brian Rasmussen.</p> <p>- How are you doing?</p>	<p>Hi.</p> <p>Great I guess.</p>	<p>Ugh! Why the hell are you calling me? How do you think I'm doing. you killed my mom asshole.</p>
<p>-Well, that's good to hear. Listen, I'm terribly sorry about everything that has happened.</p>	<p>Ok.</p>	<p>If you were really sorry you wouldn't have been driving my mom around while you were intoxicated and she would still be here. With me.</p>
<p>-I really feel awful. It hurts more because I know I'm the one held responsible. I miss her a lot.</p>	<p>Yeah I bet. Thanks.</p>	<p>You're the one that should've died. Unlike me, you deserve to have your family torn apart.</p>
<p>- Well if you ever need anything at all, ask me, ok?</p>	<p>Sure.</p>	<p>If you can't bring my mom back, I don't want anything from you.</p>
<p>- Ok good well I'm going to let you go now. I don't want to bother you. Please keep in touch. I would love to hear from you occasionally.</p>	<p>Bye.</p>	<p>You already let part of me go. Forever. What more could you possibly want from me?</p>

AGENT:

Hey, it's your agent...

I've got this great job for  
you.. they want you to start  
in 2 days.

Your job depends on it.

Sorry, but you really don't  
have much of a choice.

Sounds great I'm glad you  
decided to.. I will call  
the company in the morning.

(hangs up)

JAYCE:

Hello?

Oh.. hi...

I think I should take a  
break from all of the work,  
I'm burned out.

I uhh... just don't know if  
if it's a good idea.

Hmm... alright.

(sighs) Bye.....

### **An Everyday Conversation between My Grandma and Me**

Me: Hola, Grandma.

Her: Hola, mijita. How was your day today? Did you go to school?

Me: No, it's Saturday.

Her: Oh, sí, sí.

Me: How was your day?

Her: It was ok, but I wanted to go home today; but my house isn't finished yet because they found... um... ¿como se dice?

Me: Mold?

Her: Sí, mold in my house and they said I had to come up here until they can fix it.

Me: Oh, that's too bad. So what did you do today, Grandma?

Her: Oh nothing, same as always. And you? What did you do today? Go to school?

Me: No, because it's Saturday today.

Her: Oh, sí, sí. Mija, quería irme a mi casa hoy pero no puedo. ¿Porqué no puedo ir?

Me: Um... no sé. Uhhhh, did you go to the store today, Grandma?

Her: Oh, yes. Mija, how was your day at school today?

Me: Um. Muy bien

Her: Que bueno.

## What does your dad do?

### One Day in Elementary School

Friend 1: My dad's a doctor. He makes a lot of money, and spends so much time with me.

Me: Oh, that's cool. My dad's an astronaut. Right now he's collecting things on the moon for his boss.

### Some Other Day in Elementary School

Friend 2: Hey Senica, what does your dad do?

Me: He's the boss of some big business. He makes a lot of money. Right now he's in New York, telling his workers what to do.

### Another Day in Elementary School

Friend 3: Hey, do you and your dad want to go to the movies with me and my dad this weekend?

Me: Oh, my dad's fighting in the army. He's somewhere on the other side of the world, I think Iraq. Sorry

Friend 1: I thought you said your dad's an astronaut?

## Why?

Me: Alex c

Me: Alex c

Me: Why di

Me: Why di

have still been here with your family

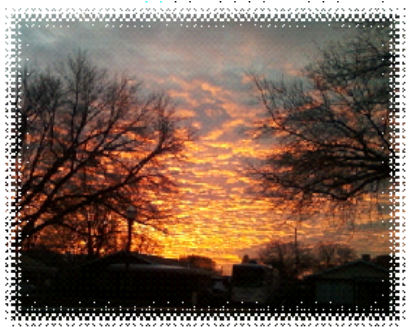
Alex: ha ha you know what they say, curiosity killed the cat!

Me: That's not funny; you were always scared of gun shots, what made you go outside? You should have stayed inside

Alex: You know me I'm always up for an adventure

Me: I wish you were still here, everything seems harder without you, it's like I'm missing half of myself

Alex: Lupita you know I'll always be there for you, I'll always take care of you, like I said I would, you never have to worry about that



Me: Alex I still miss you

Alex: I miss you too

## Why?

Me: Alex can I ask you something?

Alex: Yeah go ahead

Me: Why did you go outside

Alex: I wanted to see what was going on

Me: Why didn't you just stay inside, if you did you would have still been here with your family

Alex: ha ha you know what they say, curiosity killed the cat!

Me: That's not funny; you were always scared of gun shots, what made you go outside? You should have stayed inside

Alex: You know me I'm always up for an adventure

Me: I wish you were still here, everything seems harder without you, it's like I'm missing half of myself

Alex: Lupita you know I'll always be there for you, I'll always take care of you, like I said I would, you never have to worry about that

Me: Alex I still miss you

Alex: I miss you too

# One Act Plays

Include narration (stage directions)

(The living room is dimly lighted as dad walks through the door.)

Me: How was work

Dad: (silence)

Me: Dad, what happened?

Dad: Your mom...

Me: What about mom?



## Free Write

Begin creating a dialogue piece or a one-act (mini play) for your multi-genre project. Focus on the elements of strong dialogue: tension, moves story forward, and avoids tacking on unnecessary details. You may present your dialogue in the format that works best for your project.

Homework: Rough Draft of your dialogue piece

**If you finish your dialogue use this time to work on other genre pieces. Remember to be creative and work on creating unity among your pieces.**

