

WRITING A STORY

WORKSHEET 2: WRITING DIALOGUE

What are your options?

It's important to understand how "dialogue", the words people say to one another in a story, add to the enjoyment.

Writers have two ways of describing what is said: "reported speech" and "direct speech" (dialogue). Here's the difference in practice:

A

Linda's Mum came into the bedroom. Linda was looking at a pop video on YouTube. Her mother asked her why she wasn't doing her homework. Linda groaned and said that she'd already finished. (**Reported speech**)

B

"Linda, what are you doing?"

"Oh, gee – give me a go - I'm just looking at a video on Youtube."

"But why aren't you doing your homework?"

"Golly, Mum! I've already finished, haven't I?" (**Direct speech, or "dialogue"**)

Which should I choose?

You will have noticed from your reading that authors normally prefer direct speech. Open any novel and the chances are it will start with dialogue. Why? Because dialogue is alive with the personality of the characters. Even in very simple exchanges like the sample above, you can "hear" the two people – hear the exasperation in Linda's voice ("Oh gee, give me a go", "Golly...haven't I?") and the suspicion in Mum's. If you compare the two passages (A & B), you can see how 'flat' A is in comparison to B.

In everyday life, what we do all the time is to communicate **in dialogue**. It's the default setting in face to face situations. We don't think about it – we just talk – back and forth, more or less nonstop. That's why authors, mimicking life, use so much of it.

But's there's another good reason for using dialogue.

Dialogue is dramatic

It can be used to turn up the drama on any situation – and drama is good for any story. Let's revisit Linda and her Mum.

"Don't you take that tone with me, young lady!"

"Gee, Mum. You're always hassling me! I said I did it!"

"And often you haven't – am I right? Remember the last school report?"

“Oh no – not that again! I said I’d try harder this term. You promised not to nag...”

“Nag! How dare you? I have every right...”

Get the idea? There are no fancy words here – just what people actually say – but by quoting the now slightly aggressive back and forth – we feel the tension. We wonder what this is going to lead to.

ACTIVITY 1

Here are some situations, described in “reported speech”. Choose one and transform it into “direct speech” (or dialogue).

A

Harry is walking out the school gate when he is pulled up by Big George (the bully) and his sidekick Sly. George is determined to have fun. No matter how hard Harry tries, he can’t get away. Will things turn really nasty?

B

Jill and Melanie are sitting eating their lunch. Up comes Betsy. Melanie would like to be friends, but Jill is jealous and tries everything she can to make Betsy go away.

C

Mrs Jones has returned to the lunchtime detention room. The two who have been kept in are Julia and Warwick. Someone has written something horrible on the board about Mrs Jones, and drawn a nasty picture, a caricature of the teacher. It has to be one of the two in detention.

ACTIVITY 2

Here are three “starters” for dialogue. Choose one and expand it into a dialogue of at least 10 lines.

A

“OK,” said the teacher, “who did it?”

B

“I want to join your group,” said Nora.

“Well you can’t!” snapped Terri.

C

“Open up, it’s the police!”