

The Busy Writer's Book of Checklists

Checklist 5 – Dialogue

Aspect of Dialogue	Your Assessment		
	Works Well	Needs Work	Poor
Does your dialogue demonstrate that you know how to show differences in ethnic background, social standing, education levels and ages? (If not, go out one day with the specific intention of listening to different rhythms and patterns of speech.)			
Does each of your characters sound like an individual?			
Is it clear who is saying what in each scene?			
Have you over-used speech tags? (These are necessary only if it is otherwise unclear who is speaking.)			
Have you taken into account that most people use contractions in conversation? (E.g. she's rather than she is; they're rather than they are; it'll rather than it will; etc.)			
Does your dialogue read well aloud? (If it sounds stilted, make some changes.)			
Have you broken up long passages of direct speech with actions, details of the non-viewpoint character's expression, or details of the viewpoint character's thoughts?			
Does each speaker's response flow smoothly from the previous speaker's words? (Unless you are trying to show that one of the speakers is distracted.)			
Have you made sure that quotation marks are used for words that are spoken aloud, NOT thoughts?			
Have you checked that your sentence structure is varied? (No repetitive patterns and not too many sentences starting with the same word.)			
Does your dialogue sound appropriate for the age of each character?			
Have you, where appropriate, indicated a response by showing some body language or a facial expression, rather than using words?			
Have you avoided 'info-dumping' in dialogue? (That is, using dialogue unnaturally as a way of filling in the backstory. For example: having one character tell another something they would obviously already know.)			
Have you avoided using dialogue to express YOUR religious, political or social views, rather than the views of the character?			
Have you woven the viewpoint character's thoughts and emotions into the conversation as it is taking place? (Avoid the 'sandwich technique' - writing a slab of direct speech using only speech tags, followed by a slab showing the character thinking or acting, then a slab showing direct speech, and so on.)			
Have you mostly 'shown' the reader the dialogue as it is happening, rather than 'reporting' what has been said? (Writers who are uncomfortable with dialogue often resort to this: "He told James what he had seen and then they decided what to do next. June came in and offered her opinion. A little later, they all set off..." etc. etc.)			
Does every passage of dialogue move the story forward or show us something about the character?			
<i>Any other aspects of dialogue that need consideration:</i>			