

Name

Class

Due date



Grammar explained

Dialogue is a written exchange between characters in a text. Dialogue is inserted into a wider narrated story that frames the narrative.

<p>The narration frames the dialogue; gives it a lead-in.</p>	→	<p><i>It was Ruby who began. 'Just tell me why; that's all I want. I just want to understand why.'</i></p>
<p>The dialogue, signalled by the quotation marks, is the voice of the character indicated by the narration.</p>	→	<p><i>'Oh, Ruby, don't ...,' pleaded Justin in the hope that she would leave it be. 'I didn't mean for it to happen. It just happened.'</i> And in that very moment he knew how inadequate that was as a reason for destroying his marriage; how, if he was her, that would aggravate and frustrate rather than soothe and placate.</p>
<p>Each new speaker begins on a new line so the reader can follow who is talking.</p>	→	<p><i>'Things don't just "happen"!' Ruby snapped, angrier for his evasiveness.</i></p>
<p>The narration gives the reader clues about the 'sound' of the voice. Here, Justin's voice is pleading; in Ruby's next line she is angry.</p>	→	<p><i>'I know ...' he stuttered, but too late to stop her diatribe. In some way, though, he knew he had it coming so he let her go.</i></p>
<p>The narration fills in the gaps between the speakers with information that moves the narrative on.</p>	→	

A **conversation** is a written exchange between characters. It is a text in itself and difficult to write because there is no narration to guide the reader. Thus the writer is left with only words and punctuation to indicate to the reader the emotional states of the characters. Therefore, the conversation is most successful between two very distinctive characters. The conversation must give the narrative cues that are missing because there is no narrator. The same dialogue from above in conversation might read:

<p>The voice must signal to the reader the emotion of the character. The semicolon indicates her need for a reason and the repetition indicates the extent of her need.</p>	→	<p><i>'Just tell me why; that's all I want. I just want to understand why.'</i></p>
<p>Where narration in the dialogue, 'in the hope that she would leave it be', is replaced by this wish to move on.</p>	→	<p><i>'Oh, Ruby, don't ... I didn't mean for it to happen. It just happened ... Can't we get past this?'</i></p>
<p>These are two very strong utterances, indicated by the exclamation mark. They replace the narrated reflection by Justin that his answers were going to annoy her.</p>	→	<p><i>'Past it! I don't even know what "it" was, Justin! And don't treat me like an idiot! Things don't just "happen"!' You've been caught, Justin! Why try being evasive now? You think this "it just happened" excuse works at this stage? God, how frustrating! How utterly patronising! I have a right to know—it's my marriage you have destroyed!'</i></p>
<p>This replaces the narrator's reflection that his evasiveness would make her angrier.</p>	→	
<p>This suggests to the reader that she is angrier than she was before because of his response.</p>	→	

This is the stuttering the narrator referred to in the dialogue version.

This replaces the narrator's conclusion that Justin 'knew he had it coming so he let her go'.

'I know ... I ... I know I deserve whatever you have to say, so just say it.'

The skill in writing dialogue and conversation is to create voices that are plausible and ring true to the reader. The examples above are two adult voices; if the breakdown was between two 16-year-olds, the voices would be too old. The voice needs to belong to the character who uses it. Notice that contracted words, colloquialism and even slang can be appropriate in dialogue and conversation if that is what the speaker would say.

1 Have a go at turning this conversation into dialogue.

'Please, Chris, have a seat. Don't look so worried, I don't bite.'

'Yeah, well, it's not your teeth I'm lookin' at.'

'This? This is just your school file, Chris. There's nothing here that you don't know about. Here, have a look if you want.'

'Nah ... put it down. I don't wanna see it. I know what's in there ... nothin' but trouble.'

2 Now write this dialogue into a conversation.

Chris twisted awkwardly on the hard chair, wishing he was anywhere but here. Miss Johnston's smiling face made him feel even worse. 'So, Chris,' she began innocently enough, 'I was told ...'

Chris swung round quickly; a figure of defensiveness. 'Who tol' you stuff 'bout me?' he demanded.

Staying calm, Miss Johnston continued in the meaningless smiley way she had begun and didn't seem to notice Chris' jaw tightening and his eyes narrow. 'Mrs Smith happened to mention you fell asleep in her class. Is there some problem at home that you're not sleeping properly?'

'What's happenin' in my house is none of your damn business!' snapped Chris, crossing his arms defensively.

'Language, please, Chris,' replied Miss Johnston primly.

Name Class Due date

Language in use

3 Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

'Sister, my name is Mrs Edwards. I have come about my father. Mr Knight rang about him coming into the home today.' She spoke rapidly in case her voice failed her.

The sister's smile vanished. 'My dear there must be some mistake, we thought, that is we didn't realise, I mean. Look dear, is your father lighter or darker than you?' the sister asked.

'Why do you ask that sister?' Mrs Edwards asked. 'Are you prejudiced? Are you racist?'

'No, no, not me my dear,' replied the sister. 'You don't understand. It's the other patients. They may say terrible things to your father and he may get hurt.'

'Sister, my father is dying and I can't bear to watch him die. I can't bear to do that,' Mrs Edwards replied.

'I am sorry my dear but he might hear other patients saying terrible things and ...'

'Sister,' Mrs Edwards broke in, 'my father does not even know me and I don't think he can hear what anyone is saying. We always look after our own but my father is dying sister, dying.'

'I'm sorry my dear but have you tried the general hospital? I'm sure they will take him there. You will have no trouble getting him in,' the sister said. Mrs Edwards stood up and walked towards the door.

'We Look After Our Own' by Oodgeroo Noonuccal.



For many years, the author of 'We Look After Our Own' was known as Kath Walker, but out of respect for her Aboriginal heritage she is now only referred to as Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

a What is Mrs Edwards' emotional state? What words or phrases tell you so?

b What word would you use to describe the sister's attitude to Mrs Edwards? What words or phrases make this clear to you (and to Mrs Edwards)?

Name

Class

Due date

8 Is 'discrimination' a synonym for 'prejudice'? Why or why not?

9 When writing dialogue, it is important not to overuse 'said' or 'replied'. These are two fairly emotionally neutral words and are therefore only really appropriate when what is being said is just that—just being 'said' or just being 'replied' to. Conduct some research and find as many words as you can to replace 'said' and 'replied'. Fill in the table with the words you find.

Building on language

Creative writing

In all creative writing the author generates people, places and situations and brings them to life. While imaginative writing comes from the imagination, creative writing can take elements from our known world, our known experience, people we know and places we have been, and put them in different places, situations and with other people. The distinction between creative and imaginative writing is only in the source of the material, not in the texts themselves. Dialogue can be a most effective means of breaking up text (visually and aurally) for the reader and lead to greater engagement with the text.

10 Turn this paragraph into either a dialogue or a conversation. You will need to alter the text to make it work.

He said he didn't want to go because it was naff and boring. That made her mad and she started yelling about how it wasn't the movie that was naff and boring, it was him. This was pretty typical stuff for these two, though. He wanted to see something romantic and lyrical; she wanted action—you know the type—muscles rippling, guns blazing. They never saw eye to eye when it came to the movies. Tonight was no different and, like every other night, she'd end up ringing her girlfriends and going, and he'd stay home and sulk about how she didn't understand him and was completely insensitive towards him.

c Why doesn't the sister want Mrs Edwards' father to stay? How do you know?

d The 'sister' has no name. Why do you think Oodgeroo Noonuccal left her nameless?

e What name would you give Mrs Edwards and the sister, and how would that change your relationship with them?

f Why isn't Mrs Edwards' father's name Mr Edwards?



As an author you can call your characters what you will and it is sometimes very effective to refuse to name your characters to make their behaviour or attributes stand out.

Vocabulary builder

4 What is the difference between 'prejudiced' and 'racist'?

5 What does the prefix 'pre-' mean in words?

6 Knowing this, what does that prefix mean in 'prejudice'?

7 Why does that prefix suggest that 'prejudice' is a negative term?

- 11** Work with a partner to create a dialogue that would fit in with the text below. The dialogue should take off from the conclusion of the passage and offer the reader more development in the story. Each member of the partnership should represent one 'voice' in the dialogue. Try to make it realistic.

When it came to being brave, Shaun wasn't. Don't get me wrong, he was my best friend and everything, but man—was he ever a sook. No matter what I suggested, he'd find a way to wriggle out of it: a crook stomach, his mother calling, something he'd forgotten to do. And it wasn't like I was asking him to be a daredevil or anything—just stuff like jumping off a pier or skating in a pipe—y'know—everyday stuff for kids like us. So, that day when I told Shaun what the plan was, I wasn't going to take no for an answer and I was pretty sure he'd say no almost before I got the question out of my mouth. It was a big deal for me though; I really wanted to ask Jess to the school dance but I had to get a date for her friend Laura and, for some reason I couldn't explain, she liked Shaun. As soon as he stood near me I knew it would take some persuasion to get Shaun, the biggest wimp I knew, to ask Laura to the dance so Jess would come with me. I started ...
