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***ONLINE WRITING MODULES –  
Fiction Writing***

**Dialogue/Viewpoint**

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## 1. HOW DIALOGUE AND VIEWPOINT ARE DEVELOPED

In this Module, we will look at how dialogue and viewpoint is developed in the fictional world.

- a) **Dialogue** – This is one way that mood, social class, occupation, nationality is exposed
- b) **Viewpoint** – Exposes the character's voice and viewpoint in the story, what is their viewpoint in relation to the story? How much can they convey, how much are they allowed to convey

**Through narration:** - The narrative paragraph tells a story, like a narrator in the play.

**By description:** - Gives us the details of the 'picture' the writer reveals about the character, place thing or an idea.

**By exposition:** - This exposes the elements behind the person, place, situation or idea.

Apart from directly illustrating a character, dialogue can have the following uses:

- It can heighten the drama – dialogue of itself will dramatisation of a situation
- Supply information by way of background, or simply telling of facts.
- Quicken the pace of the story. Short speeches will make the reader 'race'.
- Advance the plot, such as using it to change the scene.
- Promote a feeling of reality. You can often get a difficult scene, attitude or mood across with more creditability using dialogue than you can any other way.
- Indicate the particular mood or attitude of a speaker, or of others.
- Reflect or describe action.

In dialogue, it is better to concentrate on the pronunciation of one type of word, rather than to try to render every word the character says as true to life. This will get the image across without overdoing it.

The amount of dialogue you use in a story is up to you as some writers prefer to use a lot and others use it just to draw attention to a point. There is no right or wrong way of the amount of dialogue you use, this is all very dependent on the type of story, the viewpoint of the character, but you should be aware that dialogue is not a very good narrative tool to use as its limitations are very constricting in regards to vocabulary, the personality of the character who is speaking.

Good writers have learnt to keep dialogue as a minimum to move the story along and its use is to let the character be shown through their speech, their mannerisms and how they interact with one another.

The conventional method of speech/dialogue in a story is to start a new paragraph for each new speech, no matter how short the speech.

i.e.

*'What did you say?'*

*'What.'*

*'I asked you what you just said.'*

The only time this changes is when a character speaks and is then interrupted that you stay in the same paragraph:

i.e.

*'Wait a minute!' said Louise, pointing to the sign. 'Be careful!'*

*'I just hope,' said Anne, looking out the porthole, 'that this ship doesn't sink.'*

Note that the full stops occur in their usual places, at the end of sentences, and if there is no full stop, the speech continues with a small letter.

If a speech needs to be broke up into more than one paragraph, the convention is, so that we are aware of the same person speaking, is to repeat the opening quotation marks at the beginning of the new paragraph without closing them in the paragraphs before. Such as: -

*'And then,' said Mrs Weymouth, 'the car started skidding out of control.  
'I just sat there, hoping, praying, that the car would not hit me as I waited for the lights to change to green.'*

There is also one thing that should always remain in dialogue, the word 'said'. Be aware that this word can replace many actions, such as sitting down or standing up, biting their lip, running fingers through their hair. A piece of fictional writing is in essence the creating of a technique to form a concept on a particular view on life and that it's not a narrated reproduction of an impression on real life.

The use of dialogue should be used to do more than one task, such as letting the reader know what is said, how and why it is said and who speaks it as well as advancing the story.

Sometimes throwing in some adverbs can let us know what is happening quickly with dialogue between the characters, such as

*'I thought I told you never to come here again!' Mr Allen said angrily.*

You have to be careful not to use too many adverbs in a story, as it can be just as boring and tedious as having not enough. Use them wisely.

Do not use dialogue unless it moves the story along and that serves some purpose as interaction between characters.

Should be natural and serve a purpose in advancing the story, depicting/developing character, dramatising and enlivening. Read dialogue aloud. Better still; have someone else read it to you. Listen to how the speech flows in the story, and is similar to the speech of people in the real world.

The expository paragraph gives information about a given topic and can be written with style and in different ways so that the 'telling' of a scene, or upcoming event in a story, doesn't become dry and boring, and this is probably the most challenging of all a writer's inventiveness, to provide a unique slant and grab the reader's attention. This is a craft in itself; to learn how to divulge information without merely telling the reader the details, after all, don't we as writers, like to be challenged by reading other writers literature.

The author/writer is responsible for creating the atmosphere in a story, as well as having created characters and their description. The reader knows who the protagonist is, who the antagonist is, the aim (plot) of the story, these are just a few of the elements uncovered by the writer.

Writing good dialogue in a story can help the reader get closer to character, event or situation in the story. This helps the reader attain a mental picture of the event or character that has been created as the central focus of the story through inventive use of dialogue or narration, as they can see the characters, smell the air in the room, feel the tension, the love, the exhilaration. When the character does speak, he or she has to be just as the reader imagined them to be, i.e. deep voice, timid in

nature, sleazy, fun loving, gruff etc. Their voice should be heard through the writing, use of dialect/accents; colloquialisms help enormously in conveying a sense of the character.

### Examples:

1) ***'Yet a gentleman may not keep a public-house; may he?' said I.***

This is a line of dialogue from Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*. The use of the word 'gentleman', throughout his novel and for instance, Jane Austen and Bronte sister's novels, reinforces the type of language used at the time. The word 'Inn' in the story is highly appropriate for a story created around that time and/or era, but for writing in the current time you would use the word 'pub' (public house), as a reference, unless you were writing about a time traveller.

Don't aim for perfect dialogue, 'speak' as the character would, use words that the character, which you created, would suit their style.

2) ***'She's teaching youse to write, mate?' Ron asked, hardly able to believe it.***

This is from Colleen McCullough's book, *Tim*. It is obvious from the dialogue that the language is Australian slang, McCullough uses the word 'love', and 'eh' in her dialogue in the story and the language is more appropriately to be used in country towns and some states, than major cities.

3) ***'Well, well," said Leamus with a wry smile, 'you must be quite a bit wheel. Or' - a thought seemed to strike him - 'isn't Centre on this?'***

From John Le Carre's novel, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, there is a sense of urgency that comes across from this dialogue. The speech is interrupted with emotion, tension. There are a quite a few ellipsis' and em-dashes throughout the text and the pace maintains a suitable spy story level of excitement to keep the reader interested enough to find out what happens next. Which is what every writer should try to achieve in his or her writing of dialogue and narration.

This last example shows the narrative hook to keep the reader wanting to pick up the book again and again.

Some great stories have memorable beginnings that have created that narrative hook, such as:

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times", - A Tale of Two Cities*

*"Call me Ishmael", - Moby Dick*

These are just a couple of examples of opening lines; it doesn't matter if it was a first person or third person perspective. You could probably add to this list with books that have left a mark in your memory, there was something that seemed to stay with you to remember what that book was, a simple word, that can trigger a memory. This is good writing, as you want readers to remember your stories!

### 3. GETTING STARTED

Now comes the fun part, your involvement. The following exercises are designed to help you and show you how to create and develop your story by use of dialogue and viewpoint, remember its all fun!

#### Exercise 1 – Character Analysis

This exercise is about understanding what motives a character, what is the driving force behind their thinking, or simply, what makes them tick.

Find a book that you have enjoyed reading and observe the following, 1, what particular style has the writer used or developed in order to convey their story, 2, was the writer successful in portraying their characters with dialogue? 3, what has the reader understood about the character from the use of dialogue.

#### Exercise 2 - Creating your own Character Dossier

This is the fun part of creating your very own character. If you had intended to start writing and needed to have a character study, then here is the perfect opportunity to begin your story.

Use the Character Dossier profile to help you understand your character, see below.

#### Exercise 3 - Write a short scene of 250-500 words using dialogue only

Now that you are aware of the process of creating a character, here is your chance to put this character into a scene. You have to show parts of the character dossier that you have created on this character, i.e. temperament, anger, caring.... etc.

Enjoy this creative space, I have created a couple of paragraphs to get you started if you feel you need a hand, and don't be bound by the word limit once you feel your character come to life! Go for it!

### Character Dossier

*(You can use a photograph, illustration or your own imagination.)*

Name:.....  
 Address:.....  
 Age:.....  
 Birthdate:.....  
 Gender: .....  
 Nationality.....

#### **Physical appearance:**

Facial features (eye-brows, eye colour, nose shape and size, mouth, lips, facial hair, hair cut and colour, ears, head and jaw shape, cheek bones.)

**Body frame/stature and height:** Limb and hand descriptions, other details.

**Movements:** Facial, hand gestures, walking, standing, sitting.

**Dress:** Fashion, neatness, quality, colour and cut, jewellery.

**Speech:**

*Vocabulary*, accent, complexity of sentence structure, speech patterns.

*Mannerisms* – Colloquial (informal), clipped, drawn out.

*Voice:* - Loud soft, high, low, broken.

*Attitude* – Sarcastic, patronising, superior, self-assured.

**Background**

Occupation, class or social background, school, education level, skills, hobbies, interests, recreational activities of any kind; family background.

**Significant experiences**

Experiences that may have helped shape this person.

**Personality**

Moral and religious beliefs, attitudes to self and the world, to work, likes and dislikes, aptitudes, strengths and weaknesses, sub-conscious or psychological features, motives and aspirations, feelings, emotions temperament, tastes in music, clothes and people.

**Friends**

Who are his/her friends? Does this person relate well to others? What are they likely to say about this person?

Does this person have any problems? What are they?

How are they handling their problems?

How would you write about this person/character to make your reader care enough about their problems?