Dialogue

CCA10.4g Write a historical persona essay (e.g., biographical narrative, response to a historical photo) that . . . uses dialogue to bring characters to life.

**Dialogue:** a recreation or representation of real or imagined speech.

**Dialogue Tags:** “he said”; “she cried”; “I shouted”

**Important Points:**

1. Listen to how people talk, especially people who fit the category of people you are representing. You want to imitate **natural speech patterns.**
2. Edit out unnecessary words. Even though in natural speech people say a lot of unnecessary, filler words, you want to **include only the words that advance the plot or provide characterization or contribute to theme.**
3. You can use dialogue to provide information to the reader; however, you don’t want it to be obvious that you’re feeding the reader facts. Intersperse the speech with these facts at a pace that the reader can keep up with and that doesn’t bog down the story.
4. Situate the dialogue within the action. Provide description about the characters while they’re speaking. You want to include physical details.
5. Use dialogue tags when necessary. You want to include some signal words to keep the reader on track with the conversation, but you can drop the dialogue tags to keep the conversation flowing more smoothly.

**Formatting Dialogue**

1. **Punctuate from the Inside.** Almost always place the period, question mark, or exclamation point on the **INSIDE** of the quotation marks. Example: *Tom said, “I will not tolerate this****!”***
2. **Commas before quotes.** When introducing a quote with the “he said/she said” manner, the comma comes after the “said” or whatever word you’ve chosen to use (asked, cried, shouted, etc.). The point is that the comma goes AFTER the introduction to the dialogue and BEFORE the quotation mark. Example: *Jennifer whined* ***tearfully, “But*** *I never meant to hurt you.”*
3. **New speaker, new paragraph**. Every time there is a change in speaker you must begin a new paragraph, even if it is two people talking back and forth.
4. For a quotation that would normally end with a period, use a comma instead. This is because the sentence is not complete until after the dialogue tag. Example: *“I just want to be done this* ***essay,” Kaelyn*** *whined.*
5. If you place the **dialogue tag in the middle of a sentence**, use a comma inside the first set of quotation marks, and normal punctuation inside the second. Example: "I will do this **essay,"** Amy said**, "but** only if it’s for mark**s.”**
6. For a quotation that would normally end with a question mark or exclamation point, use normal punctuation, but place it inside the double quotation marks. Example: "Isn’t everything for marks**?"** John asked.

**Please note**: some of this information was derived from this website. For more information, visit this website: <http://fictionwriting.about.com/od/writingexercises/qt/punctuation.htm>

Dialogue Example:

Mrs. Foster asked the class, “What do you want to learn today?”

Noah smiled and said, “Let’s learn about writing dialogue!”

Everyone cheered and Mrs. Foster quickly began to teach the lesson, while the students promptly took notes.

“Why do we have to know about dialogue?” complained Lily.

“Because,” thought Stephen, “we’re always talking, so our characters need to talk, as well.”

Lily considered this, “Hmmm, Yeah, I guess.”

Amy and Jasper fired question after question.

“What about question marks?”  
 “Can I skip the dialogue tag?”

“Why do you have to start a new paragraph every single time you change speakers?”

Aaron was completely confused: “I don’t get it! Are you saying that even if the speaker just says, yes, that we have to start a new paragraph?”

“Yes.”

Shanelle was enjoying the lesson and wondered aloud, “What if the character is thinking something? Is there a way to show that?”

“My favourite way to show interior dialogue/monologue is to italicize those thoughts,” Mrs. Foster replied.

*These students are so incredibly brilliant. I am so blessed to be teaching such keen learners, such inquiring minds! Sigh.*

“Remember,” Mrs. Foster cautioned, “to put enough dialogue tags into your conversation that the reader can follow the dialogue, but not so many that it is cumbersome.”

“Okay, Mrs. Foster.”

And all the students nodded in agreement.

