Writing Dialogue in a Story

Dialogue is what happens when two or more characters speak to one another. We experience dialogue all the time in our everyday lives. Dialogue in a novel should do one, if not all, of the following:

1. Move the story forward
2. Increase the tension
3. Help to define characters

Dialogue that moves the story forward:

The phone rang, and Jerry picked it up.

“Hello?”

There was a moment of silence on the other end.

“Jerry? Is this Jerry Simmons?” questioned a voice.

“Yes. Who’s this?” Jerry asked.

“Jerry…”

The other man paused. Jerry could hear him take a deep breath.

“Jerry, my name is Dave. I’m your brother.”

“I don’t have a brother,” Jerry quickly replied, losing his patience. “My family died years ago.”

“Not your whole family,” Dave whispered.

Right away, we want to know who this Dave fellow is, if he’s telling the truth, and how he found Jerry. Basically, we want to know what will happen next. In fact, this is a great initiating event. The discovery of a long-lost sibling is certain to move your story forward in interesting ways.
**Dialogue that increases the tension:**

“Dave!” Jerry shouted. “We’ve got to get away from here! The building’s about to blow!”

“We’ve got to go back!” screamed Dave.


Dave pointed up at the roof.

“Because Susan’s still up there,” he answered frantically.

Talk about tense. Are Dave and Jerry going to save Susan? It’s a matter of life and death here, and this short example of dialogue has the reader wanting more.

**Dialogue that defines characters:**

“What’s up, G-dawg?” Mark said. “You got a table for one? I’m starving!”

The waiter looked up to see Mark and replied, “Good morning to you, young man. Welcome to our fine establishment.”

“I’ve been playing video games for 40 hours straight! I need like ten sandwiches!” Mark exclaimed.

“I am sorry, but I’m going to have to ask you to keep your voice down if we are to provide you with the ten sandwiches you requested,” responded Greg curtly.

Obviously, Mark and the waiter are two very different characters, and the reader can tell this just by the way they speak to each other. It’s likely that Mark is much younger than the waiter, and he is clearly more excitable. The waiter, on the other hand, is more formal, and doesn’t know the first thing about youth culture. In just a few lines of dialogue, the reader finds out a great deal about these character and how they relate to each other.
DIALOGUE Conversation Writing – 20 points Summative

- Open a Word Document

- Choose a picture from the Dialogue Pictures File
  - Mrs. Bolyard’s Webpage/ Dialogue Project/ Picture Files
  - Copy (Ctrl C) and Paste (Ctrl V) the picture into a Word Document.
  - Format the picture to approximate size below.

- Choose **one or more** of the three examples from above and write your own dialogue between the characters in the picture.

The dialogue must clearly identify the type of dialogue and must include:

- **at least ten lines** of dialogue
- **at least one tag** must be located in the **beginning** of a sentence
- **at least one tag** must be located in the **middle** of a sentence
- **at least one tag** must be located at the **end** of a sentence
- a **narrative** section (remember the narrative does NOT use quotation marks)