



**AutoCrit**

Dialogue


What is strong dialogue and why does it matter


Date: June 12th, 2014

Welcome to Session I





115,000 word thriller

Welcome to Session I




115,000 words and no dialogue!




Welcome to Session I


Dialogue is one of the most challenging areas of writing.


It's hard to make dialogue sound believable, realistic, and dynamic.




Welcome to Session I


Why is dialogue so important?

Your book will never get published without strong dialogue.





Common Mistakes


- Using adverbs
 - "I'm done with this," John shouted **angrily**.
- Dialogue tags too interesting or fancy
 - Use: "he said" or "she replied."
 - Avoid: "interrogated", "pondered"

Common Mistakes

- Doesn't sound realistic or believable
- Cheesy accents or stilted speech
- No pauses, beats or actions
- Excessive punctuation marks

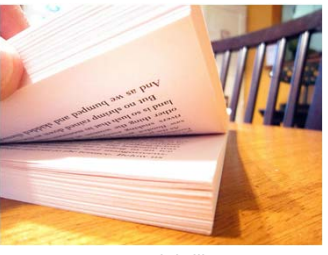
Common Mistakes

"No!" he floccinaucinihilipilificated.


"What?" he spat queried asked requested shouted yelled whispered grumbled said.

Common Mistakes



115,000 word thriller

Common Mistakes



DIALOGUE SESSION I

- ❑ Using dialogue tags the right way
- ❑ Why should we avoid adverbs in dialogue tags?
- ❑ Showing versus telling in dialogue
- ❑ Exercises to improve your dialogue skills

DIALOGUE SESSION II

- ❑ The grammar and punctuation of perfect dialogue
- ❑ Formatting your dialogue
- ❑ Manipulating tone and energy through the placement of dialogue
- ❑ Minimizing the use of dialogue tags

DIALOGUE SESSION III

- ❑ Making your dialogue sound believable and realistic
- ❑ How to avoid writing cheesy or stilted dialogue
- ❑ How to include beats in dialogue to control the pacing
- ❑ Testing your dialogue



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Elements of a Strong Dialogue

Elements of a Strong Dialogue




1. Dialogue adds energy

Elements of a Strong Dialogue




2. Dialogue makes a story more believable

Elements of a Strong Dialogue




3. Dialogue is fun for the reader

Elements of a Strong Dialogue




4. Dialogue can help you manipulate pacing

Elements of a Strong Dialogue




5. Dialogue reveals character

Elements of a Strong Dialogue




6. Strong dialogue flows

Elements of a Strong Dialogue



7. Dialogue should give us a sense of action unfolding


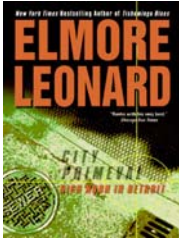
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Elements of a Strong Dialogue
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8. Dialogue should advance the plot

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Elements of a Strong Dialogue
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Example:

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Elements of a Strong Dialogue
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He walked across Grand River to Dunleavy's. Jerry Hunter was at the bar with a girl who was resting her arm on Jerry's shoulder, closer to him but acting bored. She took time to look Raymond Cruz over while he placed his doggie bag on the bar and ordered a bourbon.

Hunter said, "Where's your girlfriend?"

"They have a new thing," Raymond said. "They invite you to dinner. Then just before the check comes they get mad and walk out. Leave you with a forty-two-dollar tab."

The girl with Hunter said, "Is he one, too? He's kinda cute."

Hunter said, "She's trying to figure out what I do for a living."

"If anything," the girl said, moving slightly to the jukebox disco music. "Don't tell me, okay?"

She narrowed green-shadowed eyes as she moved with the beat. "If we were over at Lindell's — who's in town? — you might be ballplayers. Except they never wear ties. Nobody wears ties."

Elements of a Strong Dialogue

- Focused
- Characters speaking one at a time
- Characters sound distinct.
- Individuals have their own style of speaking.
- Personality revealing dialogues:
 - Woman's curiosity, her playfulness, and her tendency to think out loud
 - Raymond appears sarcastic
- Proper pacing

Beats in Elmore Leonard's dialogue

Beats are pauses, brief descriptions, or gestures between lines

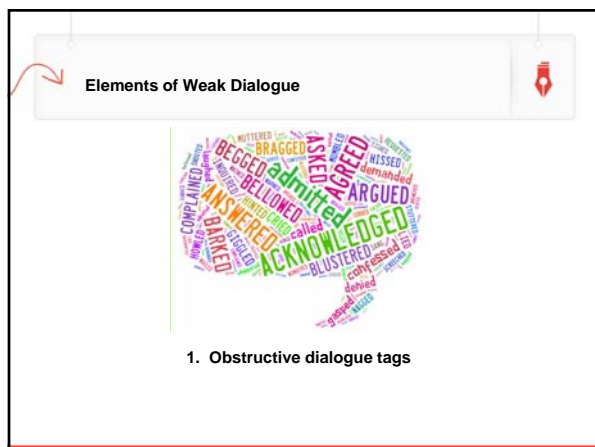
- Puts the reader in the moment
 - When the woman is moving slightly to the jukebox
- See the scene a little more
 - Hear the music and picture these three people at this bar.

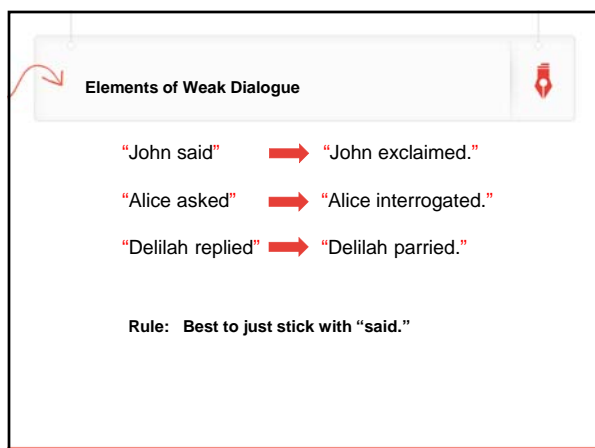
Elements of a Strong Dialogue

Other authors known for strong dialogue:

- Toni Morrison
- Raymond Carver
- Flannery O'Connor
- Sinclair Lewis








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Elements of Weak Dialogue
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The Exception to the Rule

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Elements of Weak Dialogue
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Occasionally, you can use a dialogue tag to convey the volume of a speaker's voice.

"Shh. The baby's sleeping," my father whispered.


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Elements of Weak Dialogue
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SPOT CHECK 1

Are you using tags other than "said" or "asked"?

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✍
Elements of Weak Dialogue



2. Using dialogue tags that are physically impossible

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✍
Elements of Weak Dialogue

EXAMPLES:

"You look ridiculous," she laughed.

"I'm sure you do," I smiled.

"I can't agree to that," he frowned.

↪
✍
Elements of Weak Dialogue

EXAMPLES: Quick Fix

"You look ridiculous," she said, laughing.

"You look ridiculous." She laughed.

Elements of Weak Dialogue

"I hate you," she hissed.

↓

"I hate you," she said through gritted teeth.

Elements of Weak Dialogue

SPOT CHECK 2

Check your dialogue passages for tags that are physically impossible.

RED FLAGS TO LOOK FOR:

• Laughed	• Giggled
• Hissed	• Choked
• Chortled	• Snorted
• Sighed	• Sneered
• Frowned	• Smiled

Elements of Weak Dialogue

3. Adverbs in Dialogue Tags

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Elements of Weak Dialogue
✍

EXAMPLE:

she said hopefully.

↪
Elements of Weak Dialogue
✍

EXAMPLE:

- **Telling**
 - He walked quickly to her bedside.
- **Showing**
 - He rushed to her bedside.
 - He bolted to her bedside.
 - He hurtled to her bedside.
 - He raced to her bedside.

Rule: Eliminate as many adverbs as possible

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Elements of Weak Dialogue
✍

EXAMPLE:

"I've had enough," Simon said angrily.

↓

"You disgust me. This conversation is over," Simon said.


↓

Simon shoved back his chair and slammed his fist on the table. "I've had enough," he said, clenching his jaw. "This discussion is over."

⊘

"I've had enough," Simon said, angry.

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Elements of Weak Dialogue



The Exception to the Rule

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Elements of Weak Dialogue

If the tone or emotion of the dialogue could be confusing or unclear to the reader, you could use an adverb.

"Maybe I should come upstairs for awhile," he said.

"No, thank you," she said.

↓


"No, thank you," she said emphatically.

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Elements of Weak Dialogue

SPOT CHECK 3

Check for adverbs in your dialogue tags.

↪ Elements of Weak Dialogue ↩



4. Overuse of Exclamation Points in Dialogue

↪ Elements of Weak Dialogue ↩

“I can’t believe it!” John said.

Rule: Save the high-drama punctuation for truly high-drama moments.

↪ Elements of Weak Dialogue ↩

SPOT CHECK 4

Are you overusing exclamation points?

AutoCrit: Adverbs in Dialogue

AutoCrit: Pacing

Home Pacing & Momentum Dialogue Strong Writing Word Choice Irregularity Compare to Fiction

Sentence Variation **Pacing**

[View Analysis](#) [Load Analysis](#) [Print](#) [Email](#) [Export](#) [Clear All Text](#) [Unload](#) [Jump to Chapter](#)

“
“Okey”

Please beside an ancient shoe was a small shoe, a shoe for a female foot. Since being in China, he had seen a few elderly women hobbling on cane with their deformed feet enclosed in simple black cotton shoes. But this was the first time he had ever seen a short foot old Chinese. The shoes were only modest old shoes with some maple leaf, he knew he had a good inch heel and a toe that curved upwards. So this was a shoe that would cover a foot small enough to reside in it.

bow of a teacup, she thought.

“I have to have this,” she said to Xia.

Xia frowned. “Foot binding is a great shame for China.”

Pacing
Total: 1215
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Select All Deselect All

- ☒ PACING
- ☐ It wasn't the L.
- ☐ Using cliche words

17



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Dialogue Writing Exercises

WRITING EXERCISE 1

Prompt

Write a scene between two characters using only dialogue and dialogue tags

– no actions, description, exposition, internal narrative or anything else. Just dialogue

WRITING EXERCISE 1: EXAMPLE

"When are we leaving?" John asked.

"When I'm ready," Alice snapped. "Stop asking."


"Don't use that tone with me," John said. "You know, I'm getting awfully tired of you barking at me all the time."

"Well, what do you expect? I'm unhappy, John."


"What could you possibly have to be unhappy about?"

Alice said, "You're kidding, right? Please tell me you're kidding."

"I give up," John said.




WRITING EXERCISE 2




Prompt

Take each of these sentences and rewrite them so that the dialogue itself expresses the emotion, and you don't need to rely on adverbs or dialogue tags.



WRITING EXERCISE 2: EXAMPLE



Original


"We're leaving," John said angrily

Revised


"We're leaving right this instant. Go get your things," John said

Revised with gestures, actions & description

John clenched his fists, the knuckles turning white. "We're leaving," he said, his voice taut.



WRITING EXERCISE 2: Your Turn



- "I'm not sure what you mean," Peter said coolly.
- "What are you so afraid of?" Jenna grinned.
- "We'll talk about it later," Alice said evasively.
- "I miss you," My mom weeped.
- "This is great," Scott said excitedly.

DIALOGUE COURSE | CLOSING



Writing strong dialogue is one of the most difficult aspects of writing

 **AutoCrit**

Happy Writing ☺!
