5 Critical Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Is it necessary?

Strong dialogue is necessary in the moment. Does that character actually have to say something right now? Can the reader figure things out themselves without needing character dialogue to explain it for them?

Characters speak at every opportunity, leading to far too much unnatural exposition and on-the-nose storytelling.

2. Is it true to the character?

Characters with their own unique personality should sound different to everyone else. When they speak, they speak with their own purpose and in their own style. Some talk earnestly, while others hide their true motivations or feelings behind insincere words.

Characters all sound the same. They feel like a tool for the writer to proceed with the plot, rather than distinct living people brought together by the events of the story.

3. Does it move the plot forward?

Dialogue never occurs *just because*. Every conversation is relevant to the story and the characters' place within it.

Dialogue appears constantly, often being totally unrelated to the plot itself. This tends to happen when the author wants the story to feel more "real" – but it bogs down the pace and makes characters less interesting because nothing of real value seems to be happening.

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4. Is it too formal?

Dialogue feels natural and realistic, with contractions used and hidden meanings buried within. Not everything needs to be spelled out completely in a stretch of dialogue. People may be reluctant to reveal their feelings and try to express them in different ways.

Dialogue feels abrupt, too stunted and formal. Perfect grammar and every sentence being complete and matter-of-fact means characters don't sound like real people.

5. Are you misusing tags?

How a character feels or what they're thinking is conveyed through a combination of what they say and how they behave. Tags are kept to a minimum so the reader can use their own imagination in drawing the scene.

Dialogue tags such as *screamed*, *yelled*, *hissed* or *cried* replace character action and rob the reader of the chance to get involved.

OH YEAH!