



! FORMATTING DIALOGUE !

“This is your friendly reminder to use commas instead of periods during the dialogue of your story,” she said with a smile, standing at the board. Mrs. Karsen loved Writer’s Workshop and was super excited to teach her students about dialogue and how to use it in their story.

“Well, unless you are following the dialogue with an action and not a dialogue tag.” Ms. Hineuber took a deep breath and sat back down after making the clarifying statement.

“Yes,” she added, nodding at her students, “you’re right. However, it’s appropriate to use a comma if there’s action in the middle of a sentence.”

“True.” She glanced at the students. “You can also end with a period if you include an action between two separate statements that are also complete sentences!”

The following rules should help you learn to write dialogue properly.

In addition to these hints on form, please remember that dialogue should be natural for the characters speaking (be sure to keep in mind your characters’ personality traits).

1. Use quotation marks around the words the character is actually speaking out loud.
2. Begin a new paragraph each time a different person speaks – this can help to cut down on the number of dialogue tags required. Remember to **indent** the beginning of each dialogue paragraph, just as you would in any other type of writing (use the tab key).
3. When splitting a quotation with a dialogue tag, do not capitalize words which do not begin new sentences **UNLESS** they are two separate, complete sentences.
4. A dialogue tag is a small phrase either before, after, or in between the actual dialogue itself. It let’s the reader know who is speaking and in what manner. A comma separates it from the actual dialogue.

Mrs. Karsen said, “What’s Up?” “Not much,” replied Ms. Hineuber.

5. Periods, commas, and other punctuation are always placed inside the quotation marks.

Begin a new paragraph
when there is a change of:

- time • place
- topic • speaker

6. WHEN IN DOUBT, GRAB A NOVEL AND SEE HOW A PROFESSIONAL USES DIALOGUE!

Paragraph Practice

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic.

Good paragraphing greatly assists your readers in following a piece of writing. You can have fantastic ideas, but if those ideas aren't presented in an organized fashion, you will lose your readers.

The basic rule of thumb with paragraphing is to keep **one idea to one paragraph**. If you begin to transition into a **new idea**, it belongs in a **new paragraph**.

Start a new paragraph...

- **When you begin a new idea or point.** New ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.
- **To contrast information or ideas.** Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides in a debate, different points in an argument, or any other difference.
- **When your readers need a pause.** Breaks between paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding these in will help your writing more readable. You would create a break if the paragraph becomes **too long** or the material is complex.
- **When you are ending your introduction or starting your conclusion.** Your introductory and concluding material should always be in a new paragraph. Many introductions and conclusions have multiple paragraphs depending on their content, length, and the writer's purpose. (THINK: Non-Fiction, essays, papers)

•Viewing the paragraph as a camera scene

Ray Bradbury (author of Fahrenheit 451) suggests that you think of each paragraph as a single camera shot in a movie. Every time the shot changes (e.g. change in camera angle), start a new paragraph.

