

# Correct Use of Dialogue

As you wrote your story, did you remember that each speaker in your story inhabits his or her own paragraph? If you have forgotten this rule, you have a character clash!

*Example:*

"Are you okay?" I asked. He slowly turned over one his hands and knees. "Yeah," he said, wincing. "I've had worse." Mom pointed at him as if he were a garden pest. "He's a heap of trouble," she said to me. Then she said to Frankie, "If you have to hurt yourself, please do it in your own yard." He seemed to nod to that and I helped him up and he ran off. A few minutes later we heard, *Whoosh!* "Ahhhhh!" *Thud!* "Ugh!" He was back. "Something is messed up with those people," Mom said, chopping up onions that evening. "Something's wrong in their heads."

The dialogue above should have been written in the form of multiple paragraphs, as shown below:

"Are you okay?" I asked. He slowly turned over one his hands and knees.

"Yeah," he said, wincing. "I've had worse."

Mom pointed at him as if he were a garden pest. "He's a heap of trouble," she said to me. Then she said to Frankie, "If you have to hurt yourself, please do it in your own yard."

He seemed to nod to that and I helped him up and he ran off. A few minutes later we heard, *Whoosh!* "Ahhhhh!" *Thud!* "Ugh!" He was back.

"Something is messed up with those people," Mom said, chopping up onions that evening. "Something's wrong in their heads."

Now that you have included (or are ready to include) dialogue in your personal narrative, you will check the dialogue in your story for character clashes.

1. Count the speaking characters in your story.
2. Choose a highlighter or marker of a different color for each speaker (or if you're working on a computer, use different color fonts for each speaker).
3. With the first highlighter or marker, highlight the speech of the first character throughout your narrative.
4. Continue through your writing again for every additional speaker, using a different color for each one.
5. Now that you have color-coded each character's remarks, can you guess what you have if you see two or more colors in the same paragraph? That's right—a character clash!
6. Revise any character clashes by starting a new paragraph whenever the speaker changes.

# Correct Use of Dialogue

## Rules for punctuating quotations

- In the United States, punctuation usually goes inside the closing quotation mark of a direct quotation, as in the following sentences:

"Hey, Mac. Here's the girl you've been waiting for!"

"Yes."

"What happened to it?"

- Use a comma between the dialogue and the tag line (the words used to identify the speaker: he said/she said), as in the following sentences:

"Yeah," he said, wincing

"Nothing," I mumbled

"Something is messed up with those people," Mom said.

- If a question mark or an exclamation point occurs where one of the separating commas should be used, omit the comma and use the question mark or exclamation point to separate the quoted material, as in the following sentences:

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"Hey, Mac. Here's the girl you've been waiting for!" he exclaimed.

- The speaker's words are set off from the rest of the sentence with quotation marks, and the first word of the quotation is capitalized. When the end of the quotation is also the end of the sentence, the period falls inside the quotation marks, as in the following sentence:

Then she said to Frankie, "If you have to hurt yourself, please do it in your own yard."

The worst possible words out of Mr. Feely's were, "Okay boys, shirts and skins."