

Dialogue toolkit © Pie Corbett 2024



Talk for Writing

Always ask, "What mood am I trying to create?" – then you can select words that fit.

To create dialogue that sounds real, reflects character and moves action forwards, you might want to

Nursery/Reception	Y1/2: as in N/R+	Y3/4: as in Y1/2+	Y5/6: as in Y3/4+
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore what characters say using quality picture books. Use a basic speech bubble to show visually what is spoken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose and decide how a character feels, thinks or behaves and show this through what they say: <i>"I'm scared!"</i> Reveal how a character said something through powerful synonyms for 'said': <i>hissed, squealed, roared, whispered</i> Add emotion by adding an adverb after 'said': <i>he said nervously</i> <p>Introduce a few speech punctuation rules that are to be taught in Y3/4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start a new line for each speaker Write what is said, starting with a capital letter, and the punctuation inside a speech bubble Burst the bubble to leave speech marks round what is said Start the spoken words with a capital letter If the sentence ends with speech, put a .!//? inside the speech marks. If the sentence continues, end the speech with a comma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidate speech punctuation rules Use only a few exchanges, balancing description, action and dialogue Tag on what a character is doing while speaking, using a 'stage direction': <i>"No," he hissed, shaking his head.</i> Use a speech sandwich: <i>"Hello," said John, waving to his friend. Then character B replies, "Run for it", squealed Tim.</i> Add to the speech sandwich by adding in the listener's reaction: <i>"Hello," said John, waving to his friend. Tim gasped.</i> Use dialogue to suggest how a character feels, thinks or what they are like: <i>"Now, I don't want you two playing down by the old canal. You know it's playing with fire," said Mrs Mac."</i> Include what people have said through reported speech: <i>Mrs Mac had warned them to stay away from the canal.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have characters discuss other characters and reflect on events: <i>"I cannot believe Sam ignored me earlier," Kabir mumbled.</i> Add in some action before character B replies: <i>"Hello," said John, waving to his friend. Tim gasped. Coming down the road was an elephant. "Run for it!" squealed Tim.</i> Put the speaker before or after what is said or in between: <i>Sam said, "So, let's go." "So, let's go," said Sam. "So," said Sam, "let's go."</i> Use a short exchange of dialogue to move the story or action along: <i>"Kia, what are those?" "Jewels, Joel. Why are you staring at them?" "I need them. Give them to me."</i> Explore a variety of formal and informal techniques to develop a character's voice, such as apostrophes for omission and question tags: <i>"We were lovin' that yesterday, weren't we?"</i> or quirky expressions: <i>"Crazy cats!" she exclaimed.</i>