**Dialogue: A How To Guide**

Punctuation and Grammar Tips:

1. Your quotation marks must always hug your dialogue:

* “I would love to go to the mall with you,” said James.
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Dialogue that would end in a period and then is followed by who said it must have the period changed out for a comma:

* “I really don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jane complained.
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Unless it is a proper noun following the dialogue, the first word that follows it must not be capitalized:

* “You’ve got to be kidding me,” he said.
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. If the dialogue ends in a period but there is no additional statement about who said it, you don’t need to change the period to a comma.

* “Well, that was fun.”
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. If the dialogue is a question, you would punctuate it normally even if the line is followed by who said it:

* “What is going on here?” Mrs. Carter cried.
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. If the dialogue ends with an exclamation point, you wouldn’t change the exclamation point to a comma.

* “Stop that!” she yelled.
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. If you want to interrupt dialogue with an action, maintain normal punctuation and capitalization.

* “I have to go back.” She turned to look at him. “I don’t have any choice.”
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. If your dialogue is preceded by who is saying the line, you must add a comma after the lead in and prior to the dialogue.

* Joe said, “I don’t like that.”
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Each time a new character speaks, you must start a new paragraph.

Style:

1. Keep in mind that people in different frames of life will talk differently, so your teenager character would speak differently than your 80-year-old grandmother character.

* 16-year-old girl: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* 80-year-old Grandmother: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. If you can express how someone said something with a word other than said and an adverb, do it. It’s more interesting.

* Do not: “Go away!” she said angrily.
* Do: “Go away!” she shrieked.
* Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Sometimes dialogue isn’t necessary. Always try to show not tell.