Dialogue

Telling a story is multi-layered. There is setting, context, character development, conflict, time, and many other elements that are important for the reader to know. **Some elements are conveyed in general narrative, but other elements come alive when displayed through dialogue.**

Using Dialogue in Storytelling
For example, if you want the reader to know that a room smells badly, there are two ways go:
1. Bobby walked into the room and realized that it smelled badly.
   OR
2. "Wow, what died in here? Ew!" said Bobby, covering his nose with his hand.

Which line do you prefer? Both convey the same message, but adding dialogue with body language provides a more vivid and intriguing image. Plus, you do the reader a favor by acknowledging their intelligence. The dialogue combined with body language means you know the reader can infer that the room smells badly.

One trick good writers remember is **R.U.E., which means Resist the Urge to Explain.** This trick follows the overall rule of writing fiction, which is *Show, Don't Tell*.

Using the example from above:
"Wow, what died in here? Ew!" said Bobby, covering his nose with his hand. It smelled badly in the basement and he didn't want to smell it anymore.

Is the second sentence necessary? No. The dialogue and body language *shows* the reader that the room smells. Therefore, we don't need to *tell* the reader that the room smells.
Using adverbs can be helpful in some circumstances, but it can be a lazy way to do more explaining. Adverbs are modifiers that usually answer the question *how*.

For example:
"Wow, what died in here? Ew!" said Bobby, disgustedly, covering his nose with his hand.

This is a circumstance where *disgustedly* is unnecessary. We know from the context of his dialogue and body language that Bobby is already disgusted, so the adverb creates wordiness rather than giving the reader important information.

However, the following example could use an adverb:
"Oh no!" said Bobby.

Oh no, what? Oh no, he's scared? Oh no, he's been caught? Oh no, he forgot something?

"Oh no!" said Bobby fearfully.

Now we know Bobby is scared. We don't know why he's scared, but we know he's scared about something. This prompts us to keep reading, right?

"Oh no!" said Bobby grimly.

Just changing the adverb from *fearfully* to *grimly* gives the scene an ominous feeling, like something bad is about to happen. While adverbs seem helpful, they should be used sparingly. Instead, build informative, necessary dialogue flanked by narrative that shows the reader what's going on in the scene.

Verbs in Speaker Attribution
The most common verb used in dialogue to attribute speech to a speaker is *said*.

"I'm ready to go," said Jane.
"Me too," said Bobby.
"Get your shoes on," Mom said.

While it's tempting to use other verbs to replace said, *overuse* of other verbs is the sign of an amateur. The same rule about adverbs applies to using verbs other than said. Use them sparingly and only when it's pertinent to the context of the scene.

"I'm ready to go," Jane announced.
"Me too," offered Bobby.
"Get your shoes on," Mom demanded.

This is overkill. Not only are the verbs overly dramatic for such mundane dialogue, it slows the scene down. In fact, the dialogue could be cut altogether and combined in general narrative that reads: Jane, Bobby, and their mother readied themselves to leave the house.

One way to avoid too many saids is to break up the dialogue with beats, which are physical movements or motions to show more activity in the scene.

"I'm ready to go," said Bobby, pulling on his shoes. Jane did the same, followed by their mother.

Punctuation in Dialogue

● Use quotation marks on either end of direct quotes, both before and after attribution:
    ○ "I'm ready to go," said Bobby.
    ○ Jane answered, "Me too."
● Take note of punctuation places inside and outside quotation marks:
    ○ "Oh no!" Bobby whispered. "I forgot my math homework!"

- - "Where did you leave it?" asked Jane. "At home?"
  - "No," he said. "I left it on the bus."
- Quotes within a quote need one mark instead of two:
  - "I clearly remember you saying, 'I have no homework,'" said Jane. "Maybe you're thinking of something else."
- Start a new paragraph when the speaker changes:

"I'm pretty sure I was talking about another subject," said Bobby. He tried to remember whether he had homework in math or science, but his brain went blank. Bobby rubbed his forehead in frustration.

"Don't worry so much," said Jane. "I'm sure Mrs. Banks will understand."

"I don't know," said Bobby. "She's a tough teacher."

Together, Bobby and Jane walked through the front door of the school, then they went their separate ways.