

# Speak Up Through Dialogue

By Dallas Woodburn

One of my good friends is an up-and-coming Hollywood director, and I recently decided to convert one of my stories into a short movie script. I already had the basic plot, the characters, the action—this should have been a piece of cake. Umm ... not quite.

When writing a movie script, you have to convey your characters' feelings and thoughts entirely through dialogue and body language. For example, in my short story, I could tell the reader how my main character feels in words: "Maria was angry at John." In my script, however, I had to show Maria's anger—did she get red in the face? Words can lie, but body language rarely does.

This requires me to develop my characters—and their characteristics—more fully. Maybe Maria, normally a very talkative, vivacious person, becomes quiet and curt when she is angry, answering John with only one-word replies. Or maybe she is the type of person who pretends that everything is OK, but then something small, like John's forgetting to take out the trash, causes her to explode in a wave of emotion: "John, you never do anything I ask you to!" Which leads to the next question: How does John react? Is he defensive, surprised, apologetic, angry?

Ah, now we're getting somewhere. Now I have the beginnings of a movie script: a story told through dialogue and visual cues.

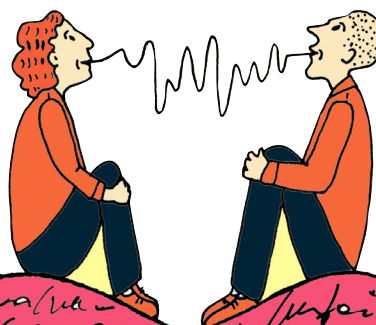
Think of your favorite movie. Why do you love it above all

others? For me, at least, it's because I am intrigued by the characters, which in turn makes me interested in what happens to them. And how do I "know" the characters? Through what they say—and what they don't say.

Even if you're not an aspiring screenwriter, pay attention the next time you go to the movies. Observe how the writers use dialogue to move the story along and give you insights into the characters. It's also important to pay attention to the silences, the breaks in dialogue, the little pauses, and awkward moments—often those hint at deeper truths beneath the character's words.

Feeling adventurous? Put two characters from two different movies in a room together and create a conversation. What would Captain Jack Sparrow and Shrek say to each other? Superman and the Seven Dwarfs? Napoleon Dynamite and *Legally Blonde's* Elle Woods?

Dialogue is not only fun but also a very powerful tool. Use it to give voice and personality to your characters. In turn, your characters will give voice to your themes and ideas as a writer!



Dallas is a sophomore in college and the author of two books. Visit her online at [zest.net/writeon](http://zest.net/writeon).

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