

HellBound Books Publishing

The following guidelines are based on what we have actually seen in manuscripts. Many are common errors; some are a tad more technical, and a frighteningly large amount are simply attributed to the bad use of the English language!

We have started with the most popular area of mistakes – how to punctuate dialogue correctly – the rules are pretty black and white, and this guideline/checklist (call it what you will) should help clarify.

The other areas of regular mishaps are dealt with individually, and we do hope that all of this is of use to anyone writing, whether or not they choose to submit to HellBound Books Publishing or not.

The Basic Rules of Punctuating Dialogue

WRONG:

“It is indeed, Phil.” Melissa said
“It is indeed, Phil.” Said Melissa
Melissa said. “It is indeed, Phil.”

CORRECT:

“It is indeed, Phil,” Melissa said
“It is indeed, Phil,” said Melissa
Melissa said, “It is indeed, Phil.”
“He loved you,” she said.
She said, “He loved you.”
“This fable,” our teacher said, “is a twist of an old tale.
“He loved you,” she whispered, hoping Sue didn’t hear.
Leaning away, she said, “He loved you.”
“He loved you,” she said, hoping to provoke a reaction, “but you didn’t care.”
“He loved you” – she pounded the wall with her fist – “but you never cared.”
“Call me tomorrow,” Mary said and then thought, *Because I’m too tired to listen to you now.*

It MUST be a comma before the quote if the words after the quote directly relate to it. But, if the words after the quote don’t relate to it, then the quote should end in a full stop (‘period’ for the Yankees!), the words after constituting or beginning a new sentence. **For Example:**

“Thank you, Phil.” Melissa flashed her fake, toothy smile out to the audience.
Harry said, “Come on, Ray. It’ll be fun.”

“Let’s go.” Gilda said.
He said, “We’ll discuss the fable in one hour.”
“I’m not sure,” said Ray, “that I feel like it.”
“When will we be back?” Ray asked.
“When will we be back?” asked Ray (note the lower case ‘asked’)

A new line when new person speaks

ALWAYS Start a new paragraph when moving from one speaker to another! (This also is the basic rule for prose – whenever a new person/thing/event is mentioned – NEW PARAGRAPH!!!!)

And – **ALWAYS** start a new sentence with a capital letter, even in dialogue!

“How long a hike is it?” Ray asked.
“About seven miles to go,” said Iris.

Ray was getting sick of walking, his feet hurt. “How much farther?” he moaned. (note the lower case ‘he’ – your word processor may pick up on this and try to make it upper case, so beware!)

“Oh, quit your whining, Ray,” Iris admonished.

AND SO...

“The usual way of **punctuating dialogue**,” he said, “is to start the speech with quotation marks and to close the marks when the character stops speaking a sentence or two later.

“However, if it is a **long speech** then you will want to break it up into paragraphs. “Like this. Notice that there are NO QUOTATION MARKS at the end of the previous paragraph! But they do appear at the start of this new one. It’s only when you reach the end of the final paragraph of the speech that you close the quotation marks. **Like this.**”

It is ok to be creative – although the general rule dictates a comma and lower case when relating to the dialogue directly (said, shouted, whispered etc.), we can get away with ‘smiled’, ‘grimaced’, ‘giggled’, etc.

TECHNICAL NOTE: If you are ending a line of dialogue with a ‘-’ or ‘...’ and are using the 66/99 quotation marks, you will often find that the end marks are ‘66’. Make sure you fix these! (It’s an easy fix – you can insert a letter, add the speech mark, and then delete the letter).

Adverbs!!!

A few here and there are ok – but for heaven’s sakes don’t just stick ‘ly’ on a word and think it reads well – think how better to phrase your sentence!

POOR: "I think I really ought to leave," Sarah said hesitatingly.

BETTER: "I think I really ought to leave." Sarah's voice was somewhat hesitant.

Tenses

Never – and we mean **NEVER** - switch tenses partway through a sentence, paragraph or chapter (yep, we've seen it!). If your story does not dot between past, present or future, make the change a new chapter, or at the very least stick some '***' in and leave a gap!

WRONG: "It's heavy," Dave says as he picked up the brick.

CORRECT: "It's heavy," Dave said as he picked up the brick.

Basic punctuation!?:.,

This really is basic stuff – but equally critical that all writers know how to punctuate their work properly!

Remember to use '?' at the end of a question (you'd be surprised!)

Do not overuse the '!', and make sure it is used in proper context:

WRONG: "It's going to explode!" she whispered.

CORRECT: "It's going to explode," she whispered.

ALSO CORRECT: "It's going to explode!" she yelled.

Use a period (full stop) at the end of **every** sentence (unless you use another punctuation point, of course).

On this point – don't **EVER** feel the need to add a comma or period after a punctuation point! We see this a lot in dialogue...

WRONG: "Where are you?," asked Gertrude.

CORRECT: "Where are you?" asked Gertrude.

ALSO CORRECT: "Where are you?!" screamed Gertrude. As writers, we can get away with this, if someone is screaming/shouting a question – but don't abuse the privilege!

Commas – these should be used to make a sentence flow (plus used correctly in dialogue – see above!), and to break up a sentence so that it reads naturally.

WRONG: "Ya can't kill a guy for admiring the view!" He exclaimed shrugging his shoulders.

CORRECT: "Ya can't kill a guy for admiring the view!" he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders.

Commas are also used in dialogue when a name is mentioned...

In dialogue, **ALWAYS** place a comma **before** a name:

WRONG: "You want this Dave?"

CORRECT: "You want this, Dave?"

[see how the placing of the comma alters the context of the sentence?!]

Semicolon: We see far too much semicolon abuse, the most common is where they are over used in place of commas, and used multiple times in the same sentence – use commas or periods, people!!

The humble semicolon is used to break up a long sentence instead of a period. Comes in handy when you have a lot to say about one thing but need to have a little breathing break (imagine you are reading it out loud!)

Reasons to Use

1. To separate clauses
2. To create variety
3. To emphasize relatedness
4. To separate items in a complex list

Let's talk more about each of these techniques and how to use other grammar tools at your disposal to enhance your writing when it comes to semicolons.

They Separate Clauses

Semicolons separate things. Most commonly, they separate two main clauses that are closely related to each other but could stand on their own as sentences if you wanted them to.

Here's an example:

I have a big test tomorrow; I can't go out tonight.

The two clauses in that sentence are separated by a semicolon and could be sentences on their own if you put a **period** between them instead:

I have a big test tomorrow. I can't go out tonight.

They Create Variety

One reason you might choose to use a semicolon instead of a period is if you wanted to add variety to your sentence structure; for example, you might use a semicolon if you thought you had too many short, choppy sentences in a row

More often than not, your word processor will suggest where to use a semicolon instead of a comma or nothing – it would certainly behoove you to pay attention to that green line!

If the green line suggests a semicolon (;) there's a good chance you need one!

Quotation Marks: These are different to speech marks – and are used to emphasize something crucial.

E.g. The guy liked to go by the moniker "The Pastor".

NOT: The guy liked to go by the moniker "The Pastor".

See the difference? The correct version has just the one quote mark at either end! To put two makes it – technically speaking – dialogue, and causes confusion (in addition to being grammatically incorrect).

You're/your and there/their – and it's too!

Alarming common errors!

'Your' is something attributed to you: **Your pet cat.**

'You're' is an abbreviated form of 'you are': **You're a swell guy!**

'There' is used when indicating a location: **It's over there.**

OR

Is there another way?

'Their' is when something is attributed to someone: **It's their puppy.**

'They're' is an abbreviation of 'they are': **They're coming over tomorrow.**

'To' is used when indicating direction/travel: **We're going back to the future, Marty!**

'Too' is another way of saying 'also' or 'in addition': **I'm coming along too.**

'It's' is an abbreviation of 'it is': **It's raining men (hallelujah!)**

'Its' is used when referring to something in the possessive: **Its coat was inky black.**

A Common Error, Which (or that) is Easily Remedied

Your word processor will stick a little green line beneath:

It was a door which was the only way out. **WRONG!**

It should be:

It was a door, which was the only way out. **CORRECT!**

OR

It was a door that was the only way out. **CORRECT!**

DON'T IGNORE THE LITTLE GREEN LINE!!!!

... VS -

use - (a dash) when being interrupted:

“How do we do th-?”

“It’s easy as pie,” Dave butted in.

NOTE: be consistent with your dashes!!! If you prefer to have a space between the dash and the word, thusly:

It was - in Fred’s opinion - a big one.

OR

It was-in Fred’s opinion-a big one.

NOT

It was-in Fred’s opinion - a big one.

And, while we are on the subject of dashes, we really ought to mention **HYPHENS**.

If words are to be hyphenated, **DO NOT** give in to the inexplicable urge to add a space:

Cross- legged. **WRONG!**

Yep - us too, but you’d be surprised! Of course, it should be:

Cross-legged. **CORRECT!**

use ... (three periods or ‘ellipsis’) when trailing off or omitting something:

“I think we should...” Dave became lost in his own thoughts.

“Why, you’re a complete...”

NOTE: If you are going to use an ellipsis - remember that it is THREE dots, not two, or four!!!

Misc. Hints & Tips

SPELLING; this really does go without saying - but check your spelling! If your word processor puts a red line beneath a word - check it out!!! (Yes, we do get submissions in which the author has clearly seen fit to ignore his *Word* program!)

ALWAYS start a new paragraph when dealing with a new person/thing.

Latin words and phrases are **ALWAYS** written in italics!!!

When writing thoughts as opposed to dialogue ('inner dialogue', if you will), use italics and not quotation marks.

Use of quotation marks makes it confusing – the reader must know if a line is being “spoken” or *thought*. There is no need to use both italics AND quotation marks, by the way!

WRONG: “Yes Sir!” Dave said with a salute, but thought to himself, “Not on your bloody life, I won’t.”

CORRECT: “Yes Sir!” Dave said with a salute, but thought to himself, *Not on your bloody life, I won’t.*

If your word processor puts a **green line** or a **red line** under ANYTHING – pay attention and see if it needs fixing! If what you have written is justified creatively, then leave it – if not, FIX IT!

Basic Formatting for Submissions

These rules may vary from publisher to publisher, so ALWAYS read the requirements before submitting. The rules are laid out not only to help with the publication process, but also to ensure each manuscript is professionally presented. Failure to adhere to the requested rules will more than likely lead to rejection – it is a means by which a writer can show their professionalism and attention to detail and ability to follow simple instructions.

Here are the most used basic rules for formatting, and the ones HellBound Books Publishing insists upon.

12pt-sized text

Times New Roman font

Double spaced

Only one space between words, please and...

Use your **PAGE BREAK** key for page breaks, not dozens of line breaks.

No extra line between paragraphs!

For paragraphs - use **indent**, not tab and certainly **NOT** spaces! don't use tab – set the indent in settings (Format/Paragraph/Indents & Spacing in Word).

Italics – don't underline!! We appreciate that some publisher's ask you to do this in lieu of italics (heaven only knows why!) – but don't!!! If a word(s) is meant to be *italicized*, then hit the italics button!

Manuscript saved in .doc or .docx format.

END