

**IFWA MEETING**  
**Thursday, April 6, 2017, 7:00 PM**  
**Sentry Box**  
**MINUTES**

**Information Items:**

**New Members:**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Person</b>
7:00 PM	<b><u>Crits for April</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crit 1: Kevin – experimental fantasy western – excerpt Crit by Rick, Michael G.</li> <li>• Crit 2: Dan Hampton – 6800 word short story – supernatural thriller Crit by Shauna, Leslie</li> </ul>	Shannon Rick / Michael  Shauna / Leslie
	<b><u>Crits for May, 2016</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crit 1: Chris' Space Opera Heist Crit by Ed, Joey</li> <li>• Crit 2: Ed – First Chapter – Space Engineering Fic Crit by Shannon, Dan Hampton</li> </ul>	Shannon
8:00 PM	<b><u>Skills Session</u></b> Craig DiLouie – Tips for Effective Dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gave this at WWC 2016</li> <li>• Primary sources (LIST)</li> <li>• Tip#1 – Know the rules before you break them.</li> <li>• Tip#2 – Every piece of dialogue must set tone, set scene, set character and theme.</li> <li>• Tip#3 – Enhance the tone of the story</li> <li>• Tip#4 – Should sound natural without being boring</li> <li>• Tip#5 – If too real, it can be boring, but if too perfect, it doesn't sound natural</li> <li>• Tip#6 – Read it aloud to see how it sounds to the ear – rhythm, voice, etc.</li> <li>• Tip#7 – Tips for natural dialogue:</li> <li>• Tip#8 – Things to Avoid</li> <li>• Tip#9 – Avoid talking heads in white space –</li> <li>• Tip#10 – Tips for addressing talking heads</li> <li>• Tip#11 – Tips to address white space</li> <li>• Tip#12 – Start a story with dialogue without setting scene if there is action (this is one of exceptions)</li> <li>• Tip#13 – Use dialogue to set a scene directly –</li> <li>• Tip#14 – Qualities of Voice (Smith)</li> <li>• Tip#15 – Reveal character through conflicting goals and agendas – outright or subterfuge</li> <li>• Tip#16 – Transactional Analysis</li> <li>• Tip#17 – Conflict in Dialogue</li> <li>• Tip#18 – Raise the conflict level by keeping it short and simple – short, clipped words, short sentences,</li> </ul>	Craig DiLouie

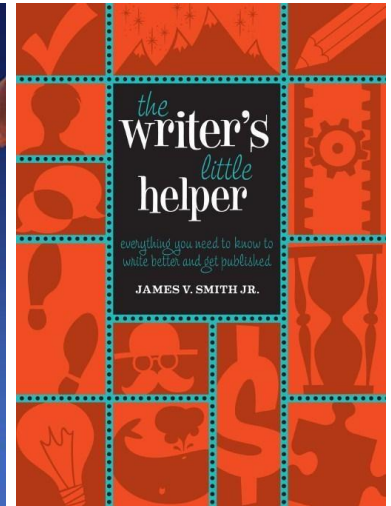
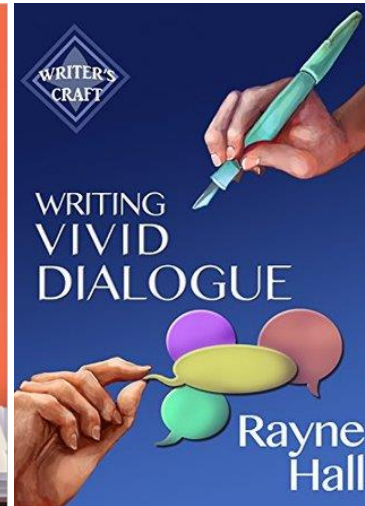
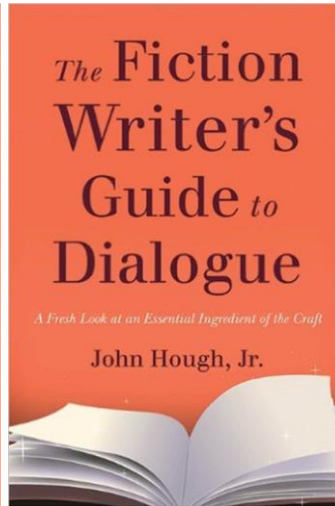
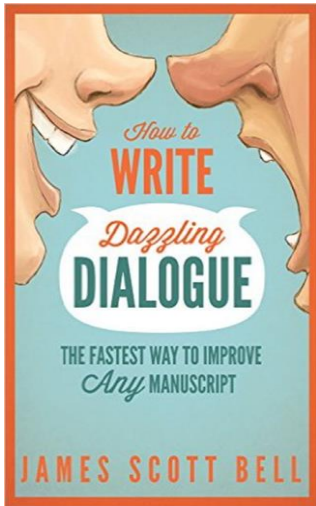
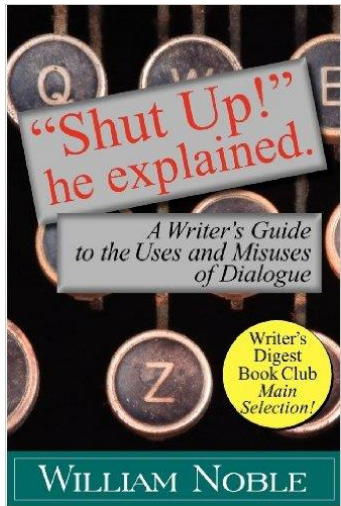
Time	Topic	Person
	<p>repetition adds emphasis – imperative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tip#19 – How to Raise Interest/Conflict</li> <li>• Tip#20 – Sharp colourful dialogue reveals character</li> <li>• Tip#21 – Gender Speech is possible generally</li> <li>• Tip#22 – Be very economical with insults and foul language</li> <li>• Tip#23 – What a character doesn't say can be meaningful</li> <li>• Tip#24 – Internal Dialogue – this is for a POV character – must be honest and revealing, can slow the pace</li> <li>• Tip#25 – Save info dumps for big reveals – reference history in narration and dialogue</li> <li>• Tip#26 – Avoid exposition in dialogue – You can do more telling in dialogue than you should in narrative</li> <li>• Tip#27 – Make sure your characters are speaking to each other, not the reader</li> <li>• Tip#28 – Dialogue is the only place the author can talk about theme – postulate theme, come up with opposing view, have two characters</li> <li>• Tip#29 – How to have an argument</li> <li>• Tip#30 – Never use a verb other than “said”</li> <li>• Tip#31 – Other words can be used for emphasis to add a little variety</li> <li>• Tip#32 – minimized overused tage such as “sighed”</li> <li>• Tip#33 – use as few tags as possible</li> <li>• Tip#34 – Closing dialogue</li> <li>• Tip#35 – Use dialogue BEAT – action, facial expression, tone of voice</li> <li>• Tip#36 – Stage directions can provide short pause but with more drama</li> <li>• Tip#37 – Body language is a form of dialogue that can be used for beats</li> <li>• Tip#38 – Body language comes from feelings and personality</li> <li>• Tip#39 – Body language reinforces fr belies dialogue</li> <li>• Tip#40 – Avoid overused actions in final draft (sigh, shrug, nod, turn, look, pause) -</li> <li>• Tip#41 – Dialogue can convey facila expression based on context</li> <li>• Tip#42 – Never used an adverb to modify said</li> <li>• Tip#43 – use adverbs to convey rather than reinforce</li> <li>• Tip#44 – Start a new paragraph when a new person is talking</li> <li>• Tip#45 – Italics can change meaning and tone of sentence.</li> <li>• Tip#46 – Watch your !</li> <li>• Tip#47 – Quotation marks optional but safer</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
8:30 PM	<p><b><u>Call for Agenda Items</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	Michael

Time	Topic	Person
8:35 PM	<b><u>Brags</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Craig DiLouie – Orbit has made offer on latest novel.</li> <li>• Steve Swanson – finished novel today</li> <li>• Ed Wilson – Bad letter from Daw – not taking Harshes Journey</li> <li>• Sandy Fitzpatrick - Have one story in third round of consideration – one second round</li> <li>• Ron Friedman – accepted to Astronomy Workshop for Writers – 2 – Book Launch – sold out regreably</li> <li>• Gary Renshaw - My fourth novel in Chandler Affairs – launch on May 1 at Owl's Nest</li> <li>• Randy McCharles – Creative Ink Festival – Burnaby BC</li> <li>• Michael Gillett – Attended Creative Ink Festival in B.C.</li> <li>• Ann Cooney – Fairytale that was published last year was submitted to Alberta Literary Awards</li> <li>• Brent – accepted for Tesseracts 20</li> </ul>	Michael
8:40 PM	<b><u>Discuss / Decide</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short Story Contest – Patreon Discussion – we can look at it, but need to possibly provide perk – types of perks – look into it – Kevin has done a lot – expect things throughout the year – expect things throughout the year – for wider population. In this case, wider population means family and friends.</li> <li>• Library – Brent has offered to manage the library – it is at Adams house – Brent will pick it up. People can get books.</li> </ul>	Michael
8:55 PM	<b><u>Announcements</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aurora Awards:</b> March 15 nominations open. CSFFA members can nominate eligible works. Membership is \$10 / year. Note: Last year Enigma Front was one vote shy of being a finalist. Don't say your vote doesn't count.</li> <li>• <b>Writers in the House</b> – April 22-23 (weekend after Easter) at the Fireside Room, Calgary Delta South – 135 Southland Drive S.E. – Times: 11a.m. – 11p.m. Saturday and Sunday – Admission free, but there is an expectation that we will order food and drink from Boomtown Pub for use of the room.</li> </ul>	Michael



# Tips for Effective Dialogue

By Craig DiLouie





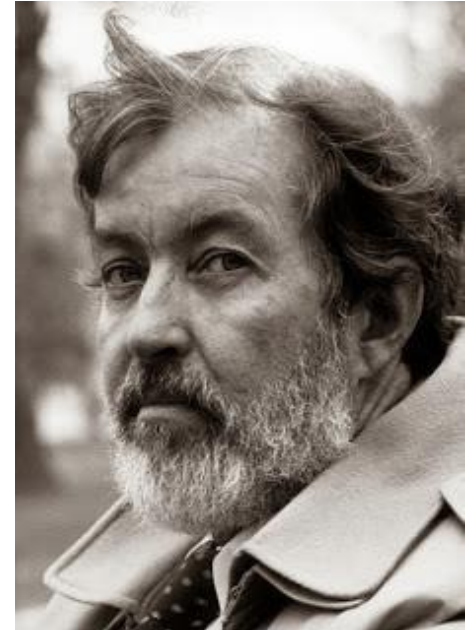
**THEORY**

# TIP #1

Learn these tips, and then break them at will.



“Action is character.”  
—F. Scott Fitzgerald



“Dialogue is character.”  
—George V. Higgins



“Dialogue should always be a compression and extension of action.”

—John Howard Lawson



“Dialogue must move a story.”

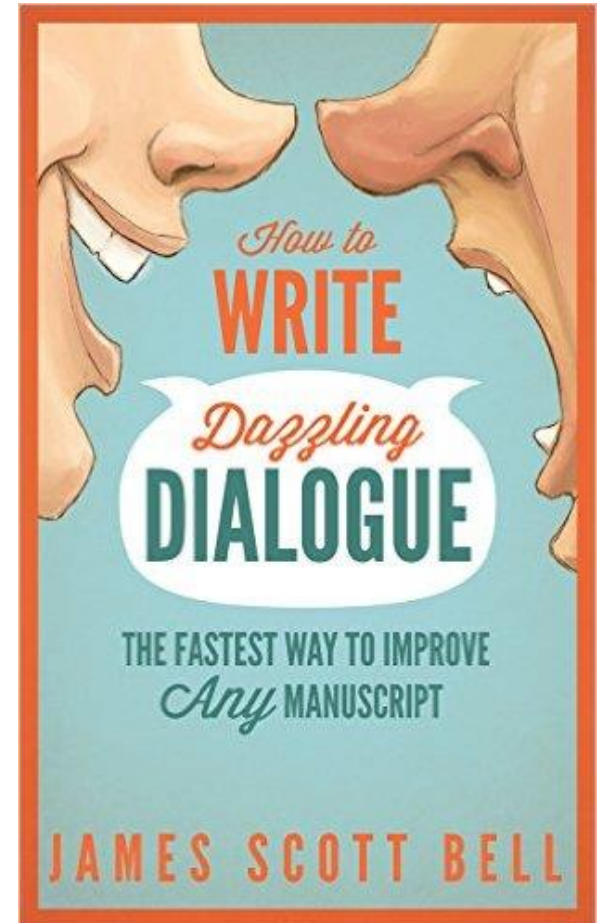
—Peggy Simson Curry



## TIP #2

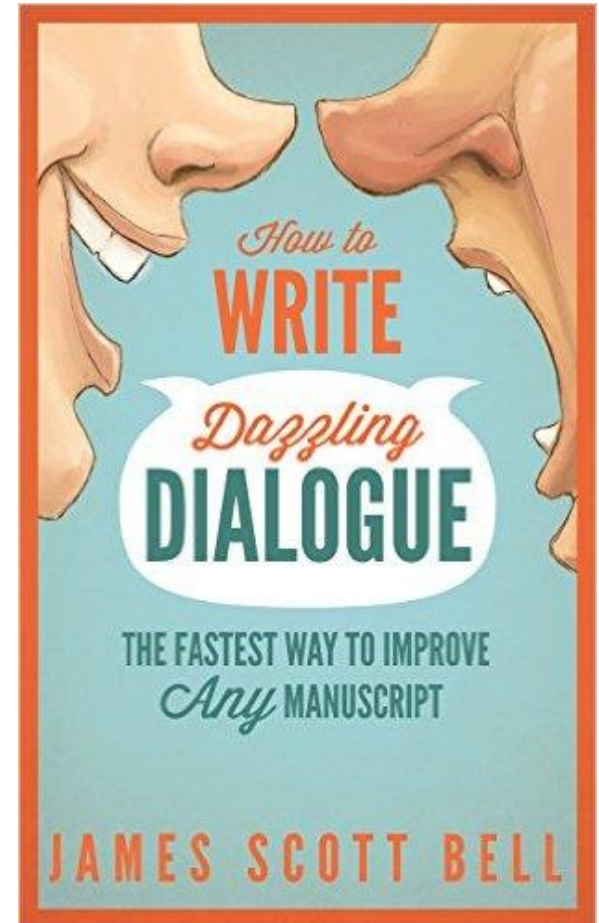
Every piece of dialogue must do one of these:

- Set the tone
- Set the scene
- Reveal character
- Reveal story information
- Reveal theme



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# TIP #3

Dialogue should enhance the tone of the story.

The grinning ghost lurched down the stairs in a series of horrific freeze frames.

Option A: "Murder," John murmured. "Bloody, rank death is coming for us."

Option B: "Pretty neat," John exclaimed, "but we'd better make tracks before that ghost pulls a number on us."



# TIP #4

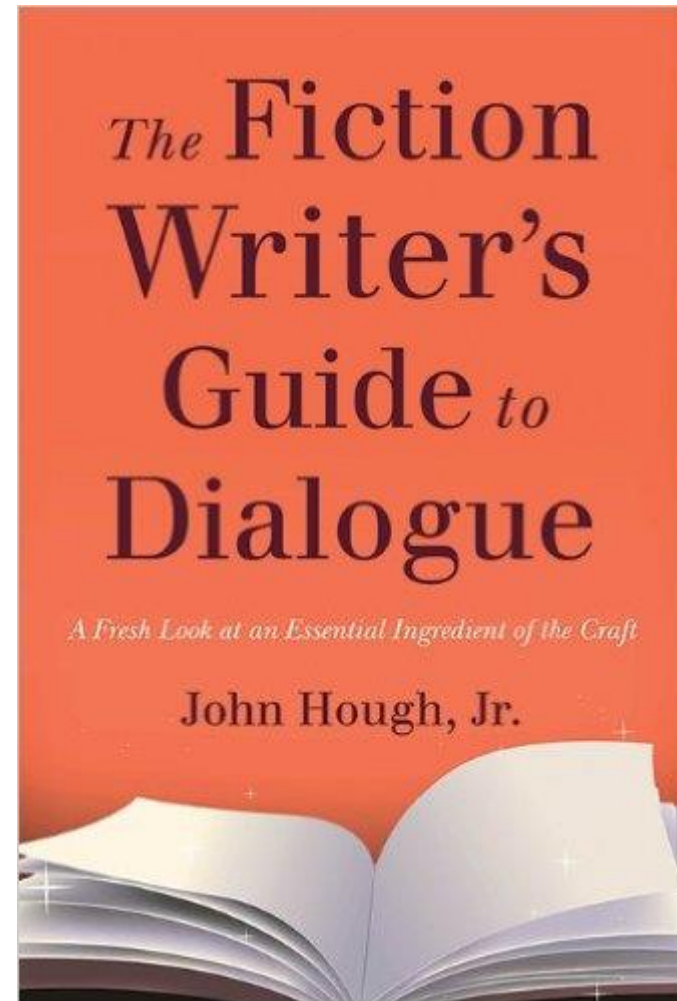
Dialogue should  
sound natural  
without being real.

Real talk is boring.



“Your characters have to respond immediately, but you have all the time in the world to craft that response.”

-John Hough, Jr.



# TIP #5

The paradox of good dialogue:

If it's too real, it's boring.

If it's too perfect, it doesn't sound real.





## TIP #6

Read your dialogue aloud to see how it sounds to the ear. In fact, it's recommended to read your entire book aloud.





# TIP #7

For natural dialogue, consider:

- Short sentences, shorter than narration
- Sentence fragments okay
- Shorter feels real, better readability
- Shorter paragraphs (Hough recommends 1-3 sentences, preferably 1-2)
- Use contractions
- Characters can interrupt each other
- Ellipse for halting speech



# TIP #8

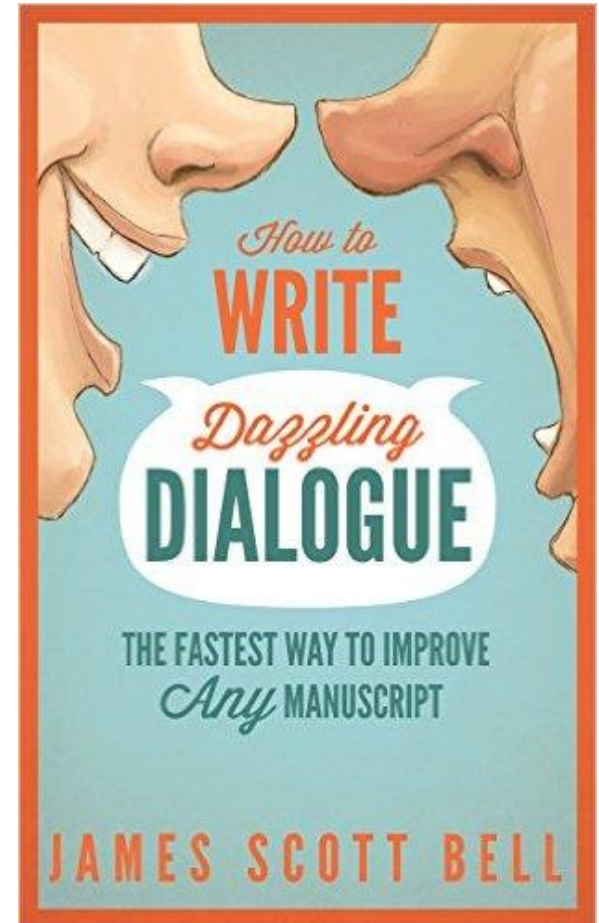
For natural dialogue, avoid:

- Overusing characters saying each other's name
- Repetition unless to drive a point home
- Tics of real speech (hello, goodbye, um, ah, uh, how are you, etc.—unless shaded with meaning)



Every piece of dialogue must do one of these:

- Set the tone
- **Set the scene**
- Reveal character
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## TIP #9

Avoid “talking heads in white space.”



Talking heads: Long stretches of dialogue.

White space: No clear scene.



# TIP #10

To address “talking heads,” have the characters do something while they talk.

Something ...	Example:
Mundane (easy way out)	Have a meal
Something discordant	Picking flowers for the funeral while planning the murder
Something relevant to the plot	Working on the car before the big drag race

## TIP #11

To address “white space,” set the scene.

- Can be broad-stroked if scene set earlier
- Upfront description or sprinkled throughout

# TIP #12

You can start a story with dialogue without setting the scene if there's action too.

- Use beats, not tags, here
- Avoid info dumps
- Establish point of view early
- Limit conversation to two characters.

"Help!"

"It's so dark. Where are you?"

John clung to the ledge. "Help!"

"I see you," Jane said. "Hang on!"

"I don't..."

She reached for him, missed. "Damn it!"

"I don't think I can--"

"Hang on, John!"

He felt his grip slipping. "Jane? Oh, God. Jane!"

As he began to fall, her hand clamped over his wrist and pulled.

# TIP #13

## Use dialogue to set the scene directly.

"God, that water," Jane said. "Reminds me of a turquoise ring I lost back in Canada."

John said, "I can see right to the bottom. The pirate ship—it's down there!"

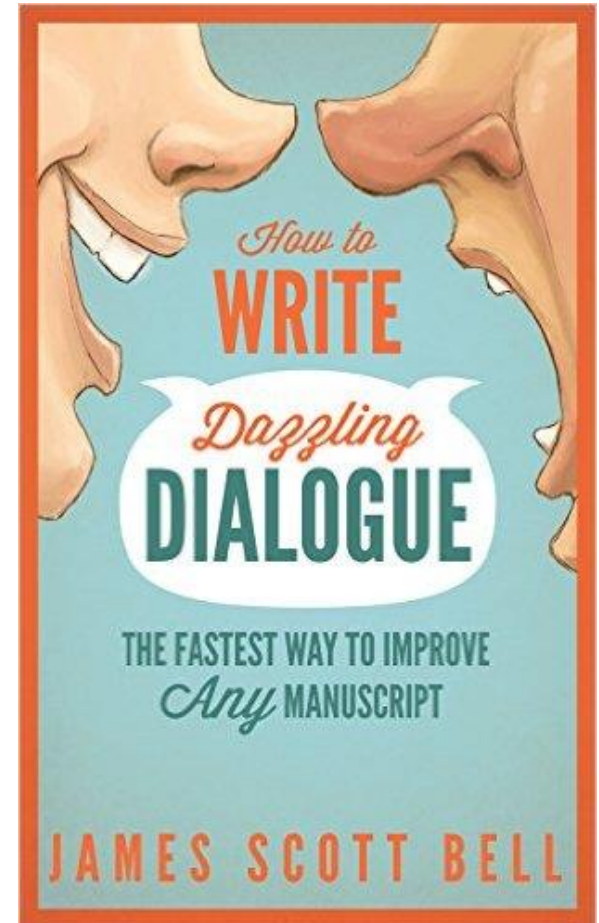
"The desert just goes on and on," John moaned. "But that shimmer..."

"Mirage," Jane said. "It's not what you want it to be."



Every piece of dialogue must do one of these:

- Set the tone
- Set the scene
- **Reveal character**
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# TIP#14: Qualities of Voice (Smith)

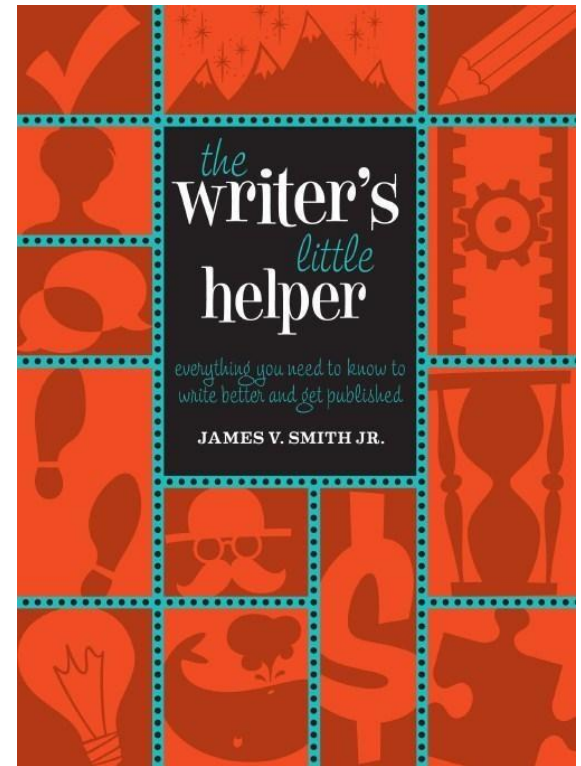
**Vocabulary:** general level,  
distinctive phrases/words  
(signatures for character)

**Verbosity:** length of speech

**Velocity:** pace and rhythm

**Viewpoint:** point of view (story),  
point of view (character's  
worldview)

**Venom:** emotional intensity



## TIP #15

Reveal character and move the story through conflicting goals or agendas. Can be outright or subterfuge.



Jane wants John, who is severely ill, to get out of the house and live his life to the fullest. Depressed, John wants to mope.

`"It's a beautiful day,"  
Jane said.`

`He shrugged. "It's a day."`

## TIP #15 (again)

People talk in books to push their agenda. For everything they say, there must be a reason.

Example:

John wants to sleep.

Jane wants tell him about a self-help book she's reading.

At end, the combination of the book and his refusal to engage might spark a decision to leave him on the spot.



# TIP #16: Transactional Analysis

Theory that people interact based on self-perceived role in a conversation.

- **Parent:** authority, decisive, power
- **Adult:** even-handed, analytical, calm
- **Child:** emotional, selfish, irrational



Dialogue tool introduced by Jack Bickham, author of *Writing Fiction That Sells* (1989), from pop psychology book, *Games People Play*, by Dr. Eric Bene.

# TIP #17: Conflict in Dialogue (Smith)

**Overt aggressive:** threats of violence

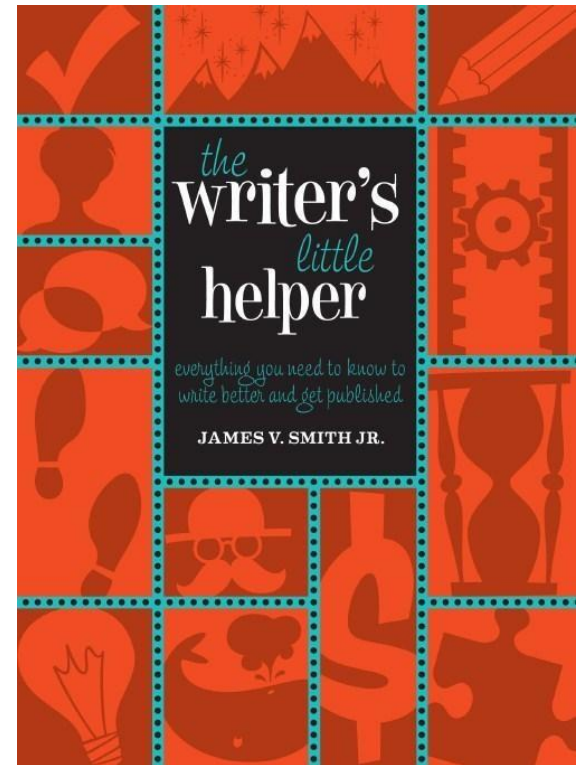
**Passive aggressive:** apparently submissive character spars with stronger one

**Provocation:** taunt or dare

**Undercurrent:** conflict is suggested but not open

**Ambiguity:** like undercurrent but more subtle, only writer knows for sure if conflict is there

**Subliminal:** conversation about one thing but heading to conflict



# TIP #18

Raise the conflict level by keeping it short and simple.

- Short, clipped Anglo-Saxon words (e.g., “box,” not “container”)
- Short sentences
- Strings of short sentences
- Short paragraphs
- Repetition adds emphasis
- Imperative: “I do,” not “I think I do”



# TIP #19: How to Raise Interest/Conflict

- Turn statements into questions:

A: "You haven't left the house in days."

B: "When's the last time you left the house?"

- Withhold the answer:

Q: "When's the last time you left the house?"

A: "I have everything I need right here."

- Evade, ignore, misdirect, Q with Q:

Q: "When's the last time you left the house?"

A: "Do we have to talk about this right now?"



# TIP #19: How to Raise Interest/Conflict

- **Misunderstanding:**

John: "How are you?"

Jane: "What?"

John: "How are you?"

Jane: "I can't hear you over the music."

- **Indirect discourse:**

John: "How are you?"

Jane: "Look at them over there. So happy."

- **Sucker punch:**

John: "How are you?"

Jane: "Mind your own business."

# TIP #19: How to Raise Interest/Conflict

- **Interruption:**

John: "Will you marry me, Jane?"

Jane: "John! I don't know what to say—"

Man: "Down on the floor! This is a robbery!"

- **What/Why:**

John: "Did you kill him?"

Jane: "He just wouldn't shut his mouth."

- **Replying to perceived real question:**

John: "So you can't account for your whereabouts that night."

Jane: "I didn't kill him. I loved him."

# TIP #20

Reveal character through sharp, colorful dialogue.

- Give each character a unique voice
- Reflect on a primary trait or goal (angry, bitter, outgoing, cynical, etc.)
- Zingers (snappy comebacks) make a character seem superior and likeable



Character Trait	Dialogue
Self-centered	I, me, my, mine
Insecure	I would like, maybe, if you don't mind, sentences that end in question
Pompous	Pompous, multisyllabic words
Bossy	Commands
Status	Drop names and status symbols
Expressive	Exaggerations, totally, never, forever, the most, the best

# TIP #21

Gender speech is possible, but tread carefully. Generally (from Rayne Hall):

- Women talk more than men
- Women reference emotions more often
- Men use speech to identify their place in pecking order
- Men get to point quicker
- Men usually don't compliment other men on appearance



Good luck getting this right in your book.

## TIP #22

Be very economical with insults and foul language.

- Use when needed for specific effect
- Don't force it for color
- A little goes a long way
- You can invent bad words



## TIP #23

What a character doesn't say can be meaningful.

Of Course I'm  
Being Quiet.

Who Plans  
A Murder  
Out Loud?

# TIP #24

Reveal character with internal dialogue.

- For point of view character
- Must be honest, revealing
- Can slow the pace
- Deep POV can blend external and internal dialogue in same tense
- No need for quotes, tag—e.g.:

A: Mom called me. "What now?" I wondered.

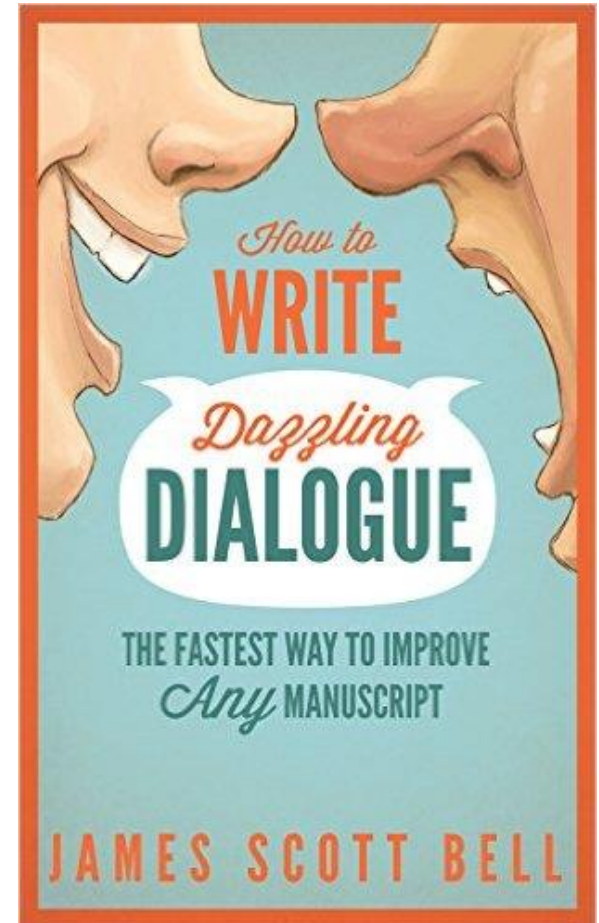
B. Mom called me. What now?





Every piece of dialogue must do one of these:

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## TIP #25

Save info dumps for big reveals laced with emotion.

Better to spread out, here and there if just basic info or to flavor the story.



Instead of giving history of dragons, reference in narration and dialogue.

His daughter held up a dragon's tooth. "Look what I found at the market today!"

John was old enough to remember the dragons. He shivered and forced a smile. "That's a great find, sweetie."

# TIP #26

Avoid exposition in dialogue (particularly what characters already know or info that shows too great an awareness of the story). That being said, you can do more telling in dialogue than you should in narrative.

"Mom's not here?"

"She went to work at 7AM."

(Mom has a job, so presumably works every day. We don't seem to need the 7AM. But...)

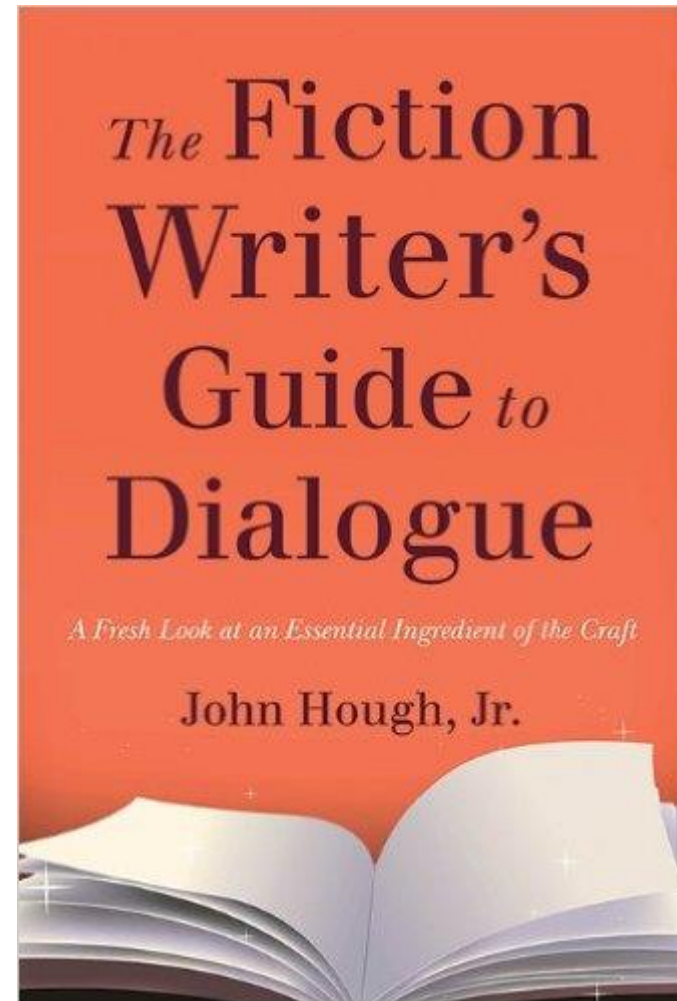
"Why so early?"

(Ah, now the 7AM works. Context is vital.)

## TIP #27

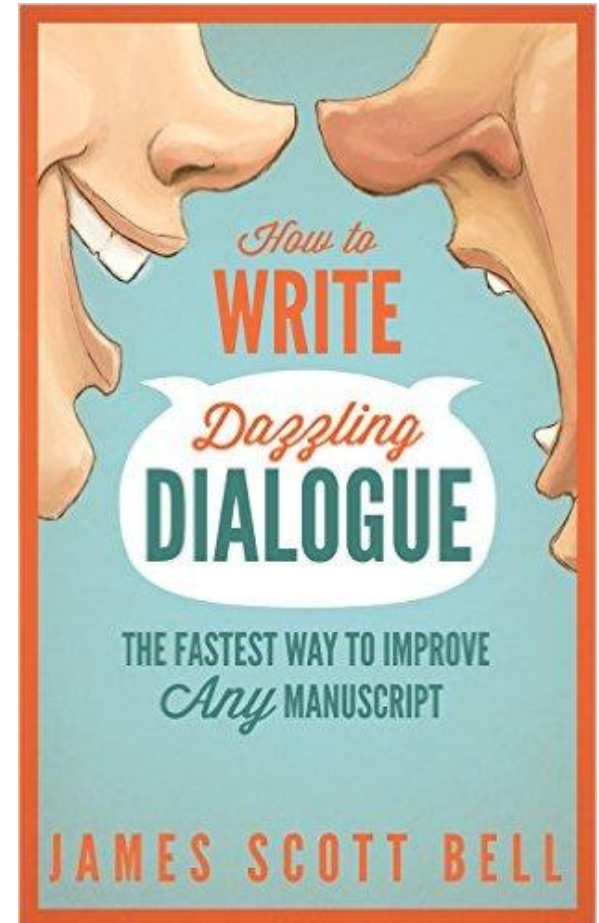
“Make sure your characters are speaking to each other, not to the reader.”

-John Hough, Jr.



Every piece of dialogue must do one of these:

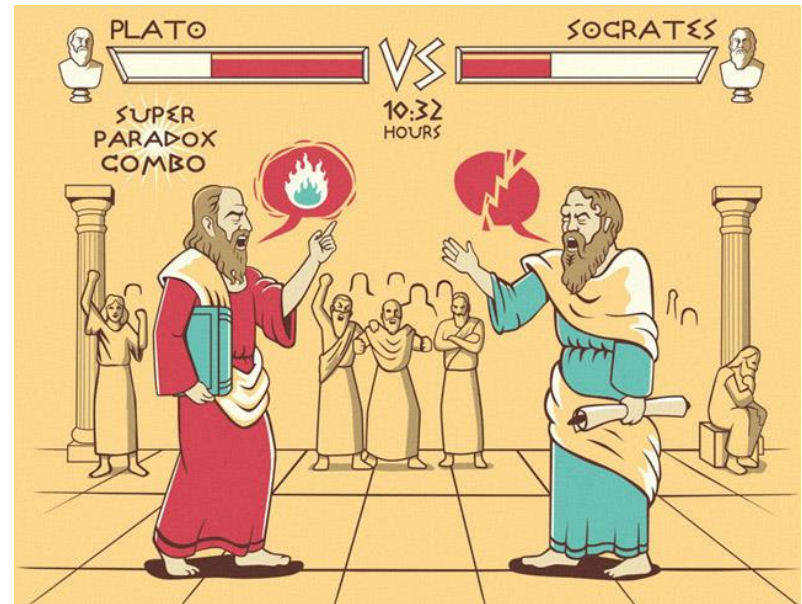
- Set the tone
- Set the scene
- Reveal character
- Reveal story information
- **Reveal theme**



# TIP #28

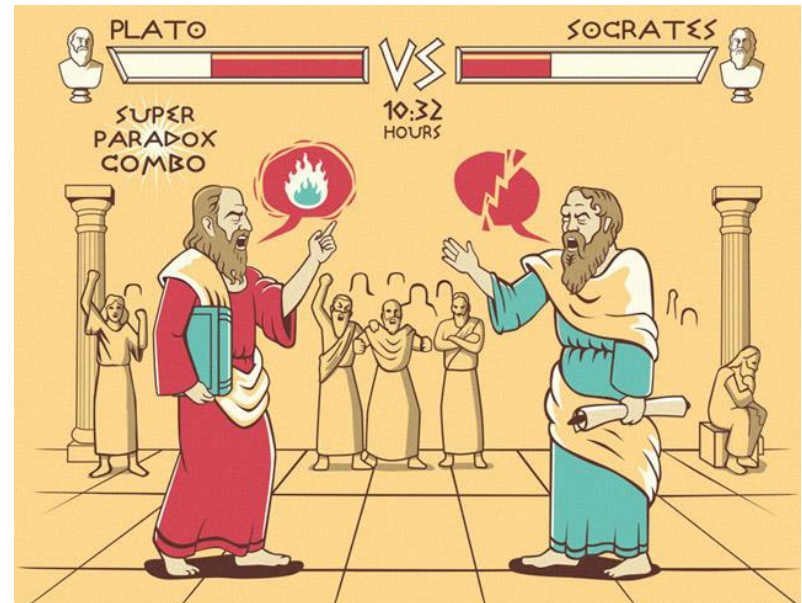
Dialogue is the only place in the book the author can talk about theme.

- Postulate theme
- Come up with opposing view
- Have two characters argue it out
- After this scene, any arguing can be simply because they don't like each other



# TIP #29: How to Have an Argument

- Strong verb tags and beats
- Short tight sentences
- Okay to interrupt a lot
- Questions/sentences can repeat but with different replies
- Overall succinct







**TECHNIQUE**

## TIP #30

“Never use a verb other than ‘said’ to carry dialogue,” Elmore Leonard said.

“\_\_\_\_,” she said.

“\_\_\_\_,” she said, “\_\_\_\_.”

She said, “\_\_\_\_.”

She said: “\_\_\_\_.”



Do you agree with Leonard?

## TIP #31

Other words can be used for emphasis, exaggeration or to add a little variety.

"\_\_\_\_," he commanded.

"\_\_\_\_," he hissed, "\_\_\_\_."

He cried, "\_\_\_\_."

He roared: "\_\_\_\_."



## TIP #32

Minimize overused tags such as “sighed.”

Minimize complicated tags such as “expostulated.”

“Asked” may be redundant if used with “?”

Avoid using actions such as “laughed” and “smiled” as tags.



## TIP #33

Use as few tags as possible.

"\_\_\_\_," Jane said.

"\_\_\_\_," John said.

"\_\_\_\_," Jane said.

"\_\_\_\_," John said.

"\_\_\_\_," Jane said.

"\_\_\_\_," John said.



## TIP #34

If tag follows dialogue, close with a comma (inside end quote), otherwise a period, exclamation point or ellipse (declarative).

"Yes," she said.

"Yes."

"Yes..."



Close with question mark (or ellipse plus question mark) if interrogative.

# TIP #35

Replace tags with dialogue beats—action, facial expression, tone of voice.

If a character does something in same paragraph as dialogue, no tag is needed.

She pumped her fist.  
“Yes!”

She smiled. “Yes.”

Her voice rose an octave. “Yes!”



# TIP #36

Stage direction (like tags) can provide a short pause but with more drama.

A: "I'm going to finish this beer. Then I'm going to kill you."



B: "I'm going to finish this beer." He pulled a knife from his boot and set it on the table. "Then I'm going to kill you."





# TIP #37

Body language is a form of dialogue that can be used for dialogue beats.

#1: "Jane?"

She frowned and turned away.

#2: "Jane?"

Her eyes seemed to dance. "What?"

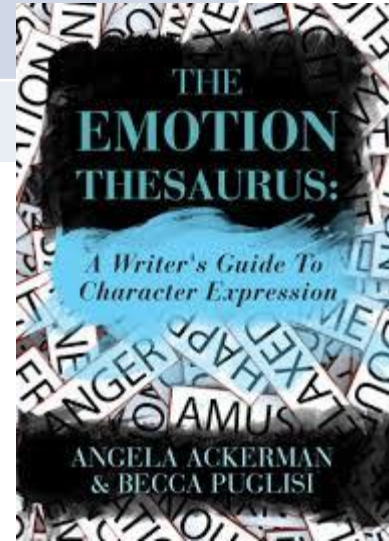


# TIP #38

Body language comes from feelings and personality.

Feeling	Action
Embarrassed	Turn away, blush
Anxious	Chew nails, fidget, rub back of neck
Angry	Clench fists
Pain	Grit teeth

*Emotional Thesaurus* can be good resource.



# TIP #39

Body language reinforces or belies dialogue.

He pounded his fist  
against the table.  
“No more of this!”

He grimaced. “Happy to  
do it, honey.”



# TIP #40

Avoid overused actions in *final* draft.

Examples: *sigh, shrug, nod, turn, look, pause*

Use software to  
generate frequency of  
repeat words (Scrivener,  
Autocrit.com,  
HemingwayApp.com)

Also ensure actions fit  
character. Would an optimist  
sigh? A decisive person shrug?



# TIP #41

Dialogue can convey facial expression based on context.

"I despise you," she said.

(We can "hear" the glare.)

"So, you want to come upstairs for a drink?" she said.

(We can "hear" her playful smile.)



## TIP #42

“Never use an adverb to modify the verb  
‘said.’” –Elmore Leonard

Do you agree with  
Leonard?



## TIP #43

Use adverbs to convey rather than reinforce meaning.

RIGHT: "I love you," he said dully.

WRONG: "Help me," she said beseechingly.



Alternate to "dully":

"I love you." He said it with all the enthusiasm of noting the time.

## TIP #44

Start a new paragraph when a new person is talking. If character does an action, put it in the same paragraph.

"Let's go," she said.

He glanced up from his book. "I'm reading."

"No, you're not."

He said, "I was."

She raised the gun. "Well, you're not anymore."

("When in doubt, have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand." –Raymond Chandler)



# TIP #45

Italics can change the meaning and tone of a sentence. (Be sparing.)

A: "I'm not going," he said. ("I'm not going.")

B: "*I'm* not going," he said. ("I'm not going, but maybe somebody else it.")

C: "I'm *not* going," he said. ("Even if you threaten to kill me.")

D: "*I'm not going.*" (Total emphasis.)

Italics and devices like capitals are like camera zooms. They call attention to themselves. Be absolutely sparing, or go all out for effect.

# TIP #46

Watch your “!”

“Keep your exclamation points under control. You are allowed no more than 2 or 3 per 100,000 words of prose.” –Elmore Leonard

“An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke.” –F. Scott Fitzgerald

“Whatever!” –Craig

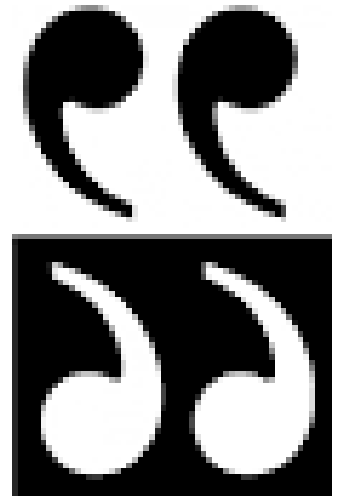
Write your story with “!” Find the “!” Take it out. If it works without it, leave it out.



# TIP #47

Quotation marks are optional but safer.

- Common in Southern Gothic (see Cormac McCarthy)
- *Cold Mountain*: Charles Frazier used a dash preceding dialogue
- Intention and confidence required
- Anytime you do something different, you draw haters
- You can experiment, such as taking out quotation marks in flashbacks





# 10 Tips for Effective Dialogue

THANK YOU!

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Any questions?