

Master Dialogue Cheat Sheet



Here are seven key take-aways from this course:

1. Dialogue in story is not dialogue in real life. In real life people make a mess of words. In dialogue every line is specifically crafted to “play an action” – to provoke, inspire, threaten, shame, etc.
2. Only say what the character mean if it is absolutely necessary. Sometimes you have to just blurt it out. But readers love to figure things out. And often times character don’t know what they really mean. Dialogues tends to be much more interesting when the actual meaning of the words is hidden and even open to interpretation.
3. Dialogue is the tip of an iceberg. To write it well you must know the character’s worldview, history, needs, physical and emotional state, expectations, and feelings about the character they’re addressing.
4. If writing for performance, don’t insult the intelligence of your cast by including parentheticals that explain how to say the line. Write the line so well they’ll know how to read it.
5. If your dialogue meanders and feels cliché, it’s almost certainly because you don’t know what the character wants or they don’t want it badly enough.
6. Never let the need to reveal information (exposition) outweigh the believability of what your character says. Motivate every line.
7. Your dialogue kicks ass when you can tell who is speaking without seeing their name. When you can do this, it means their attitude and personality are clear.

