

Theatr
Iolo

Topic Four

Dialogue and Language



What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is the talk between characters, or the talk that characters have directly with audiences.

The conversation between characters is an important part of a play.

Very often, although not always, it is how we understand things about the character/s and the story.

Try creating a fact file for your character or try choosing facts about yourself.

These facts could include:

- Who is in their family?
- Where do they live?
- How old are they?
- What is their name? and do they like their name?
- What are their hobbies?
- What are they good at?
- What is worrying or bothering them?
- Is there a problem they need to solve

The audience will not know anything about this character before the play begins.

More often than not, they will learn about your character/s by what is said in the play.



How to use different types of Dialogue

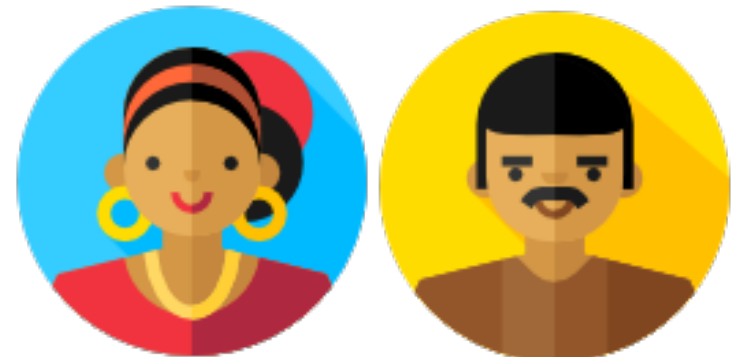
This might be done in the following ways:



The main character will tell the audience themselves, talking to them directly in a **monologue** (that's when characters talk without anyone else interrupting, or when they are on their own).



One of the other characters will talk about the other one, when they aren't there. This could be members of their family or their best friends.



The audience will meet the main character in a scene talking to another character. Within this dialogue, the audience will learn certain facts about them, their situation and their personality.

Example 1

Tom walks onto the stage, and looks out into the audience. She smiles, and then starts talking to them

TOM: Hello! I'm Tom. Short for Tomasina but my mam won't call me anything else. Honestly. She's bonkers. Is your mam bonkers too? Anyway, my mam called me Tom cos my uncle died before I got born so my mam wanted to remember him through me or somethin' stupid, so she called me a boy's name and because of that everyone makes jokes about me *all the time*. Even my mam does. People always start singin Tom Jones songs whenever they see me comin, like Delilah and It's Not Unusual and that. It's just happened now, now this second, before I came to talk to you. I'm really fed up with it. Honestly, I've had enough....



What are all of the things that we now know about Tom after this speech?

What are all of the things that we *think* we know about Tom after this speech?

What do you think will happen next to Tom when we next see her, and what will she do?

Example 2

The lights come up on a modern kitchen. CERYS (34, energetic, no-nonsense) is busy cooking. CHRIS (36, thoughtful, a joker) is scraping muddy boots with a kitchen knife.

CERYS talks without looking at CHRIS

CERYS: I think it's ridic'lous...Wanting a party on the internet...Sausage rolls, trifle....

CHRIS: I know love

CERYS: Crisps, sandwiches...I've got to deliver the lot. Contactless. To the door. Fourteen buffets

CHRIS: I know love

CERYS: Stop sayin' "I know love"

CHRIS: I know...

CERYS: Are you *listenin'* to me?

She turns to look at him. Can't believe what she's seeing

CERYS: What are you *doing*? This is a kitchen table! Go outside and do that

Chris gets up

CERYS: And you can take all these parcels round yourself

CHRIS: But ...I....

CERYS: You haven' got rugby practice Chris, it' s lockdown. And *you* told your eight year old daughter that she could have a full birthday party on Zoom together with *fourteen* friends, so *you*, mate, can deliver it. Either that or *you* can tell 'er it's not happenin', and deal with the fallout. Your choice, Chris!

A beat. Chris thinks about it.

CHRIS: I'll bring the car up to the back door...



What do we know about the family after this scene?

What do we know about Tom after this scene?

What do we *think* we understand or what do we guess about Tom and her family after this scene?

Example 3

Tom and her little brother Dewi run into the space. They are breathless and shocked.

DEWI: Wow!.. Weles di 'na? (Did you see that?)

TOM: Paid gweutho Mam, ok? (Don't tell Mam ok?)

DEWI: Ie, ond Tom...(Yeah, but Tom)

TOM: Tomasina. I ti. Neu Miss. (Tomasina to you. Or Miss)

DEWI: Sa i'n myn i alw ti'n Miss. (I'm not calling you Miss)

TOM: Whatev's. So ti'n cael gweud wrth Mam bod ni wedi gweld(Whatev's. You can't tell Mam that we've just seen...)

DEWI: ...Alien yn glanio yn y coed!Fi yn. Fi'n mynd i weutho pawb... (An alien landing in the trees! I am ! I'm goin' to tell everyone)

TOM: Gweud ti wrth *unrywun* a bydd Mam yn ffindo mas...(You tell *anyone* and Mam will find out)

DEWI: Bydda i'n rili gofalus. Bydd hi byth yn gwybod (I'll be really careful. She'll never know)

TOM: Sdim ots Dewi, bydd hi jest yn gwybod. A wedyn bydd hi'n groundo ni am fis arall a bydd rai o ffrindie stiwpid ti wedi gneud rywbeth stiwpid fel lladd yr alien neu rywbeth (It doesn't matter Dewi she will just know. And then she'll ground us for another month and some of your stupid friends will do something stupid like kill the alien or something)

DEWI: Bydde nhw ddim (They won't)

TOM: Naethon nhw lladd hamster fi Dewi so (They killed my hamster Dewi so....)

DEWI: Dim ar bwrpas (Not on purpose)

TOM: Os ti'n gweutho Mam bydda i'n gweutho hi *union* beth ddigwyddodd i hamster fi a byddi di ddim yn cael mynd mas i whare am pum mlynedd. Ok? (If you tell Mam then I will tell her exactly what happened to my hamster and you won't be allowed out to play for five years. OK?)

Reluctantly, Dewi nods.

What do we find out about the story during this scene?

Do you think you find out more by this example compared to the monologue?

Use the fact file that you created for your character and try to write an opening scene with dialogue that lets us get to know the character, their world and their situation.

Think how the audience might follow the story and get to understand the problems that they are facing.

TOP TIP: The dialogue moves the story on. The talk between characters, or the talk that the characters have with the audience, are the way that the story moves forward.



Problems with Dialogue

One of the most common problems that happen when writing dialogue is that it doesn't sound how people really talk.

There might be lots of reasons for this:

- Maybe you make your characters talk as if they are on a film or drama that you have seen on television rather than the way that you might talk yourself.
- Maybe you use characters to explain the situation to an audience, so what they are saying doesn't feel real.
- Maybe characters just talk, and don't really want or need anything.

For example

Imagine that we are going to write a scene around the breakfast table. Dewi and Tom are trying to think about what to do, but they don't want to make it too obvious in case their parents hear them.

Let's make things a little bit harder for them (because that's always good in drama) by saying that it's the school sports day and they need to get their kit together before school



Problems with Dialogue

Cerys is rushing around getting everything ready for school. Chris is hiding behind a paper with the headline STRANGE RUMBLING NOISES IN SMALL TOWN. Dewi and Tomasina are trying to decide what to do

TOM: Bydd raid inni gael e i'r llong-ofod erbyn un neu ni gyd yn mynd i farw (We have to get him to the spaceship by one or we're all going to die)

DEWI: Ie, fi'n gwybod. O'dd e wir yn scary do'dd e? (Yeah, I know, he was really scary wasn't he?)

CHRIS: (*dropping his newspaper*) This story about the rumbling noises in the small town is very worrying, don't you think Cerys?

CERYS: Yes, it feels as if there is something very strange, almost out of this world, going on. Blant, sganddo chi eich stwff yn barod ar gyfer y mabolgampau sy'n digwydd pnawn ma lawr wrth lan y mor? (Kids, do you have your stuff ready for the school sports day that is happening today down by the beach?)

CHRIS: Why are you speaking Welsh to the children, Cerys?

CERYS: Well, it's because I can speak Welsh and so can the children because they go to a Welsh medium school but you've never learnt.

TOM: (*whispering fiercely*) Bydd raid iti weud wrth Mam bo ti'n dost fel bod ti'n gallu aros gatre a wedyn byddi di yn gallu mynd a'r alien i'r llongofod erbyn un i stopio ni gyd rhag cael ein lladd (You will have to tell Mam that you are ill so you can stay home and then you can take the alien to the spaceship by one o'clock to stop us all from being killed)

How could you make this little scene stronger and more real?

Is there too much emphasis on making us understand the background and not enough on showing us the situation as it would really be?

Re-write this scene making all the same points but without over explaining anything and making all the characters speak as naturally as possible.

Remember that Cerys is very busy, Chris is more interested in his newspaper than anything else and Tom and Dewi need to sort a plan so that they can save the village without Mam and Dad finding out.



TOP TIP:
Keep each line short.

Using Dialogue for Wants and Needs

A character *has* to want something as otherwise nothing would happen in the play.

So what the character **wants** pushes the talk between people, but when you want something, there are different ways of getting it.

Imagine that Dewi wants a new bike for his birthday.

What happens if he asks his dad straight?

DEWI: Dad. Can I have a bike for my birthday?

CHRIS: No. You can't. I'm not made of money.

This would be a very short scene. If Dewi really, really wants a bike, then he has to work a bit harder to get what he wants. He might try this:

DEWI: Dad.. Shall I help you wash the car tomorrow?

CHRIS: That's nice of you, yes.

DEWI: And if you like I could take the dog for a walk too. I don't mind doing the poop a scoop, and I know you don't like it...

CHRIS: What d'you want? Is it still that bike? I've told you...

DEWI: You're not made of money, I know.

Dewi's plan starts well here but then he makes it a bit too obvious too soon and Dad says no again. Let's try one more time:

CHRIS: Where have you been, Dewi? You look all sweaty.

DEWI: Been exercising in the garden, Dad.

DAD: All over my lawn! I've just spent a hundred quid re-seeding that.

DEWI: I know Dad, but Miss Morgan says we gotta do daily exercise during lockdown or we'll get ill

DAD: Right. We'll go down the park then. Go and get your bike.

DEWI: I can't though Dad. It's too small for me. It's not my fault I'm growin so fast is it? Maybe...as it's my birthday...?

CHRIS: Oh alright, you can have a bike, anything for a quiet life.

DEWI: Thanks Dad.

CHRIS: We'll ave a look online. See if there's any sales.

Using the thing that your character wants the most, try to write a scene where they try to get what they want.

TOP TIP: *If your character doesn't succeed when writing your scene, try and make them a little bit more clever in the way that they talk and act and re-write the scene again.*



Language and Words

Everyone talks differently. We all have words that we like or noises and sounds that we make more than other people do.

When you are trying to create characters, it's really important that you listen to people talk, and try to copy that when you are writing a scene.

For one day, listen really carefully to the way that three different people speak.

It could be your mam and dad, brothers and sisters, your neighbours or friends or maybe even someone on the tv.

Note down what words they say often, and also how they speak.

What did you notice?

- Do they speak really quietly and politely?
- Do they speak very little – and just give a yes or no answer to any questions.
- Do they say..um...a lot...um...?
- Do they answer with questions?
- Are there little words or phrases that they use all the time?

What about how they speak? Everyone has a certain rhythm to the way that they talk.

Rhythm is the pattern of sound that we make when we speak.



Language and Words

For example

Compare these two different phone calls;



Chris answers the phone

CHRIS: Tom! Where've you been?...seriously, your mother has been worried sick. Sick, I tell you. Get yourself home. Now. Five Minutes. D'you understand?

Chris finishes the call

.....

Cerys answers the phone

CERYS: Tom? Tom?...O, diolch i Dduw
(Oh, thank God!)

She calls out to Chris

CERYS: She's safe Chris, she's alright....She's safe Chris, she's alright (to Tom) Lle wyt ti di bod? Wedes di bum munud, jest i fynd a'r llyfr na i dy Martha, a mai di bod bron iawn i awr. Alle unrywun fod wedi cael gafael arnat ti, mae na bobl drwg yn bobman

(where you been? You said five minutes, just to take that book to Martha's house and it's been nearly an hour. Anyone could have got hold of you, there's bad people everywhere.)



How are the phone calls different?

Can you see how the rhythm of their speeches are very different from each other?

Think about how your character would speak.

Think of another character that they know– it could be a friend, parent, neighbour, teacher.

Imagine that these two people are in a café. It might be helpful if the two characters are very different to each other.

A waiter comes to ask them what they would like.

- How do they talk to the waiter?
- How do they talk to each other?
- Have a think about what they each want?

Maybe one character wants to show off, or maybe they don't really want to be there.

Maybe they want to be in the park instead but they can't say so, maybe they really want pudding rather than lunch.

Try writing this scene.

TOP TIP: Remember that the characters want something, that they always talk in a certain way, using a certain rhythm and words.



To sum up:

Characters should sound natural when they speak.

It's important that characters want or need something because this pushes the conversation forward.

Try not to use dialogue too much to explain things that have happened before.

Remember that everyone speaks in a particular way, with words and phrases that they always use as well as a definite rhythm.

