

LMF DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

# DIALOGUE

SESSION 4

BLUECOAT ART CENTRE - L1  
NOVEMBER 14TH - 5:45-7:45 PM  
£3 - ON OUR WEBSITE

*"EXCUSE ME,  
I SEEM TO HAVE  
LOST MY WAY."*

*"YOU SEEM TO BE  
ANNOYING ME."*

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# What We Will Do Today?

- i. Purpose of Dialogue
- ii. Motivation for Speech
- iii. Subtext
- iv. Trusting Actors and Audiences
- v. Character Exercises
- vi. Pace and Rhythm
- vii. Tone and Personality
- viii. Dialogue as Speech
- ix. How to Self Edit?
- x. Your Work

# DIALOGUE

# Purpose of Dialogue

Dialogue serves multiple functions in screenwriting. It isn't just an exchange of words between characters but a sophisticated mechanism that reveals character depth, conveys essential narrative information, and propels the storyline forward. Each line of dialogue must fulfil a distinct purpose, which can be roughly broken down into:

- 1. Character Revelation**
- 2. Narrative Exposition**
- 3. To Drive the Plot Forward**

**Dialogue is not filler but intent for purposeful communication.** Each line must carry intent—whether advancing the plot, revealing character, or adding to a scene with layered meaning.

# Character Revelation

As we talked about last month, *character drives story*, and dialogue can reveal character. **What ways can this be written into a script?:**

- Contrast visuals with Audio.

How is their dialogue contradictory / honest to their actions, and what does that tell us?

- The way they use language.

Is it poetic, rough, localised, abstract? The way they speak can reveal lots about who they are and their background. *Example: Oliver Twist.*

- Do they talk a lot, a little, a lot but saying a little?

Can we learn about how extroverted or introverted they are? Are they nervous about a situation when usually they are confident? *Example: Shuey Weaver with his Dad Waterloo Road.*

# Narrative Exposition

Dialogue is a powerful tool for delivering context, backstory, and plot-related details. However, these elements must be introduced organically, embedded within the conflict, humour, or other narrative dynamics to avoid falling into the trap of expository writing.

The objective is to ensure that dialogue informs and entertains simultaneously, achieving a seamless blend of narrative progression and engaging character interaction.

# EXAMPLES:

Good Exposition: Field of Dreams.

"Dad was a Yankees fan then so, of course, I rooted for Brooklyn. But in '58 the Dodgers moved away so we had to find other things to fight about."

Bad Exposition: Big hero 6.

"What would mom and dad say?"

"I don't know! They died when I was 3, remember?"

# Drive the Plot Forward

Effective dialogue moves the plot forward, even when it appears casual or incidental. Every exchange should function as part of the narrative architecture by building tension, introducing conflict, or redefining character relationships.

It is a part of **STRUCTURE**

Treat each line of dialogue as a part of structure, it builds to progress and has a start middle and end.

**Exercise 1: Write 3 sentences of dialogue between 2 people. One that sets up conflict, one that develops the plot, and one that resolves conflict revealing character.**

# Motivation for Speech

A few weeks ago, we talked about structure and the importance of entrances and exits for character. That is applicable to dialogue too. When a character chooses to speak in a scene is as important as what they are saying.

Think about why a character must speak, are you talking to fill a page? Or talking to progress the story. Can it be done first through action?

**TIP:** When writing, try to write a draft with no dialogue, and then in the second draft add in dialogue where you can't do without it.



# Subtext

What we don't say in dialogue is as important, or even more important, than what we do say. The subtext gives clues to the audience as to the real intentions of a scene, and organically reveals character, drives the plot, and provides exposition.

TIP: Make the audience work to understand, a story is more compelling when they are involved with creating the story. Subtext can be used to force audience interaction.

At the pub. Steve, has stolen a tenner from Danny for food they need whilst he was in the toilet. Danny rifles through his pockets walking back from the toilet, looking around.

Danny - "Have you seen a tenner anywhere?"

Steve looks around briefly, nothing there.

Steve - "Sorry mate, nothing."

Danny – "Ah I could've done with that; guess I'm walking back."

Steve taps his pocket as Danny puts his coat on.

Steve - "Here mate." He pulls out the tenner. "Have it."

What does this tell us about Steve?

# Trust Audiences & Actors.

Dialogue is used by Actors. Their job is to read, interpret, and then understand the subtext to use visual storytelling through physicality and facial expressions to get across what is trying to be said between the words.

Audiences are detectives, they are trying to work out what the story is and where it is going, and the job of the writer is to feed into their desire to be an active participant whilst keeping the story surprising and entertaining.

The best writing trusts both audiences and actors to do their roles effectively by writing dialogue that doesn't take away from that. The dialogue should be a tool for progress, using subtext to make writing more engaging, more economic, and a base for story.

YOU SHOULDN'T NEED BLATENT PARANTHETICALS.

Breaking down a Script page together.

## **Motherland – Pilot**

In pairs consider the techniques used.

4           **EXT. SCHOOL. DAY 1 MORNING 08.50**           4

Julia bustles the kid out of the car and into the building.

                  JULIA  
                  C'mon, c'mon, c'mon. Bag, coat...

\*  
\*

5           **INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY 1. 08.52**           5

Julia checks her iPhone clock in an empty, eerily quiet corridor.

                  JULIA  
                  How late are we..?

A woman rounds the corner and pulls up short, surprised to see Julia and her kids. This is Janet, the kid's teacher.

\*  
\*

                  JANET  
                  Hello. Hello, Ivy, hello, James.  
                  Ehm, I'm sorry, you're--

\*  
\*

                  JULIA  
                  Julia. I'm their Mum.

                  JANET  
                  Yes, yes, of course... did you have  
                  an appointment or..?

\*  
\*  
\*

Julia stares at her, lost. What the hell are you saying?

                  JULIA  
                  Well, no, I'm just here to -

Julia looks to her left and sees all the chairs up on the tables in one classroom. She looks to her right and sees an empty assembly hall floor being machine polished.

                  JANET  
                  Did you forget it was half term?

\*

                  JULIA  
                  ( she did )  
                  No.

\*  
\*

                  JANET  
                  Your children are in their  
                  uniforms.

\*  
\*

                  JULIA  
                  Yes, they're going to a... back to  
                  school disco/children-themed party.

                  JANET  
                  Are you here to see Mrs. Lawson?

\*  
\*

# Character Exercises

Exercise 2: Using your 3 sentences, try to add character quirks into the words. Do they talk too much, are they blunt? What does that add?

Exercise 3: Can you give a context to your 3 sentences that changes the dialogue's meaning?

Exercise 4: Can you be more economic with your words? Is everything necessary or can it be implied through subtext?

# Pace and Rhythm

Dialogue possesses a musicality that can evoke various emotions depending on its pacing and rhythm. The flow of dialogue—its tempo, pauses, and cadence—can significantly influence the scene's tone, creating urgency, tension, or intimacy.

- Rapid-fire dialogue can create a sense of urgency, chaos, or escalating tension.
- Slower pace can foster introspection, vulnerability, or discomfort.

Just as music builds tension through tempo changes, dialogue can do the same. The way characters interrupt each other, the length of their sentences, and their pauses all contribute to the scene's emotional resonance.

# Tone and Personality

Compelling character comes from giving each character a unique and identifiable voice. Dialogue directly reflects a character's experiences, temperament, and psychological makeup. Therefore, the nuances in word choice, rhythm, and tone must reflect who they are, ensuring that every character's speech feels genuine and distinct.

**Word Choice:** Do they speak with lots of colloquial language? Do they fluctuate between languages? Are they precise?

**Rhythm and Pace:** Example: Mark Zuckerberg in Social Network talks fast and overlapping, reflecting his restlessness.

**Personality Traits:** Sarcasm, for instance, can reveal a character's defensive tendencies, while a more straightforward tone might suggest honesty or even naiveté.

# Dialogue as Speech

Dialogue is spoken in film, to read it out loud is how we get more information and see the flaws. Even if it's uncomfortable.

Exercise 5: In pairs read out your sentences to each other and see if it sounds genuine. Does it have subtext? Is it progressive and interesting?



# How to Self Edit?

Ask yourself the hard questions when editing, writing dialogue can flow easily in first drafts and fill huge gaps in the script, but is it incisive and necessary? If you can cut it; do.

1. Is this a difficult conversation for the characters?
2. Does it put characters under pressure?
3. Does the conversation involve conflict?
4. Were you engaged and excited when reading out loud?
5. Has something changed at the end of the conversation?
6. Are the characters revealing more about themselves?

Get someone else to read it out loud for you, listening to dialogue from someone else's mind can be insightful.

# **Let's Look at Your Work!**

**or**

**If you haven't brought work, use this time to develop your sentences or to ask questions.**