Presenting Dialogue

There are accepted ways in which to present *dialogue,* a word that refers to what people say in a story. The following exercises present a few simple rules for presenting characters’ dialogue in your stories.

1. **Converting an *indirect quotation* to a *direct quotation***

The following sentence provides a summary of what someone has said:

Daryl B. Trouble told me to go home.

This is known as an *indirect quotation* because Daryl’s exact words are not reproduced; rather, they are summarized. In contrast, *direct quotation* goes within *quotation marks* and reports exactly what someone has said, as in the following sentence:

Daryl B. Trouble told me, “Go home, fool!”

Rewrite each of the following five sentences so that the indirect quotation is presented as a direct quotation.

1. Roland Butter asked me when the soup would be ready.
2. At the beginning of class, the teacher told us to turn in our homework.
3. I got an email saying that I had just won a million dollars.
4. Bette DeRanch said that we should keep the noise down.
5. The principal congratulated us for being so well behaved.

2. **Punctuating quotations**

In the United States, punctuation usually goes *inside* the closing quotation mark of a direct quotation, as in the following sentences:

“I’m a happy camper.”

“Those are delicious lima beans,” said Jim Panzee.

Lauren Order shouted, “I’m free at last!”

“How did you do that?” asked the magician’s assistant.

In the following sentences, place both quotation marks and punctuation in the proper locations:

1. We might be behind by 50 points, but we will win the game said the coach.
2. The chef exclaimed This is my greatest creation ever!
3. Why do want me to do that I asked my mother.
4. The mayor declared No dog shall roam this town unleashed.
5. Ginger Snapps was told No more cookies for you by the cafeteria lady.

3. **Quotations and paragraphs**

A final rule regarding quotations in stories is that every time a new speaker begins, the writer should start a new paragraph. When two or more characters are speaking, the proper form looks like this:

“Hello!” said Ira Fuse to Kareem O’Wheat.

“And a big howdy to you!” replied Kareem.

Ira paused and asked, “What are you up?”

Kareem paused to think. He then said, “I was just about to head into that dark and shadowy alley to see if anything pops out and tries to scare me.”

“Great idea,” said Ira. “What do you say we hide between those two dumpsters and see what happens?”

Kareem smiled and replied, “That’s a fantastic idea! Last one in is a rotten egg.”

“What a coincidence,” said Ira. “It rather smells of rotten eggs in a rancid, fetid, repulsive sort of way.”

“Well then,” said Kareem, “I think we’re doing the right thing.”

“What could possibly go wrong?” inquired Ira as they headed in to crouch between the dumpsters and enjoy the remainder of the afternoon.

\*This handout is adapted from Figure 3-2 on pages 47-8 in *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction.*