
Punctuating Dialogue

Dialogue records people's exact words. Because people often use fragments in their speech, dialogue can record those fragments. Writers signal dialogue by enclosing it in quotation marks and using a comma to separate the dialogue from the rest of the sentence. If the quotation ends with a question mark or an exclamation mark, however, no comma is necessary.

"What do you think of the new house?" asked Mother. "Like it?"

"Not much," answered her daughter.

Exercise: Punctuating Dialogue

The dialogue below might have occurred among the mother, the father, and the daughter in Cynthia Rylant's story "Checkouts." Add quotation marks and commas where necessary.

1. Aren't those windows beautiful? asked Mom.
2. Yes said Dad and I love all the porches.
3. This place has a real sense of history he added.
4. What sense of history? asked their daughter.
5. Why answered Mom the place is, after all, over a hundred years old.
6. Dad said If rooms could talk, think of the stories these would tell.
7. Maybe said the girl but I'd rather be back in the old house.
8. Why? asked Dad.
9. Because the girl explained that's where my friends are.
10. Her mother tried to reassure her. You'll make new friends, honey she said.
11. Sure said Dad and we have plenty of room to invite them over.
12. And plenty of outside room for your garden added Mom.
13. I guess so said the girl.
14. I know so! said Dad, giving his daughter a hug. You're a survivor, kid.
15. The girl smiled shyly. Well she said maybe I am.