**Dialogue: Glasgow rules**

Dialogue in fiction is not like the dialogue in real life – it is embroidered, embellished and squeezed to paint the picture that the journalist or author wants to get out there. It has a point. In real life we natter on about one thing or another. In writing, dialogue is focused.

*“Convince me.”*

*“I can’t. Not while everyone is looking.”*

*“But you said –”*

*“I do ... I do love you.”*

*“Then it’s silly to be afraid.”*

*“We’re in a church. It’s not a place ...”*

*“Church is a place for love. Where better to show it?”*

*“Not this type of ... love.”*

*“I want everyone to know ..."*

*"– people don’t understand!"*

*" We understand, don’t we?"*

*“Yes, Joanne.”*

*"Kiss me, Louise.”*

The Alex Glasgow Rules for Creating Naturalistic Dialogue

Dialogue is a **structured** and selected version of conversation that gives the illusion of real speech and is used to **develop the character**s, move the **storyline along** and **hint at important issues**. It creates **conflict** and **tension between characters**, and also good for **foreshadowing** and for indirect characterisation.

1. No more than nine words per utterance.
2. Use many incomplete sentence fragments.
3. Lots of ellipses, or points of suspension, shown by **…** or **—**
4. Add action: ‘I can’t come out tonight.’ Marcy scowled at herself in the mirror, her cold sore scowling back at her.
5. Plenty of interruptions, either by the other participants or because the speaker stops.
6. Give each person a different rhythm or pattern of speaking. Different language.

As the characters speak, they should tell us …

1. something about the speaker
2. **something about the person spoken to**
3. something about the situation (when, how or what)
4. something about the location (where)
5. something about the motivation (why) are they there?

Also ...

* maybe give one of your characters an idiosyncrasy like stuttering or the frequent use of particular slang (but use a light touch!)
* don’t use dialogue for clumsy plot advances such as ‘Yesterday I saw John and Harold who’ve just had twins and gone to live in Mexico because they fell out with their neighbours.’)
* don’t constantly write ‘Go!’ **he said.**
* **you don't need to use 'said' at all**
* **do not** use words such as **' he screamed' or 'he growled' -** better touse only the dialogue