[Taken from Chapter 2: Video Game Story Structure & Work Approach]

Using Dialogue to Convey Information

Dialogue in games serves two main purposes: **advancing story** and **conveying information**. When it comes to advancing the story (which can have any number of interpretations from learning more about a character, to creating some interesting reveal, to setting up a gag that is paid off later) you have a lot of flexibility in how your characters will talk and interact with one another. Other than the creative limits imposed on any project, and of course, the player's patience (which is a function of how interested they are in the story you're telling), you have a virtually unlimited palate that you can use for your dialogue. However, always remember that finger hovering over the action-button.

Conveying information through dialogue is another matter entirely. Here, you are relaying specific details that the player needs to move through the game. Let's take a look at some examples:

> *"I need to go to the store. I'm out of batteries, and I need to check my account balance at the ATM."*

Okay, what exactly is important to know from the above? That I need to go to the store? That I'm out of batteries? That I need to check my account balance? All three? Is the ATM at the store? Do I need to see if I have enough money to buy them, and that is why I need to check my balance at the ATM?

The point is, as far as dialogue goes (as un-compelling as it is), it does convey some needs and objectives that need to be accomplished. However, it gives no real direction or context in how to do so. And it doesn't't prioritize the goals that need to be achieved. Instead, let's break this up into something more useful:

> *"I gotta stop by the ATM first. I think I'm tapped, and I need to buy some batteries. Better to hit the ATM at the store and know for sure than to be embarrassed at checkout."*

Now we are doing much better. **We have a plan of attack clearly laid out.** First, we are going to the ATM, then buying the batteries, and then we are going to the store's checkout. **We have made one action contingent on the previous one.** We have identified where the ATM can be found, and the objective we are trying to accomplish (buy batteries).

As you are writing your dialogue, remember that lines are there to add depth to the story, and note which lines are giving instructions to the player. Is it necessary to always hit people over the head with direction? Of course not. Subtlety is key to not shining a beacon on instructional dialogue. **However, always keep in mind the context of your dialogue.** *Unlike other forms of entertainment, the words your characters speak are often the clues your player needs to advance through the experience.* You can inadvertently fool him and frustrate him with a careless piece of dialogue that he believes is direction and sends him off on a wild goose chase, but one you believed was just a clever turn of a phrase. **Remember that words matter.**