

## Identify the techniques of dialogue

Having examined what makes for interesting and effective dialogue, this activity provides an opportunity to look at some professional examples of scripts.

There are 6 extracts from scripts provided and below, a reminder of the 10 key points that help to create excellent dialogue. Using the space around the outside of the examples, annotate where the techniques have been used and offer some personal opinion and ideas as to why each technique has been useful.

Finally, use the space at the bottom of this page to explain which of the scripts you think is the most effective and with reasons why.

### **1. It must characterise the personality of the speaker.**

The way that a character speaks, what they say and how they say it are vital components of creating individuals. Just as real people express themselves in unique ways, so must your characters.

### **2. It must maintain the individuality of the speaker but still remain in the style of the screenplay.**

Whilst it's important to ensure that your characters are individuals, they mustn't sound anachronistic or not suit the genre in some way. If your screenplay has a particular style or tone, your characters, regardless of their individuality, must still fit within this universe.

### **3. It must reflect the speaker's mood or emotion or provide some window into their life.**

How your character feels when they're speaking is important to them and it should be important to the audience. It's also vitally important as it not only reveals information that makes your characters seem more 'real' but can allow the narrative to develop.

### **4. It must reveal the motivation of the speaker or attempt to hide their emotion.**

What a character wants to do can be shown on screen through direction, but sometimes dialogue allows the audience to get a clear understanding of *why* a character wants to do something.

### **5. It must reflect the relationship of the speaker to others.**

When we speak to people we address them in a way that reflects our relationships; we may be incredibly friendly, informal and chatty with our friends, but be much colder, formal and reticent if addressing someone in authority.

### **6. It must lead into action or help to join the story from previous action.**

Carefully consider what effect the scene before may have on your character and their dialogue going forward.

### **7. It must advance action.**

Ensure that your characters have a purpose to their dialogue, that they're not just saying something for the sake of it so that ideally, it propels the story in a naturally sounding way.

### **8. It must aim to carry information or exposition in a natural manner.**

Information or exposition must be revealed in a natural and restricted manner, carefully revealing motivation or ideas one at a time and in a way that doesn't feel forced or as if the character is speaking to not only another character but also at the same time, the audience.

### **9. It must have a purpose, for example, to foreshadow.**

Not every utterance from a character has to lead to a revelation later on in the screenplay, but some information relating to a key plot point later on can be referenced via character dialogue

### **10. It must be clear and comprehensible to the audience.**

Sentence lengths should be relatively short, any words from characters should be just a few lines at a time and ensure that word length, syllable length and punctuation is carefully managed to ensure that the rhythm of the dialogue flows in a fluid style.

I think the most effective script extract is...

## Extract 1: Rebel Without A Cause

RAY

He makes you feel pretty unhappy?

JUDY

(crying)

He calls me a dirty tramp--my own father!

RAY

Do you think your father means that?

JUDY

Yes! I don't know! I mean maybe he doesn't mean it but he acts like he does. We're altogether and we're going to celebrate Easter and catch a double bill. Big deal. So I put on my new dress and I came out and he--

RAY

That one?

JUDY

Yes--he started yelling for a handkerchief--screaming. He grabbed my face and he rubbed all my lipstick off--he rubbed till I thought I wouldn't have any lips left. And all the time yelling at me--that thing--the thing I told you he called me. Then I ran out of the house.

RAY

Is that why you were wandering around at one o'clock in the morning?

## Extract 2: Slumdog Millionaire

SHANKAR

I'm looking after them.

He makes the universal baksheesh sign with his hands.  
Salim immediately spots a fellow traveller.

SALIM

Ahh. What if they don't pay?

SHANKAR

Godbole's Uncle has a shoe shop in  
Delhi.

SALIM

First class. What about the cops?

SHANKAR

Every now and then we have to  
catch somebody and turn them in.  
Or at least pretend to.

SALIM

Right.

Salim processes this information. Sees an opening.

SALIM (CONT'D)

Do you-?

SHANKAR

You wouldn't mind? We haven't had  
a chase for a while now.

SALIM

Kid, you couldn't catch me if you  
tried.

He snatches up the shoes he was trying on and races  
across the marble floor of the Taj.

SHANKAR

Hey! Stop thief! Stop thief!

The cry is taken up by the other street kids who all hare  
after him screaming theatrically.

EXT. TAJ MAHAL. MAUSOLEUM. DAY.

Amir comes out of the mausoleum into the bright sunlight  
and looks around for Salim. No sign of him. Amir happens  
to be standing right next to the booth advertising guided  
tours when a German couple approach.

## Extract 3: Little Miss Sunshine

JEFF (O.C.)

(filtered)

Sheryl, hey, it's Jeff. Listen, great news. You know, when Olive was down here last month, she was runner up in the regional Little Miss Sunshine...?

RICHARD

(calling to Sheryl)

It's from Jeff.  
(to himself)  
Fuck!

He stalks off. The MESSAGE plays to the empty kitchen.

JEFF (O.C.)

(filtered)

...Well, they just called me and said that the girl who won had to forfeit her crown. I don't know why -- something about diet pills -- but anyway, that means Olive won the regionals, so now she has a place in the State contest in Boca. They want to make sure she can make it, so I said you'd call them...

Sheryl re-enters. She tries to listen to Jeff's message.

JEFF (cont'd) (O.C.)

(filtered)

...The woman's name is Lauren Henderson and her number...

BEEEEEP. The machine cuts him off. Sheryl, not understanding, shakes her head and returns to making her salad. Richard re-enters, picks up the phone and dials. Over the following, Dwayne comes in and out, picking up stuff to set the table.

RICHARD

(into phone)

Richard Harvey for Stan Grossman. Can you reach him...?! Yeah, tell him I want to know this thing is done -- I'm waiting for the numbers. No, I understand that. I understand. Look, he has my cell, if he could just call me anytime over the weekend and let me know we're on, I'd be very, very grateful. Okay. Thank you. Bye.

He hangs up.

**Extract 4: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**

MCMURPHY

(as he peels the Band-Aid  
off, revealing a scar)

I tell ya, these goons showered me  
at the courthouse this morning,  
last night at the jail, and I swear  
they'd have swabbed my ears out on  
the way over if they could've found  
the facilities...

A young Japanese nurse, named ITSU, passes by.

MCMURPHY (CONT'D)

(to Nurse Itsu)

Hey, how ya doin', cutie?

NURSE ITSU

Okay. How you doing?

MCMURPHY

Just great!

(calling after her)

See ya around!

Nurse Itsu laughs and disappears around the corner.

MCMURPHY (CONT'D)

(to Nurse Pilbow)

Yes, sir, I sure am gonna enjoy my  
stay here.

MISS PILBOW

I'm sure you will.

MCMURPHY

(to Nurse Pilbow)

Ya know, I ain't never been in an  
institution of psychology before.

MISS PILBOW

Oh...

They arrive at the ward door. Nurse Pilbow unlocks the door  
and opens it as...

MCMURPHY

Yeah, I'm here on a ninety-day  
observation period. Short-timer,  
like they say...

## Extract 5: Casablanca

CARL  
Open up, Abdul.

ABDUL  
(respectfully)  
Yes, Herr Professor.

Abdul opens the door and Carl goes into the gambling room.

INT. RICK'S CAFE - GAMBLING ROOM - NIGHT

There is much activity at the various tables. At one table TWO WOMEN and a MAN play cards. They glance at another table. One of them calls to Carl.

FIRST WOMAN  
Uh, waiter.

CARL  
Yes, Madame?

FIRST WOMAN  
Will you ask Rick if he'll have a drink with us?

CARL  
Madame, he never drinks with customers. Never. I have never seen him.

SECOND WOMAN  
(disappointedly)  
What makes saloon-keepers so snobbish?

MAN  
(to Carl)  
Perhaps if you told him I ran the second largest banking house in Amsterdam.

CARL  
The second largest? That wouldn't impress Rick. The leading banker in Amsterdam is now the pastry chef in our kitchen.

MAN  
We have something to look forward to.

## Extract 6: Vertigo

SCOTTIE

Well, I'm on the bum; I'll buy him a couple of drinks and tell him my troubles. But not tonight. If you won't drink with me, I'll drink alone, tonight.

(He rises to go)

MIDGE

Sorry, old man. Work.

SCOTTIE

Midge, what did you mean, there's no losing it?

MIDGE

What.

SCOTTIE

My... the acrophobia.

MIDGE

I asked my doctor. He said only another emotional shock could do it, and probably wouldn't. And you're not going to go diving off another rooftop to find out.

SCOTTIE

I think I can lick it.

MIDGE

How?

SCOTTIE

I've got a theory. Look. If I can get used to heights just a little at a time... progressively see?

He has been looking about eagerly, sees a low footstool, drags it to the center of the room as he speaks.

SCOTTIE

Here, I'll show you what I mean. We'll start with this.

MIDGE

That!?!

SCOTTIE

What do you want me to start with -- the Golden Gate Bridge?