

Fiction Essentials: Dialogue, Module 1

Handout 1.1 Layout and punctuation

Punctuation of dialogue

This is the normal punctuation for dialogue in a novel published in English:

‘Hi,’ Marta said. ‘How are you?’

‘Oh, I’ll be fine,’ Janet said, ‘once I get a little fresh air.’

That didn’t seem likely. Pale and rake thin, Janet looked worse than Marta had ever seen her. Marta chose her words carefully.

‘Do you think you can take a full day out?’ she asked. Janet looked mutinous, but Marta kept on. ‘It’s a long hike, there and back.’

‘Of course I can!’ Janet snapped. ‘Like they say: “there’s life in the old dog yet”!’

Marta smiled apologetically.

‘I believe you! You’re tougher than I am.’

Please note: either single “ or double “” quotes can be used.

Font

Use a serif typeface like Times New Roman, Garamond or Georgia.

Paragraph formatting

The following refers to formatting for a published novel.

First line indent of 1.27cm.
6pt spacing after each line.

It should look like this in the paragraph setting in Word:

The screenshot shows the 'Paragraph' dialog box in Microsoft Word, specifically the 'Indents and Spacing' tab. The 'General' section shows 'Alignment' set to 'Left' and 'Outline Level' set to 'Body Text'. The 'Indentation' section shows 'Left' and 'Right' indents set to '0 cm', and 'Special' set to 'First line' with a 'By' value of '1.27 cm'. The 'Spacing' section shows 'Before' spacing set to '0 pt' and 'After' spacing set to '6 pt'. The 'Line spacing' is set to 'Single'. There are checkboxes for 'Mirror Indents', 'Automatically adjust right indent when document grid is defined', 'Don't add space between paragraphs of the same style', and 'Snap to grid when document grid is defined'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Tabs...', 'Set As Default', 'Cancel', and 'OK'.

Handout 1.2 Who is speaking?

Elements of a character's background which will affect how they speak.

Character name			
Physical or neurological constraints or advantages			
Gender			
Age			
Class as a child			
Class as an adult			
Family			
Ethnicity			
Education			

Social group/s			
Location of childhood/Current location			
Training			
Personality			