

especially help to make the conversation sound natural. First, *the speakers use contractions* as we often do in real life. Second, *the speakers use incomplete sentences*. Although these things are not acceptable in formal writing, they do contribute to natural dialogue. Third, *the speakers change frequently* from one to another. There should not be many long quotations in a story.

In dialogue, be careful to put quotation marks only where they belong. If a speaker says several sentences together, do not put quotation marks around every sentence. Put them only at the beginning and end of the whole quotation. The words that simply tell the story should not be inside quotation marks.

Begin a new paragraph in your story each time you begin a new topic. Also begin a new paragraph each time a different person begins to speak.

Another way to write dialogue that shows rather than tells is to use descriptive explanatory words. *Said* is a good word; you should not be afraid to use it sometimes. But it is not very descriptive. Characters should *ask, whisper, shout, complain, demand, and suggest* some of their words. Try to think of words that describe exactly *how* the speakers talk.

Sometimes writers think that natural-sounding dialogue should include poor grammar and slang. Although some people do use such expressions in their conversations, they are not necessary to make natural conversations. Such expressions are unsuitable for Christian writing.

### Lively Action Verbs

Another way to show the details of the story is to use lively action verbs as much as possible. If you use too many linking verbs and use the passive voice too freely, your characters will seem motionless. Even verbs in the active voice can be used in a way that dulls the action of the story. But if you use lively, active verbs, your story will seem real—as if it were happening right before your reader's eyes.

In each pair of examples, notice how much more effective the second example is than the first.

Charlene's face was full of smiles again.

Charlene smiled freely again.

Later in the evening Mary Louise was reminded of her fault.

Later in the evening Mother reminded Mary Louise of her fault.

The wind grew strong. Soon the windows were rattling and the tree branches were tossing in the storm.

The wind increased in strength. Soon the storm rattled the windows and tossed the tree branches.

### 2. Use lively action verbs as much as possible.

- Too many linking verbs and passive voice verbs will make your characters seem motionless.
- Poor use of active voice verbs also dulls the action of the story.
- Lively, active verbs make the story seem real—as if it were happening right before your reader's eyes.

### 3. Use exact, descriptive words instead of general ones.

