Formatting Your Dialogue

There are a lot of rules to follow when writing dialogue. If you don’t follow them, you leave the reader confused and irritated. No one wants an angry reader. An angry reader is a dangerous thing. They might lash out in character related violence, or worse, they might stop reading. So, follow these rules to keep your reader happy and reading:

1. **New Person, New Paragraph**—Characters are selfish. They don’t like sharing. No character wants to share a paragraph with other characters. Every time a new character speaks, they get a new paragraph. No exceptions. You can add action, dialogue tags, and a small amount of detail to the paragraph, but no new speakers. You can even have the same character talk again after action within the same paragraph, but no one else. Ever.

2. **Easy on the Exclamation points**—Less is more. Always.

3. **Quotation Marks**—Make sure every spoken word is surrounded with these “ “. If it is said out loud, it should have them. If it is a thought, you can highlight it instead.

4. **Punctuating Dialogue**—The punctuation for dialogue goes in the quotation marks. Here are some examples to help you distinguish between when to end a sentence, and when to use a comma.

   “I don’t care if you love her, you cannot get married when you are thirteen,” said Mom.

   What Mom says is one sentence of dialogue, so you will put a comma at the end and a period after the dialogue tag to finish the whole sentence of narrative (which is the dialogue + the tag).

   Here’s how to add a dialogue tag in the middle:

   “But Mom,” cried Juliet, “I love him.”

   And here’s what do with a question mark:

   “How can you love him?” sighed Mom. “You just met.”

   And that’s how to format dialogue. You are welcome.