**Formatting Dialogue: A Quick And Dirty Guide**

Formatting dialogue correctly can trip up even the most talented writer. From the outside it can appear that formatting dialogue is a black box of contradictory rules. In this article, I want to dispel this myth and detail a set of easy-to-use guidelines that will allow you to grasp the basic building blocks of dialogue formatting.

The best way to explain the rules of formatting dialogue is to use an example:

**Hi have you seen my cat Bob said. No Bill said I have no idea where your cat is. If you see my cat will you let me know Bob questioned looking sad. Of course Bill replied with a tone of concern. (Unformatted Dialogue!)**

**Formatting Dialogue: New Speaker, New Line**

This is a pretty easy rule to apply. Each time a new speaker speaks you place the line of dialogue on a new line. This line should also be indented. We can see how this applies to our example:

Hi have you seen my cat Bob said.

No Bill said I have no idea where your cat is.

If you see my cat will you let me know Bob questioned looking sad.

Of course Bill replied with a tone of concern.

**Formatting Dialogue: Adding Speech Marks**

Our next rule says that all speech should be placed in speech marks. These can be either single (') or double ("), it's your choice. However, keep in mind that if you use, say single ('), you need to be using the opposite, in this case double (") when you are reporting speech inside speech. I also like to use the opposite when a writer places thoughts within a text.

'Hi have you seen my cat' Bob said.

'No' Bill said 'I have no idea where your cat is.'

'If you see my cat will you let me know' Bob questioned looking sad.

'Of course' Bill replied with a tone of concern.

**Formatting Dialogue: Punctuation**

When writing dialogue you will often use 'tags'. These are verbs that link the spoken words with the remainder of the sentence. Commonly used tags includes said, asked, replied and many more. Without going into the technical detail, to correctly punctuate spoken words and tags you must link them using a comma. If you use a full stop the sentences are broken and it no longer makes sense. If we look at the second line of our example we see:

'No' Bill said

This is a single sentence and therefore must end with a full stop, giving us:

'No' Bill said.

The tag in this sentence is 'said' and this must be connected to the speech. If you added a full stop at the end of the spoken words, it would separate the tag and become incorrect:

'No.' Bill said. [WRONG]

Instead we must link the spoken word and the tag with a comma, this gives us:

'No,' Bill said. [CORRECT]

If we apply this to the full example we get:

'Hi, have you seen my cat?' Bob said.

'No,' Bill said. 'I have no idea where your cat is.'

'If you see my cat will you let me know?' Bob questioned, looking sad.

'Of course,' Bill replied, with a tone of concern.