

Creative Writing  
Lesson: Wed., April 8

**Learning Target:**  
Students will practice writing dialogue.

**Let's Get Started:**  
Watch Video: [Moneyball](#)

## Practice:

1. [Watch the video](#) from the film *Moneyball*. Watch simply for an understanding of character and conflict.
2. As you watch it again, pay attention to how the dialogue--action--both moves the story forward and shapes character. Record a phrase or two that reveals character.
3. Later in the lesson, you will practice recording dialogue as we would in fiction, so leave the video up. First, though, let's consider a couple of ideas.

## What does good dialogue do?

- reveals character
- creates conflict / drama
- moves the story forward
- creates a sense of authenticity

## When *not* to use dialogue:

- to explain something that should be obvious (“...and that’s why I’m standing here now”) or would be better expressed through narration (“Man, it’s coming down hard out there, huh?”)
- to express feeling (“I’m really mad!”) when action or gesture would work better
  - for filler (“How about those Chiefs?”)

## But! (There are exceptions.)

- Story is all about conflict! In a scene, a couple of characters are both trying to get what they want. Likely, both can't get it (and compromise is boring)!
- If your character is trying to wriggle out of conflict, yes, maybe they try a delay tactic--that's shaping character.



## Practice:

1. Now, write a part of the dialogue exchange between the *Moneyball* characters *in prose* (or, in other words, as if it were a short story) using quotes.
2. Between the exchanges, when the character makes a gesture in the film clip, describe that gesture and add any internal monologue you think the film might capture that would be represented in prose.
3. If you're struggling, go to the next slide and check out my example.

## Example:

“Carlos, you’ve been traded to the Tigers.” Peter blinks, his shoulders tense, waiting for some kind of reaction from Carlos. There is none. He points to a sheet of paper on a small table between them, the kind you’d see in a cheap motel room in Detroit. The air seems stale, unbreathable. “This is Jake Palmer’s number. He’s the traveling secretary for the team. He’s expecting your call; he’ll take care of everything.”

After a moment, Carlos reaches for the sheet of paper and studies it from an arm’s length like an animal that might at any moment strike. He rubs his day-old beard with a feverish intensity.

“Is that it?”

“Yes,” says Peter. His voice is dull. He wants to tell Carlos how good he’s done for the team, but he’d be lying. And, anyway, Carlos would see through it. *Do not shoot him in the chest*, he thinks. *Do not shoot him in the chest.*

“Okay.” Carlos stands with the paper, his leather bag, and leaves.

Peter breathes again.

## **Additional Practice/Resources:**

Click on the links below for additional resources.

How does gesture and action affect pacing? Read back through your entry and see if it matches up, in terms of timing, with the clip. Then, go back to your own writing and see where you could add a simple gesture to affect a more natural pacing of the scene you're trying to write.

### [It Happened One Night](#)

Try it again with this classic scene from “It Happened One Night.” How does the tension intensify throughout the scene? What’s the payoff?

### [Excellent Dialogue \(The Paris Review blog\)](#)