

WRITING FOR TV FILM AND RADIO

WEEK 2

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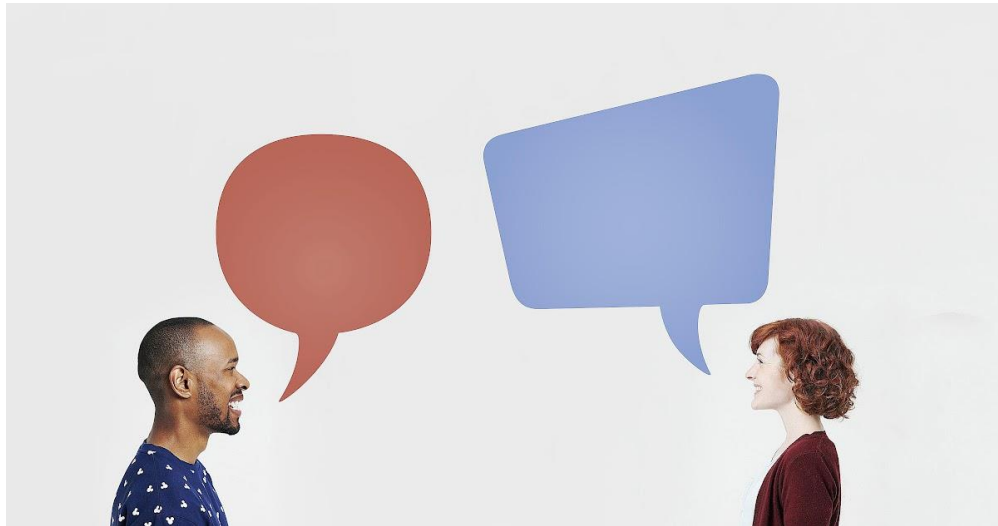
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DIALOGUE



- Nothing is trivial – everything is significant.
- Needs to sound like real speech but in reality it has to be compressed and sparing.
- Real life scenes don't reach a conclusion but screenplays must have a drive and come to a conclusion.
- Dialogue should be a function of your character, therefore....
- **KNOW YOUR CHARACTER!**

DIALOGUE SHOULD...



- **Be a function of character**
- **Move the story forwards**
- **Reveal character**
- **Establish character relationships**
- **Make your characters real, natural and spontaneous**
- **Reveal the conflicts of the story and characters**
- **Reveal the emotional states of your characters**
- **Comment on the action**



CREATING VOICES

- **Diction:** the type of language the narrator uses (e.g. standard or non-standard English? A mixture of languages?)
- **Syntax:** the sentence structure (e.g. do they use long, complex sentences with lots of clauses, and a rather indirect way of communicating ideas that might otherwise be conveyed in a more succinct manner?)
- **Idiolect:** the particular idiosyncrasies of an individual (e.g. their preference for certain words or types of words such as slang, short-hand, hyperbole, hedging language – *like, literally*)
- **Tone:** is the character warm and friendly or detached and scientific?
- **Authenticity:** how can we writer voices other than our own?

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SPOKEN VERSUS WRITTEN LANGUAGE

- In order to write convincing dialogue you need to pay close attention to how people speak in real life...
- There are big differences between written and spoken language:
 - Written language tends to be more formal than spoken language.
 - Spoken language is very messy; it's a continual process of improvisation and editing on the spot.
 - Written language hides all of these edits away in the final draft; we expect written language to be constructed carefully and accurately, paying attention to formal grammar.

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WHAT MAKES EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE?

- The paradox of writing dialogue for performance: we are aiming to capture authentic language, process it through fictional characters, and capture it on the page in such a way that it doesn't FEEL like written language.
- For dialogue to be realistic, it needs to contain a degree of messiness.
- On the other hand, hyper-realism can be tiresome to watch because we have certain expectations of performance:
 - concision;
 - entertainment;
 - a carefully constructed plot;
 - the ILLUSION of realism.



DIALOGUE

“An Ibsenite sentence often performs four or five functions at once. It sheds light on the character speaking, on the character spoken to, on the character spoken about; it furthers the plot; it functions ironically in conveying to the audience a meaning different from that conveyed to the characters.”

Eric Bentley, in J L Styan's *The Elements of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) p.12.

CREATING THE ILLUSION OF REALITY

- **Dual dialogue** is a technique that allows the actors to grasp when and where their speech should overlap.
- The result is not only to create a realistic rhythm within the speech but to speed up the dialogue by compressing it.
- E.g. At the start of her screenplay, *Little Women*, Greta Gerwig includes the following note on the dialogue:

Where there is simultaneous or quick dialogue in the script, there is a **SLASH in the middle of the speaker's dialogue, representing where the next actor should begin. The following actor's line will be started with a **SLASH** to indicate that it is interrupting another line.**

Amy looks at all the passers-by. She sees a somber young man, tall and dark and looking down as he walks. Suddenly!

AMY
STOP THE CARRIAGE! LAURIE! LAURIE!

Abandoning her primness, she launches out of the carriage and runs, nearly knocking people over. This is Theodore Laurence, **LAURIE**, a 26-year-old without a sense of direction, like most 26-year-olds. They hug joyously and un-self-consciously:

LAURIE
AMY! You're so /grown up!

AMY
/You wrote you'd come to the hotel!

LAURIE
I looked for you and couldn't find /you anywhere!

AMY
/You didn't look hard enough!

LAURIE
Maybe I just didn't recognize you, you've become so beaut/iful.

AMY
(making a face)
/Please don't.

LAURIE
I thought you liked that sort of
thing!

AMY
NO. Where's your Grandfather?

LAURIE
Still in Germany. I'm on my
own, traveling and /having
fun.

AMY
(teasing him)
/and drinking and gambling
and flirting...

LAURIE
Don't tell your mother!

AMY
Are you chasing some young girl
across Europe?

LAURIE
(darkening)
No.

ANTIPHONAL DIALOGUE: REPETITION FOR RHETORICAL EFFECT

Extract from *The Shawshank Redemption*:

SCENE: Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) and Red (Morgan Freeman) are talking in the prison yard.

Andy: I've been thinking about something.

Red: What's that?

Andy: How come you never talk about your wife?

Red: What's to say? She died.

Andy: I know, but...

Red: What? You want me to cry? You want me to break down?

Andy: No, of course not.

Red: Then what do you want?

Andy: I don't know. I just thought...

Red: Thought what?

ANTIPHONAL DIALOGUE: REPETITION FOR RHETORICAL EFFECT

Andy: That maybe if you talked about it, it might help.

Red: Help what?

Andy: I don't know. Maybe it would help you to heal.

Red: I'm healed.

Andy: Are you sure?

Red: Of course I'm sure. I've been in here for 20 years. I've had plenty of time to heal.

Andy: But...

Red: Andy, I'm not going to talk about my wife. It's over. It's done. And I'm not going to let it define me.

Andy: Okay.

Red: Okay.

ANTIPHONAL DIALOGUE: REPETITION FOR RHETORICAL EFFECT

Andy: I don't know. I just **thought**...

Red: **Thought** what?

Andy: That maybe if you talked about it, it might **help**.

Red: **Help** what?

Andy: I don't know. Maybe it would help you to **heal**.

Red: I'm **healed**.

DROP LINE: A SIMPLE, CONTRASTING LINE THAT CHANGES THE DIRECTION OF THE SCENE.

E.g. A Very English Scandal by Russell T Davies

BESSELL

I'm not sure. It's an easy mistake to make. He's effeminate, and therefore we think he's weak. But that man sits in pubs and clubs and houses and hotels telling all the world about his homosexuality. Out loud! All day long! Doesn't bother him who's listening, priests, or housewives, or landlords, or anyone. He tells the truth. And doesn't care. No one else does that, Jeremy. No one. Certainly not us. In the whole of this land, there is Norman and Norman alone. To be blunt. He amazes me. I think he's one of the strongest men in the world.

Jeremy grim. His face like a death mask.

JEREMY

Then there's only one thing we can do. Kill him.

DROP LINE: A SIMPLE, CONTRASTING LINE THAT CHANGES THE DIRECTION OF THE SCENE.

E.g.

In *Get Out* by Jordan Peele, the protagonist, Chris, sets off to visit the family of his new girlfriend, Rose. His friend, Rod is sceptical about the match from the start – he even jokes that if it all goes wrong, he's not going to rush in and save the day. This is a set up that is paid off at the very end of the movie, after Chris faces the monster. There is a long, drawn-out battle scene full of drama and tension. Then, Rod turns up to rescue Chris and it is Rod who delivers the last line of the movie.

Rod: I told you to get the fuck out of that house, man.

After the high stakes of the drama, this line punctures the tension and ends the movie on a comic note.



CREATIVE EXERCISE

As a group, we're going to read the first ten pages of *Gentleman Jack* by Sally Wainwright.



CREATIVE EXERCISE

- Use the techniques we have looked at today, to write a dialogue between two or more characters in your screenplay.
- We'll come together to perform and workshop some of these.