



## OCTOBER 2010 NEWSLETTER

### WRITERS TIPS

#### **Writers Write!:**

It's that simple. Books don't write themselves. Neither do short stories or essays or even poems. If writing is important to you, find the time to do it! Take a writing weekend away from the kids, get up an hour earlier each day, block off one Saturday a month to write. Write good stuff, bad stuff, and everything in between. Just write!

#### **The Mechanics of Dialogue:**

A tag line is the word or words at the end of sentence that let you know who is speaking. For the most part, use "said" as your tag line. As readers, we have become so accustomed to this word that we skim right by it without disruption. Resist the urge to use flashy descriptors like "he prophesized, he uttered, he grumbled." The occasional and well-placed use of such descriptors is fine if it tells the reader something about the character, for example, but use them sparingly. Try not to use adverbs in your tag lines. If your dialogue is sharp, it should rarely be necessary to say, "he said irritably." Whenever possible, let your dialogue itself tell us how the speaker is delivering the line or use an action. "He then turned and walked away." Traditionally, dialogue passages have been surrounded by quotes. Modern writers are flirting with different ways to show dialogue. Writers like Kent Haruf use no quotation marks, yet we can still follow their dialogue. But these are master writers. Until you perfect your own style, the proper way to set off dialogue is with quotes.

*"John called and said he'll be home at eight," she said, "but I don't believe it."*

Punctuation, like commas and periods, should always be placed inside the quotation marks. If you interrupt a line of dialogue, as I did above, with a tag line or an action, you can pick it up again on the other side by putting a new set of quotes around it. Whenever a new character speaks, you need to start a new line and indent. That's how the reader keeps track of the speakers. If your punctuation and dialogue serve you well, you can and should go several lines before using another dialogue tag to tell us who's speaking. If one speaker is telling a story that goes on for several paragraphs, you can indicate that the same speaker is speaking by leaving the last line of each paragraph open—meaning no ending quotation mark. But you *should* put a quotation mark at the start of the new paragraph so we know she is still speaking. Only when

the speaker is completely finished, and you are moving on, do you enclose that passage with an end quote. It should look something like this:

*“When I was little, we lived in a brick house at the end of Chestnut Street. My mother worked in a factory and my father was a doctor. I was spoiled rotten. I really was. My grandmother lived with us and did everything for me. I never had to raise a finger to help. (notice no end quote because she is still speaking)*

*“Then one day my father and mother were killed in a car accident. I was fourteen by then and old enough to help support my grandmother and me. I dropped out of school and got a job at the same factory where my mother had worked. I’m still there.”*