6.8 Speech Marks in Narrative Writing: 30-minute Pack

about 30 minutes

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions in the spaces provided. Write in full sentences where asked. You should already be confident with the basic rules of punctuating direct speech; this pack focuses on how writers use dialogue as a craft tool.

The Last Rehearsal

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). Written specifically for this worksheet as a short narrative extract for practising dialogue as a narrative craft tool.

Backstage, five minutes before curtain

Yusuf paced the narrow strip of floor behind the curtain. 'What if my mind just goes blank and everyone's staring and ...' He shook his head and kept pacing, running his lines under his breath.

Deja appeared at his elbow with a costume pin between her teeth. 'Stand still,' she said, tugging his collar straight. 'You've done this scene forty times.'

'Forty times in an empty hall,' Yusuf muttered. 'Not in front of three hundred people.'

'They're not looking at your collar,' Deja said, snapping the pin shut. 'They're looking at your face. So look confident, even if you don't feel it.'

Mr Vance swept in, clipboard under one arm, and clapped his hands twice. 'Two minutes, everyone. Yusuf, where's my nervous energy? Channel it - don't let it channel you.'

'I know, I just -' Yusuf's voice cracked and he turned away.

Deja caught his sleeve. 'Hey.' She waited until he looked at her. 'You know this play better than anyone in that hall. Better than Mr Vance, probably,' she teased.

'I heard that,' Mr Vance called from across the wings, though he was smiling.

Yusuf laughed despite himself, some of the tension easing out of his shoulders.

'Better,' Deja said. 'Now go and be brilliant.'

The headset on Deja's belt crackled. 'House lights going down. Places, please.'

Yusuf took one last breath, rolled his shoulders back, and walked out from behind the curtain into the dark.

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1 Look again at the source text 'The Last Rehearsal'. Each of the following action beats attributes speech without using a reporting clause or a speech verb. State whether each one comes BEFORE or AFTER the dialogue it belongs to.

(a) 'Deja appeared at his elbow with a costume pin between her teeth.' **(1)**

(b) 'Yusuf laughed despite himself, some of the tension easing out of his shoulders.' **(1)**

(c) 'Mr Vance swept in, clipboard under one arm, and clapped his hands twice.' **(1)**

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2 Look again at "I heard that,' Mr Vance called from across the wings, though he was smiling.' Explain how the added clause 'though he was smiling' changes the reader's impression of Mr Vance, given that the verb 'called' alone might suggest he is annoyed.

(2)

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3 Punctuate this passage correctly, adding inverted commas and any other punctuation needed. Keep the action beat as its own sentence with no reporting clause, and show that the speech is suddenly cut off. Do not change the words: tom grabbed his bag and spun round youve got some nerve turning up now he began but the words caught in his throat

(3)

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4 Read this exchange: "I don't want to go,' said Ben sadly. 'Fine, then don't,' said Priya angrily. 'You never listen,' said Ben annoyedly.' Identify the weakest reporting clause in this exchange and explain why it is weak. Then rewrite that one line, replacing the reporting clause with either a stronger single verb or an action beat.

(3)

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5 Below is a passage with several errors in how dialogue is attributed and varied. Rewrite it correctly, fixing every error you can find.

'Jess ran into the room, "We have to leave now," she said quickly. Mo frowned. "Why. What's going on." Jess grabbed her coat. "There's no time to explain, I'll tell you in the car," she said, and pulled him towards the door.'

(6)

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6 Write an original scene (approximately 100-150 words) in which THREE different characters speak. Your writing must include: at least TWO action beats that attribute speech without a reporting clause, at least THREE different reporting verbs, ONE example of interrupted speech using a dash, and ONE example of speech trailing off using an ellipsis. Your dialogue should also reveal something about each character's personality through word choice, without stating it directly. Underline each of the four required technical features (both action beats, the dash, and the ellipsis).

(10)

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7 Which of the following best defines an 'action beat' in narrative dialogue?

- ☐ A) A sentence describing a character's physical action, placed next to their dialogue, that shows who is speaking without using a speech verb.
- ☐ B) A short line of dialogue with no punctuation.
- ☐ C) A reporting clause that must always follow the speech it belongs to.
- ☐ D) Any sentence in a story that contains a character's name.

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8 Look again at 'Deja caught his sleeve. "Hey."' from the source text.

(a) How does the reader know that Deja is the one speaking the word 'Hey', even though there is no reporting clause and no speech verb at all? **(1)**

(b) Give one advantage that writing dialogue this way, using only an action beat, has over always writing 'she said'. **(1)**

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9 Which punctuation mark is used in 'What if my mind just goes blank and everyone's staring and ...' to show Yusuf's fearful thought trailing off, rather than being cut off suddenly?

- ☐ A) ellipsis
- ☐ B) dash
- ☐ C) semicolon
- ☐ D) colon

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10 Look again at '"I know, I just -" Yusuf's voice cracked and he turned away.'

(a) What has happened to Yusuf's sentence at the dash? **(1)**

(b) Explain one difference in effect between this dash and the ellipsis used earlier in 'What if my mind just goes blank and everyone's staring and ...' **(1)**

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11 Look at each reporting verb below from the source text and explain what it suggests about the character's tone.

(a) 'Forty times in an empty hall,' Yusuf muttered. What does 'muttered' suggest about how Yusuf says this line? **(1)**

(b) 'I heard that,' Mr Vance called from across the wings. What does 'called' suggest about the way Mr Vance speaks here? **(1)**

(c) 'Better than Mr Vance, probably,' she teased. What does 'teased' suggest about Deja's tone here? **(1)**

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12 Which sentence correctly punctuates an action beat used to attribute speech, with NO reporting clause?

- [ ] A) Maya grabbed her bag, "I'm leaving."
- [ ] B) Maya grabbed her bag. "I'm leaving."
- [ ] C) Maya grabbed her bag "I'm leaving."
- [ ] D) Maya grabbed her bag; "I'm leaving."

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13 A character is described only as: 'Get out of my room,' she said. Rewrite the reporting clause using a stronger verb than 'said' that shows she is furious, then explain why your verb choice is more effective than 'said' here.

(2)

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Mark scheme · 6.8 Speech Marks in Narrative Writing: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

(a) before — **B1**

(a) Answer: **before**

(b) after — **B1**

(b) Answer: **after**

(c) before — **B1**

(c) Answer: **before**

Question 2

identifies the contrast/tension between the potentially stern verb 'called' and the added detail 'though he was smiling' — **B1**

develops the effect, e.g. it reveals that Mr Vance is more good-humoured and approachable than a stern director stereotype, or that he enjoys the banter with his students (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **'Called' alone might suggest Mr Vance is sharp or annoyed at being overheard, but 'though he was smiling' contradicts this, revealing that he is actually good-humoured and enjoys the banter with his students rather than being genuinely strict.**

Question 3

action beat correctly formed as its own sentence: capital 'Tom' and a full stop after 'round', with no reporting clause or comma — **B1**

opening inverted commas, capital 'You've' with the apostrophe correctly placed — **B1**

a dash (not a full stop or comma) before the closing inverted commas to show the speech is cut off, and 'he began, but the words caught in his throat' correctly punctuated, cao — **B1**

Answer: **Tom grabbed his bag and spun round. 'You've got some nerve turning up now -' he began, but the words caught in his throat.**

Question 4

identifies the weakest example, e.g. 'said Ben annoyedly' - 'annoyedly' is not standard English, and this is the third 'said + adverb' construction in a row, becoming monotonous and telling rather than showing (oe) — **B1**

a valid rewrite replacing the reporting clause with a stronger verb (e.g. 'Ben snapped') or an action beat (e.g. 'Ben folded his arms.') — **B1**

explanation linking the revision to a clearer or more effective effect, e.g. it shows Ben's irritation through action or word choice rather than simply labelling it with an adverb (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **'Said Ben annoyedly' is the weakest: 'annoyedly' is not idiomatic English, and it is the third 'said + adverb' construction in a row, which becomes repetitive and tells the reader how to feel instead of showing it. Revised: Ben folded his arms. 'You never listen.' This shows Ben's irritation through his action rather than simply labelling it with a clumsy adverb.**

Question 5

Level 0 No accurate corrections made; errors remain uncorrected or new errors introduced. — **0**

Level 1 One or two errors corrected (e.g. the missing question marks), but the action-beat punctuation and repetitive reporting verbs remain largely unaddressed. — **1-2**

Level 2 Most errors corrected, including the action beat wrongly punctuated as a reporting clause and the missing question marks, with some attempt to vary the reporting verbs. — **3-4**

Level 3 All errors corrected accurately: the action beat is a properly demarcated sentence, both questions are correctly punctuated, and the reporting verbs/action beats are varied and purposeful throughout. — **5-6**

Indicative content:

- 'Jess ran into the room,' corrected to 'Jess ran into the room.' (full stop, not comma, since running into a room is not a speech verb)
- 'Why. What's going on.' corrected to 'Why? What's going on?' (both are genuine questions and need question marks, not full stops)
- The repeated, flat 'she said' is varied, e.g. one tag replaced with a stronger verb (such as 'Jess gasped') or an action beat, to better convey urgency
- The generic adverb 'quickly' is replaced or removed once a stronger verb or clearer action is doing that work, avoiding a 'said + adverb' construction
- The action beat 'Jess grabbed her coat.' is kept as its own complete sentence, correctly separated from the dialogue that follows
- Overall rewrite shows a controlled, purposeful range of reporting verbs and action beats used to build urgency, rather than repetitive 'said' tags

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Question 6

AO5: Content and organisation (AO5)

Level 1 A simple scene with some indication of three speakers; little sense of distinct voices or clear organisation. **1-2**

Level 2 A recognisable three-speaker scene with distinct, if simple, voices and personalities suggested through dialogue; ideas are mostly well organised. **3-4**

Level 3 A convincing, well-organised three-speaker scene in which each character's personality is clearly revealed through distinctive word choices and dialogue, without being stated directly. **5-6**

AO6: Technical accuracy (dialogue as a craft tool) (AO6)

Level 1 The required features (action beats, varied reporting verbs, dash, ellipsis) are mostly missing or used inaccurately. **1**

Level 2 Most of the required features are present and mostly accurate, with occasional errors in punctuation or placement. **2-3**

Level 3 All required features - two action beats, three reporting verbs, a dash and an ellipsis - are present, clearly underlined, and used accurately and effectively alongside a controlled range of other sentence forms. **4**

Indicative content:

- Three distinct characters are each given directly attributed speech
- At least two action beats attribute speech without any reporting clause at all
- At least three different reporting verbs are used purposefully, avoiding repeated 'said' tags
- A dash is used to show speech suddenly interrupted or cut off
- An ellipsis is used to show speech trailing off or hesitating
- Word choice and sentence structure in each character's dialogue hints at their personality (e.g. nervousness, confidence, dry humour) without the narrator stating it directly
- Underlining clearly marks each of the four required technical features

Question 7

A **B1**

Answer: **A**

Question 8

(a) the dialogue immediately follows the action beat that names Deja, so the reader attributes the speech to her by proximity **B1**

(a) Answer: **'Hey' directly follows the action beat naming Deja, so the reader links the speech to her.**

(b) keeps the pace quick and avoids repetitive reporting clauses, while also showing physical action/emotion at the same time (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: **It keeps the writing fast-paced and varied, avoiding constant repetition of 'said', while also showing Deja's physical action at the same moment.**

Question 9

A **B1**

Answer: **A**

Question 10

(a) it is abruptly cut off/interrupted before he can finish, overwhelmed by emotion **B1**

(a) Answer: **His sentence is suddenly cut off, unfinished, as emotion overwhelms him.**

(b) the dash shows a sudden, sharp break as emotion overwhelms him mid-sentence, whereas the ellipsis shows a softer, slower trailing-off as his fearful thought simply fades (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: **The dash shows a sudden, sharp break in speech, while the ellipsis shows a slower, softer trailing-off, as if the thought simply fades rather than being sharply stopped.**

Question 11

(a) quietly, under his breath, with frustration or resentment, not wanting to be fully heard (oe) **B1**

(a) Answer: **It suggests he says the line quietly and resentfully, half under his breath.**

(b) he projects his voice loudly across the distance, confidently, without needing to move closer (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: **It suggests he raises his voice to be heard clearly from a distance, confidently and without effort.**

(c) playful, light-hearted, gently mocking rather than serious or unkind (oe) **B1**

(c) Answer: **It suggests she is being playful and gently mocking, rather than serious or unkind.**

Question 12

B **B1**

Answer: **B**

Question 13

a valid stronger verb conveying fury, correctly used grammatically (e.g. snapped, snarled, spat, shouted, yelled), oe **B1**

explanation linking the verb choice to the character's fury/relationship rather than simply restating the definition **B1**

Answer: **'Get out of my room,' she snapped. 'Snapped' is more effective than 'said' because it conveys the sharp, sudden anger in her voice without needing an extra adverb to explain the emotion.**

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