



YPIP

DIALOGUE & ACTION



SAY WHAT?

Dialogue is what the characters say. Pretty simple, right?

Maybe! Sometimes characters say what they mean.
Sometimes they use subtext, or underlying meaning.

Characters don't
necessarily need to use
proper grammar, or even
real words.

BUT

Each of your characters
should sound unique, and
have unique viewpoints.

**While the idea of dialogue seems simple, it's not.
Because it's directly tied to....**

ACTION!

It's a misconception that a play is made up of dialogue – it's made up of action.

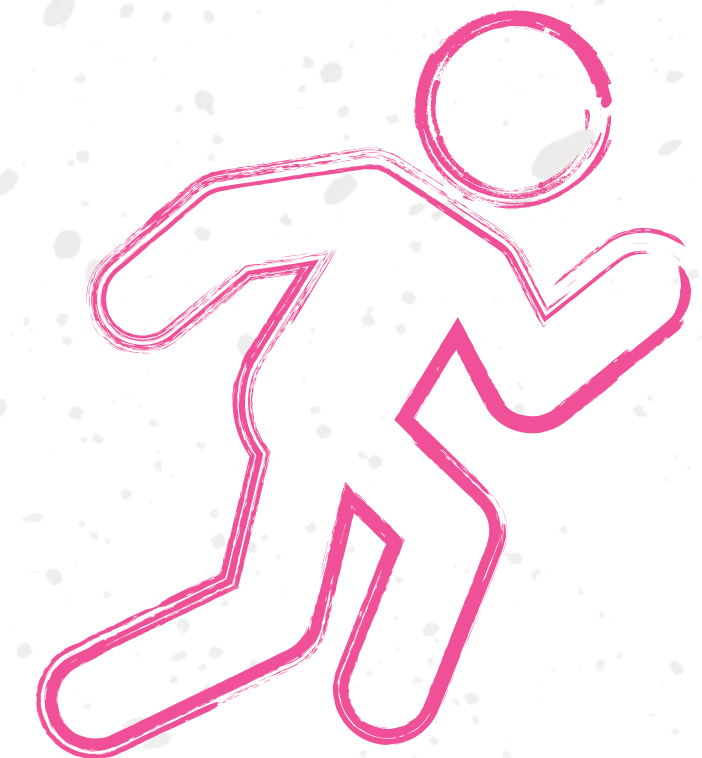
Characters DOING. In novels, there are lots of descriptions and characters' thoughts. In plays, all we have is action!

Your protagonist can **WANT** something, but we don't understand that until we see them **TRY**.



Wanting is
PASSIVE

Trying is
ACTIVE



TWO WAYS TO PLAY IT

There are 2 main ways we get action from a play:



DIALOGUE

What does a character **SAY** to get what they want?



BEHAVIOR

What does a character **DO** to get what they want?

A teacher of mine
once said 'a teaspoon
of behavior is worth a
pound of words.'



FINDING THE ACTION

Look at this section from *Mermaids*. Where can you find action in both dialogue AND behavior? Remember, action doesn't have to be super physical - it's the character making choices and trying to get something they want.

DON

Plenty of people have to take two or even three swings at it before they kill it for good. And you're stronger than most of them.

CECELIA

That's what happens. Things rot and disintegrate and later, there's no sign they ever even lived.

DON

(Jumping up)

You know what'll help? Some nice, hot tea. It'll warm you up. You know? I saw a little shop about a mile up the road. Why don't you stay here, and I'll run back and get a mug for you. "It's a Grind," I think it was called. How clever.

CECELIA

They have those in every town.

DON

It'll make you feel better. You know it will.

CECELIA

I don't like tea.

DON

Hot chocolate then.

CECILIA

Please, just sit with me.

(He does. They stare at the ocean for a moment.)

FINDING THE ACTION CONT.

If Don wants to **ENCOURAGE** Cecilia, he tries in many ways.

He affirms her strength.

He pivots to cheering her up with hot tea.

He offers drink options!

Overall, he works hard to distract her.

Let's say Cecilia wants to **GRIEVE**, and she has action too.

She rejects Don's drink offers.

Her behavior shows her not giving in to his attempts.

Finally she tells him exactly what she needs, which is for him to simply sit with her.

NOW YOU TRY!

EXERCISE:

Using two characters (either from your play or two new ones), write a scene based on this scenario:

One has something the other wants. However, their dialogue and behaviors can only be about an unrelated activity (like fixing a car, organizing a closet, etc.)

How can you tell the story of their wants through action? What do you learn about those characters?