

## Lesson 4: Writing Dialogue for Anti-Heroes

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Normally, I wouldn't have a specific lesson for dialogue because no matter what kind of character you're developing, having a firm grasp on your character's voice is across the board. However, because anti-hero traits are so often found within voice or language, I wanted to highlight how you can use dialogue to your advantage in creating compelling anti-heroes.

### Capturing the Anti-Hero Voice

A character's voice is not just the way they speak, but also the way they interact with the world around them. It is their thought patterns, their mannerisms, and their unique perspective on the events that unfold around them. Capturing a character's voice is essential for making them feel real and authentic to readers.

When you're writing anti-hero characters, there is always a uniqueness to the way they speak simply because they are unconventional characters. Here are some ways in which your anti-hero character's voice could be captured:

- **Tone and Attitude:** Anti-heroes often have a darker or more cynical tone in their speech. They may use sarcasm, irony, or sardonic humor as a defense mechanism or to show their distaste with the world. Their attitude can be jaded, pessimistic, or rebellious, reflecting their non-conformist nature.
- **Bluntness and Brutal Honesty:** Anti-heroes tend to be more straightforward and blunt in their communication. They may speak their mind without sugarcoating their thoughts or feelings, often delivering harsh truths. This directness can come across as refreshing or abrasive, depending on the context and the character's intentions.
- **Lack of Filter:** Anti-heroes often lack a social filter, meaning they say what they think without considering the consequences or societal norms. They may use profanity or offensive language more freely, displaying a disregard for conventional politeness. This unfiltered speech can give them an edgier and more unpredictable quality.
- **Skepticism and Distrust:** Anti-heroes are often skeptical and distrustful of authority or societal structures. Their speech may reflect this skepticism through questioning, challenging, or mocking established norms. They may voice their doubts about the intentions of others, exhibiting a cynical worldview.
- **Moral Ambiguity:** Anti-heroes may reflect their ambiguity by expressing conflicting viewpoints or moral relativism. They might justify their actions or rationalize their questionable choices, blurring the lines between right and wrong in their speech.
- **Self-Deprecation:** Anti-heroes can display self-deprecating humor or downplay their own abilities or achievements. This can stem from their inner struggles or their refusal to conform to conventional hero archetypes. They may use self-deprecating remarks to deflect attention or mask their vulnerability.
- **Unconventional Wisdom:** Anti-heroes might impart unconventional wisdom or philosophical insights through their speech. They may challenge conventional wisdom, question societal norms, or offer alternative perspectives on morality and ethics. Their unique worldview and life experiences shape their speech, providing a distinct perspective.

It's important to note that these characteristics are not absolute for all anti-heroes. Each character will and should be unique and there's no rule on how you should or can capture your anti-heroes voice. However, these speech patterns are commonly associated with anti-heroic characters, setting them apart from more traditional hero or protagonist archetypes.

## Using Language to Convey Character Traits

In writing, language can be a powerful tool to express the personality and traits of a character. The words a character uses, their tone and delivery, and even their grammar and syntax can all reveal who they are and how they relate to others.

For example, a character who speaks in short, clipped sentences with a monotone voice might come across as cold and detached. On the other hand, a character who speaks with a lot of energy and enthusiasm might seem outgoing and passionate.

Language can also reveal a character's level of education, cultural background, and social status. A character who uses formal language and long, complex sentences might be seen as well-educated and polished, while a character who uses slang and incomplete sentences might be seen as uneducated or rough around the edges.

However, it's important to remember that language can be deceiving. Characters can use language to hide their true thoughts and feelings, or to manipulate others. A character who speaks in a friendly, charming tone might actually be a deceitful con artist, while a character who speaks in a gruff, hostile tone might be hiding a kind heart.

One thing writers of any character tend to forget is that we as humans are often thinking something completely different than what is coming out of our mouths. Also, what's *not* being said in dialogue or language is just as important as what is being said.

A very classic example of this is a character who says, "I love you," to their partner, but their partner does not respond at all. What does this tell the other character? What does this tell the reader?

Also consider how your anti-hero's verbal and nonverbal language differs or mirrors who they are.

Ultimately, the way a character uses language is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to conveying their traits and personality. But by experimenting and playing with your character's voice and language, you can create a very insightful window into your character's personality and mind.

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## Writing Exercises

### Exercise #1:

1. Use the provided sample below OR create your own natural paragraph between two characters.
2. Rewrite the paragraph from your Anti-Hero's POV, trying to add as much voice and language to convey who they are and what they think in that moment.
3. Then, rewrite the paragraph again from the other character's POV, giving a lot of internal time to how this character is perceiving the anti-hero character

SAMPLE PARAGRAPH:

As they stood by the water cooler, Sarah and Alex began to talk. Sarah commented on the unusually hot weather, Alex agreed with a nod. They talked about their weekend plans, with Sarah mentioning a hiking trip and Alex sharing her excitement for a new movie release. Their conversation meandered through topics of TV shows, favorite restaurants, and recent news. After twenty minutes or so, Sarah lost interest in what Alex was saying and made a comment about getting back to work.

### Exercise #2:

1. Considering all aspects of your anti-heroes history, upbringing, level of education, natural tendencies, and preferences - write out several different descriptions of how your character uses language and what that tells you about them.

EXAMPLE: Beth Dutton is notorious for using crude and brash language no matter who she is talking to (seriously, she'll say the same thing whether it's her father or some random guy she's sleeping with to get what she wants). Her cutting wit is used against the people she comes up against and even her advice and wisdom is doled out in sardonic humor.

### Bonus Exercise:

Watch this clip (or any clip of your favorite female anti-heroes that you can find) and study it for clues as to how the character displays their personality traits (especially those quirky anti-hero traits). How do they carry themselves? How does the tone of voice change depending on who they're around or does it change at all? How does the character talk to a person less fortunate versus someone who is well-off? While you're watching, try to capture everything you can about *how* the character's personality comes through.



#### Best of Beth Dutton | Yellowstone | Paramount Network

A look back at some of Beth's most unforgettable moments on Yellowstone Seasons 1-4. #Yellowstone #ParamountNetworkY...  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeD0y0FB3VI>