

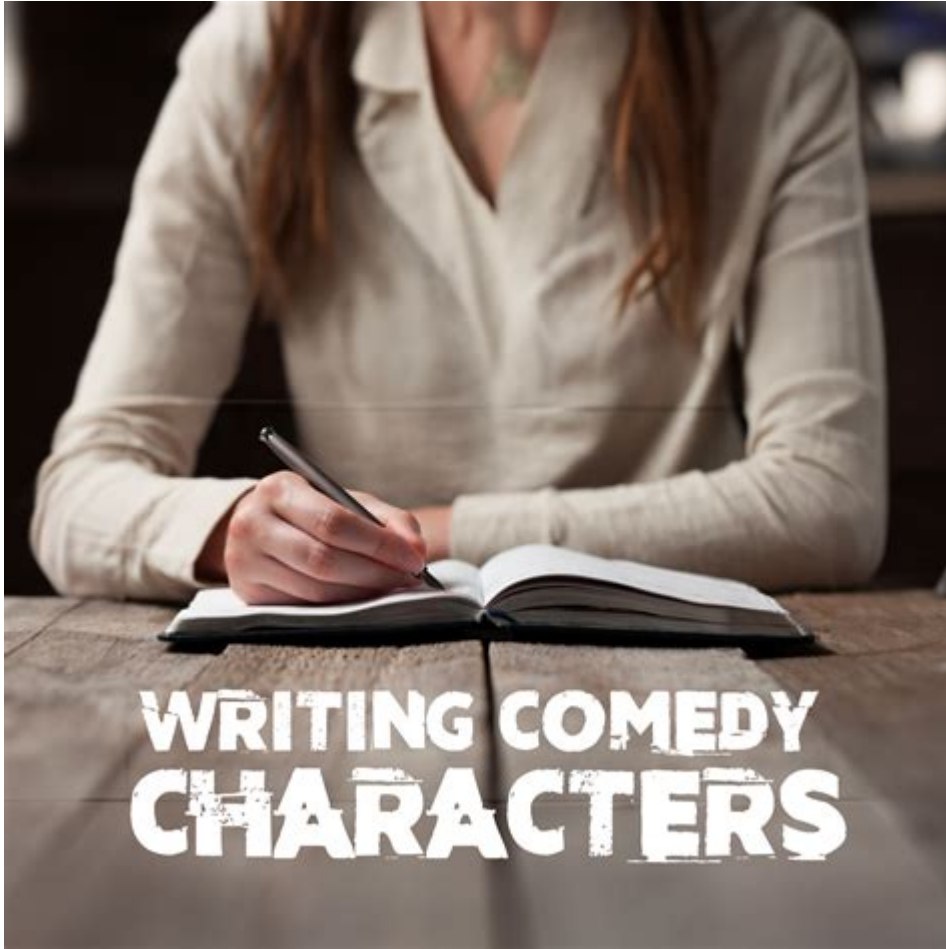
# **Novelists: How to create consistently hilarious character dialogue?**

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In the world of fiction, truly memorable characters often speak in voices so distinctive and amusing that their words alone can elicit laughter. For novelists aiming to infuse their work with sustained humor, creating consistently hilarious character dialogue is an art form. It's not just about one-off jokes, but about weaving a tapestry of wit that stems naturally from your characters and their unique perspectives.

## **Understand Your Character's Comedic Core**

Before a single line of dialogue is written, delve deep into your character's personality. What makes them inherently funny? Are they overly dramatic, sarcastically detached, prone to bizarre non-sequiturs, or perpetually optimistic in the face of disaster? Their comedic core is the wellspring from which all their humorous dialogue will flow. A character who is a know-it-all will deliver humor through pedantic corrections, while a perpetually confused character will generate laughs through their misinterpretations. Consistency in this core trait is crucial for sustained humor.



## **Master the Art of Exaggeration and Understatement**

Two fundamental pillars of comedic dialogue are exaggeration and understatement. A character who hyperbolizes every minor inconvenience can be inherently funny, turning a spilled coffee into a catastrophe of epic proportions. Conversely, a character who downplays an apocalyptic event with dry, matter-of-fact observations can deliver equally potent humor. The key is to know when and how to apply each technique for maximum impact, often using them in juxtaposition for heightened comedic effect.

## **Harness Juxtaposition and Irony**

Humor often springs from the unexpected. Juxtaposition involves placing two disparate elements side-by-side, creating a jarring, amusing contrast. Imagine a hardened detective discussing the intricacies of artisanal cheese making, or a meek librarian delivering a scathing, profanity-laced critique of a literary masterpiece. Irony, too, is a powerful tool. Situational irony (when what happens is the opposite of what's expected), dramatic irony (when the audience knows something the character doesn't), and verbal

irony (when a character says the opposite of what they mean, often sarcastically) can all be mined for comedic gold within dialogue.



## **Perfect Timing and Pacing**

In comedy, timing is everything. This applies not just to the delivery of a line, but to its placement within a conversation. A witty retort might land perfectly after a beat of silence, or a rapid-fire exchange might build momentum to a hilarious climax. Consider the rhythm of your dialogue: short, sharp sentences for quick wit, or longer, meandering monologues for a character prone to rambling. Punctuation, paragraph breaks, and even the surrounding action can all contribute to the comedic timing of your dialogue.

## **Develop Distinctive Character Voices**

Each of your characters should sound unique. Their vocabulary, sentence structure, preferred idioms, and even their speech impediments or habits (like stuttering, sighing, or clearing their throat) contribute to their individual voice. When characters have clearly differentiated voices, the humor often arises from their interactions and how these unique perspectives clash or complement each other. Avoid having all your characters sound like different versions of the same witty narrator; let their distinct voices be the engine of your comedic dialogue.



## Utilize Callbacks and Running Gags

A great way to build sustained humor is through callbacks and running gags. A callback is a reference to an earlier joke or event, which gains humor from its renewed context. Running gags, on the other hand, are recurring humorous elements that evolve or are repeated in different situations, building anticipation and familiarity with the reader. These techniques create an inside joke between the author, the characters, and the reader, strengthening the comedic bond throughout the novel.



## Read Aloud and Revise Relentlessly

The spoken word has a rhythm that written words sometimes miss. Reading your dialogue aloud will immediately reveal lines that feel clunky, unnatural, or simply aren't as funny as you thought they were. Pay attention to how the lines flow, whether the punchlines land, and if the humor feels authentic to the character. Don't be afraid to cut, rephrase, or completely rewrite dialogue that doesn't hit the mark. Consistent hilarity is a result of meticulous crafting and relentless refinement.

## 10 Great Dialogue Tips from Movie Dialogue Pros



### 1. Make dialogue visual

Hitchcock said people's eyes (and other visual details) should also tell the story.

### 2. Use plain speech well

'The most ordinary word, when put into place, suddenly acquires brilliance.' - Bresson

### 3. Keep action in focus

Muted scenes of dialogue should still have action enough to intrigue (Mamet).

### 4. Copy from memory

Tarantino describes going to movies and writing dialogue from memory after the show.

### 5. Include subtext

'The unspoken word' is what make dialogue rich, in the words of actress Viola Davis.

### 6. Know your characters

*The Sopranos* writer Lawrence Konner suggests writing character biographies.

### 7. Use set-ups and payoffs

Great dialogue is structured like a well-executed joke, according to John August.

### 8. Use silences and pauses

These 'further convey tensions, actions, moods, and emotions', says Susan Kouguell.

### 9. Say dialogue out loud

'You're less likely to write a line of dialogue that's unspeakable,' says screenwriter Aaron Sorkin.

### 10. Allow your own voice

Diablo Cody describes her dialogue in *Juno* as 'self-indulgent', but viewers liked it.

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Creating consistently hilarious character dialogue is an iterative process of understanding your characters, deploying varied comedic techniques, and refining your craft. By focusing on distinctive voices, mastering comedic timing, and embracing the power of the unexpected, novelists can bring their characters to life with laughter that resonates long after the final page.