



DIALOGUE, DIALECT, AND NARRATIVE VOICE

Good dialogue arises from surface and underlying tensions. Just as tension informs character and plot, it is absolutely essential to good dialogue. In real life, we chitchat, “shoot the breeze,” or get “carried away by the sound of our voices.” Good dialogue is *always* more efficient. It is the diamond of fictional skills—reflecting characters’ voices, sharpening their arguments, and shining light on motivations with intimacy and immediacy. Good dialogue enlivens plot, speeds action, and heightens conflict. All fictional skills are important to the whole, but contemporary fiction, in particular, seems to rely increasingly on dialogue for its success. Becoming expert at dialogue is a must.

In his first novel, *Billy*, Albert French writes strong, convincing dialogue. First and foremost, this dialogue arises from surface and underlying tensions:

“Are you afraid, Billy?”

Billy shakes his head no, squirms in the big chair, then nods his head yes.

“Come on, son, I told you there was nothing to be afraid of. Tell the people your name. You can do that.”

“Billy Lee my name.”

“Now, Billy, tell the people how old you are.”

“Ah ten.”

“Now, Billy, tell the people why you are here today.”

“Ah don’t knows. They say it’s a trial.”

“What’s a trial, Billy? Tell the people what a trial is.”

“Ah don’t know.”

“Billy, what happen to you at the pond? What happen, son?”

Billy is silent.

Red Pasko waits for an answer.

“What happen, Billy?”

“Them girls come. They beats me up. Theys bigger.”

“Why did they beat you up?”

“Ah don’ts know. Me and Gumpy be in the pond. Theys come and git us.”

“Did you try and run away from the girls, Billy?”

“Ah runs, but theys catch me. That girl, she bigger than me. She gits me down.”

“Billy, what happen when they let you up? Did you try and run again?”

“Ah gits up. She comes and gits me agains.”

“Did she hit you again?”

“Ah struck her. Ah make her leave me be.”

“Billy, what happen to her?”

“Ah don’t know. They say she deads.”

Even though you may not know the novel's entire story, the dialogue makes clear that: Billy is afraid. Billy is only ten. He is on trial; he doesn't understand what a trial is. A girl is dead. Billy remembers the girl attacking him. The setting—Mississippi, 1937—makes the scene more ominous. The underlying tension, the *subtext*, is that many white Southerners of the era considered it inappropriate for a black male (of any age) to interact with a white girl (and if interaction did occur, it would always be an unwelcome sexual advance by the black male). Tension exists because of the underlying racial conflicts and the lawyer's knowledge versus the child's naive ignorance, that Billy may die. Tension also exists because of surface contrasts between child and adult and colloquial versus formal southern speech.

Good dialogue cannot be generated without tension. Dialogue arises from a blatant or subtle threat to a character's well-being: the wife argues with the husband, the private investigator's reputation depends upon her interrogations, the comic tries not to fail at humor. Though Billy doesn't understand the proceedings, he is trying to avoid punishment for a crime he didn't commit.

MY BEST ADVICE

Dialogue works best when it creates tension and reveals conflict.

Reread French's dialogue. The language is stark yet eloquent. Why? Because of the underlying and surface conflicts. But French is also exercising *emotional restraint*. His characters are not shouting, pleading, indulging in emotional hysterics. This restraint produces even more tension and makes the dialogue more credible. Characters do need to have emotional outbursts but these outbursts will work best after all attempts at emotional restraint fail. If after further questioning, Billy breaks down, screaming, "Ah didn't kill her," it'll be more effective because of his earlier restraint and quiet answers.

In good dialogue, characters' *actions/reactions and silences* also matter. Billy is asked two questions which he doesn't answer directly or with speech:

"Are you afraid, Billy?"

Billy shakes his head no, squirms in the big chair, then nods his head yes.

"Billy, what happen to you at the pond? What happen, son?"

Billy is silent.

In both instances, not speaking contributes powerfully to the dialogue. The actions and silence are consistent with a child's behavior and make his fear more palpable. What's left unsaid is as important as what's said. Billy can say "Ah ten" far easier than he can say "Ah scared." Likewise his hesitation in answering "What happen, son?" makes the dialogue more dramatic. It is harder to speak about what matters. After such hesitation, readers tend to pay more attention to what he ultimately says. For many readers, it is entirely credible that what is most emotionally significant for a character may be the most difficult to talk about.

French has an ear for the voice, the sound of his characters' speech. He captures their *rhythm, word choices, and pattern of sounds*. Billy's speech is clipped, direct, and emphasizes verbs: "gits," "comes," "says." Billy substitutes "Ah" for "I," adds an "s" sound to pronouns, verbs, and adverbs. He says "git" instead of "get," "agins" instead of "again." He uses contractions: "don't" instead of "do not." The lawyer depends upon questions and statements which are not accusatory or threatening but meant to elicit information and inspire confidence. His rhythm is more formal, calming, and less colloquial. Though there is still the suggestion of southern regional speech when he asks "What happen?" instead of "What happened?" Neither Billy nor his lawyer uses lengthy, grammatically correct sentences. People, in fact, do speak in short, ungrammatical bursts! By being attentive to patterns of rhythm and sound, by using *short sentences and sentence fragments*, and *distinct, colloquial language to suit each character*, French mimics real human speech.

Lastly, French doesn't overuse tags. Tags are identifying phrases

such as “he said,” “she said,” “Billy answered,” “the lawyer asked.” Tags can help readers to keep abreast of who is talking when; unfortunately, they can also seem intrusive and slow the pace of good dialogue. If dialogue between characters is distinct enough, you don’t need tags. Billy sounds very much like Billy and not like the lawyer. Also, if, in direct dialogue, the lawyer says, “Billy, tell me . . . ,” we can assume that Billy replies without saying, “Billy replied.” Also, once the pattern of alternating speech between characters is established, readers will accept that each new indented line set off by quote marks (“ ”) represents a new speaker:

“Did she hit you again?”

“Ah struck her. Ah make her leave me be.”

“Billy, what happen to her?”

“Ah don’t know. They say she deads.”

Good dialogue relies upon:

Σ *Surface Tensions or Underlying Tensions (Subtext)*

There should always be the sense that what’s being said, how it is being said, and what’s being left unsaid is significant. Remember, dialogue isn’t random but reflective of characters’ emotional lives. The real causes of conflict, tensions between characters may also not be immediately evident but may hide as subtext. For example, one character may know another is lying but never directly say so; nonetheless, the character’s hidden belief that the other is lying affects what is said and how it is said. Sometimes subtext is social and political—racism, gender and sexual politics, nationalism, etc., can all potentially enhance underlying tensions in any conversation.

Σ *Emotional Restraint (and Release)*

Characters, like people, attempt emotional restraint. (Subtext, by its nature, is a kind of emotional re-

straint.) Anger, fear, lust, loneliness bubbling beneath the surface are more interesting than full-throttle emotional outbursts. When outbursts do happen, the prior restraint will make them all the more significant. Dialogue should be written with a sense of restraint and with the promise and fulfillment of releasing emotional power.

Σ *Character Actions/Reactions and Silences*

Engaged in dialogue, characters still have physical responses—facial gestures, stances, etc. These actions/reactions reinforce what’s said or being left unsaid. A character can say, “I love you,” but actions can prove whether the statement is truth or lie. Likewise, silences, hesitations can also convey the depth and truth of characters’ emotions.

Σ *Speech and Rhythm Patterns to Suit Each Character*

Characters’ personalities, regional and class differences, type of educational background, and type of community they live in, all shape sounds and word selection. Abrupt, sweetly lyrical, or monosyllabic—the variety of speech is remarkable. Some characters will use simple words and be quite eloquent; others will use “fifty cent” words to impress. Contractions, too, alter rhythms and are more common, colloquial: “I can’t go” is more informal than “I cannot go.”

Σ *Short Sentences and Sentence Fragments*

Lengthy, grammatically correct sentences make for stilted dialogue. Interruptions, sentence fragments, communication shortcuts, and dialect distinctions are more reflective of human speech:

“Where you going?”

“Church.”

is better dialogue than:

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to church.”

2 Few Tags to Maintain Pacing

Tags such as “he said,” “she asked” are used only when absolutely necessary to avoid confusion about who is speaking when. Too many tags and readers will be reminded they are reading rather than imaginatively participating in a story.

Multiple-character dialogues (more than two persons) are difficult to write. You should attempt such scenes only after you’re completely comfortable with two-person dialogues. In group scenes, each character presents a new element to balance but it’s impossible to give all equal time and focus. In addition, you need tags to remind readers of the differing characters as well as reminders of where characters are located in space. It also helps if earlier in your story or novel you show clear physical and emotional differences between characters that will appear later as a group. But, remember, the focus of group exchanges should still be on tension, restraint, actions/reactions, and, as much as possible, unique speech for each character.

Most multiple-character dialogues degenerate into monologues or, at most, a two-person dialogue. To avoid this, you need to remind readers of the multiple characters present by letting them speak, however briefly, and giving them actions/reactions. While one or two characters may still verbally dominate the scene, there needs to be a sense that the events unfolding are significant to all of them. If five characters are present in the scene, you can’t have three “disappear” while two continue to talk. Likewise, you can’t “show” a mob, jury, or classroom if your scene becomes a narrowly focused monologue. For multiple-character scenes, it is essential to remember that *all* the characters are engaged in the dialogue. While speech makes any character seem more present, you still have the

responsibility, as a writer, to make the minor characters visible and known (in varying degrees) within the scene via actions/reactions/silences and emotional attitudes. If you can write a successful scene which ignores the minor and supporting characters, then you might question the necessity of a group scene; however, if you truly need all the characters present to make the scene work (e.g., a battle, a concert, a marathon, etc.), then as a writer you must work hard to create the group, emotionally, visually, and orally, in your readers’ imaginations.

For example, in *Magic City*, a group of Greenwood men in a church defend themselves against a Klan attack. All of the characters have been previously presented. Joe is the protagonist. Lying Man, a barber, and Nate and Gabe, two ex-veterans, are all strong supporting characters:

“Here! They’re here,” yelled Mr. Jackson. “They’re here!”
He broke the stained glass with the butt of his rifle.
Others followed suit. Chunks of colored glass fell onto the floor.

“Hold up. Don’t shoot,” shouted Gabe. “Don’t shoot.”

“Damn,” whispered Bill Johnson, awed.

Joe gripped the window ledge. Behind him stood Gabe, Nate, and Lying Man.

Gabe whispered, “War’s here.”

Nate sighed, “They surely hate us.”

Lying Man said, “Stand.”

Sandy replied sarcastic: “Nothing like good odds. Don’t you think, Gabe? Nothing beats good odds.”

Gabe ignored him, ordering, “Wait ’til I give the signal, men. Wait for the signal.”

Joe’s mouth was dry. Three truckloads of men with guns. *Ambrose Oil* was written on the cabs’ sides.

“Damn that’s a lot of ’em,” said Chalmers.

“Just more ducks for me,” called Nate, slinging

his rifle over his shoulder. "I'm going to the roof, Gabe."

"Don't shoot 'til they're past the barricade," Gabe hollered as Nate scrambled out the back door.

Joe held his breath as the flatbed trucks began lumbering up the hill.

"Come on, come on. A little further," Gabe urged the drivers. "Come on." When the trucks halted in front of the barricade, Gabe lit the fuse. Crackling smoke snaked out of the church.

"Get down." Lying Man tugged Joe.

"Heads up," shouted Gabe, before diving, covering his head.

The church windows shattered. "God damn, eighty dollars," cursed Bill.

The blast had lifted the two overturned cars and the first truck clear off the ground. The Greenwood men cheered. Joe heard Nate banging on the roof, screaming, "Go on, Gabe. Go on!"

"That showed them. God damn."

If this group scene worked properly, you should have a sense of the initial Klan assault and the men's varying responses to it. This dialogue allows the reader to shift focus with the shifting emotions of the men. The strategy of such a multiple-voice scene is that you can illustrate emotional complexity more fluently.

Lines such as "The Greenwood men cheered" and "Others followed suit" are intended to suggest the larger crowd. The last line—"That showed them. God damn"—is intentionally left untagged because it could've been said by anyone. In fact, I want readers to imagine who said it.

With so many characters in the scene, tags are unavoidable. But repeating over again "He said" or "Joe said" or "Nate replied" can get pretty dull. By pairing tags with more interesting action verbs and actions, the tags become less intrusive:

"Just more ducks for me," called Nate, *slinging his rifle* over his shoulder.

"Heads up," *shouted* Gabe, before *diving, covering* his head.

You can sometimes avoid a tag entirely by directly highlighting actions. For example:

"Get down." Lying Man *tugged* Joe.
instead of:

"Get down," *said* Lying Man, who *tugged* Joe.

Joe *heard* Nate banging on the roof, screaming,
"Go on, Gabe. Go on!"
instead of:

Joe *heard* Nate banging on the roof.

"Go on, Gabe," Nate *screamed*. "Go on!"

You can't always avoid tags but you can be more creative in suggesting who is speaking when. Likewise you can locate characters within the scene more creatively if you emphasize actions paired with dialogue.

DIALECT

Black speech patterns are richly varied and expressive. All people shift language—shift dialect usage, according to the social context; African Americans often shift between standard and Black English. Dialects have complex grammars and dictions and the variety within each language form is remarkable. Dialect is a study of contrasts: southern black dialect contrasts with hip urban speech; New Englanders' broad vowels contrast with Midwesterners' twang. Language lives, fluidly changing, adapting to the changing nature and character of American society. Slaves were forced to learn standard English, but they, in turn, influenced English with their African dialects. Many words such as *tote*, *banjo*, *nitty-gritty*, and *banana* were African contributions to southern English.

Nonetheless, during slavery, white Americans used speech differences as a marker for black inferiority. Black people were stereotypically presented as speaking gibberish, and when they did make attempts at standard English, the results were stylized as both ridiculous and humorous. Many nineteenth-century African American writers concentrated on demonstrating their command of standard English as a political defense against equating black speech with intellectual inferiority. But others such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Chesnutt used dialect to express the authenticity of expressive black vernacular.

During the 1920s Harlem Renaissance (with a striking resurgence during the 1960s Black Arts Movement), African American writers became more intent on celebrating and capturing the nuances of black speech. Experimentation ranged from phonetic representation to using blues patterns as metaphors for urban dialect to emphasizing rhymes and exaggeration as hallmarks of black storytelling tradition. Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, using differing approaches, explored the variety and range of black speech. The twentieth century proudly continues to reflect black culture, via speech, from the inside out, defying stereotypical conceptions of how blacks across gender and class lines speak. Many black writers have laid claim to standard English as an equally authentic representation of black life. While nineteenth-century writers might have consciously adopted standard English to disprove inferiority, contemporary black writers lay claim to a far wider spectrum of linguistic choices as *reflective of their reality*. Standard English is no longer a code for asserting one's civil rights worthiness!

Clearly, African American writers should use any and all speech variants which best express their characters. The range is enormous in terms of tenor, rhythm, tone, and the pattern of words. Here are but two examples:

"Missie May, take yo' hand out mah pocket!" Joe shouted out between laughs.

"Ah ain't, Joe, not lessen you gwine gimme whateve'

it is good you got in yo' pocket. Turn it go, Joe, do Ah'll tear yo' clothes."

"Go on tear 'em. You de one dat pushes de needles round heah. Move yo' hand, Missie May."

"Lemme git dat paper sack out yo' pocket. Ah bet it's candy kisses."

"Tain't. Move yo' hand. Woman ain't got no business in a man's clothes nohow. Go way."

...
 "Unhhunh! Ah got it. It 'tis so candy kisses. Ah knowed you had somethin' for me in yo' clothes. Now Ah got to see whut's in every pocket you got."

—Joe and Missie May
 in Zora Neale Hurston's "The Gilded Six Bits"

"You've got a pretty room, a real pretty room, Miss Peace."

"You eat something funny today?"

"Ma'am?"

"Some chop suey? Think back."

"No, ma'am."

"No? Well, you gone be sick later on."

"But I didn't have no chop suey."

"You think I come all the way over here for you to tell me that? I can't make visits too often. You should have some respect for old people."

"But, Miss Peace, I'm visiting *you*. This is *your* room." Nel smiled.

"What you say your name was?"

"Nel Greene."

"Wiley Wright's girl?"

"Uh huh. You do remember. That makes me feel good, Miss Peace. You remember me and my father."

"Tell me how you killed that little boy."

“What? What little boy?”

“The one you threw in the water?”

“I didn’t throw no little boy in the river. That was Sula.”

“You. Sula. What’s the difference? You were there. You watched, didn’t you? Me, I never would’ve watched.”

—Eva Peace and Nel Wright
in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*

Both Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison are splendid dialogue writers. Both paint complex and authentic portraits of black life and black speech. Hurston revels in southern black dialect: “I” becomes “Ah,” “am not” becomes “ain’t,” “is not” becomes “tain’t.” Consonants and vowels are dropped—“whateve’” not “whatever,” “yo’” not “you.” “D” is substituted for “th”—so “that” becomes “dat,” “the” becomes “de.” “H” is substituted for “re” and “y”—“here” becomes “heah” and “my” becomes “mah.” She also alters some words, making them a run-on of sounds. For example, “Let me” becomes “lemme,” “going to give me” becomes “gwine gimme.”

Morrison, on the other hand, rather than altering consonant and vowel sounds, uses rhythm and syntax to suggest the informal black speech of small-town Ohioans, Nel Wright and Eva Peace. “What you say your name was?” is rhythmically more even and blunt than “What did you say your name was?” Dropping the verb “did,” while incorrect for standard English, sounds authentic and colloquial for Eva, who is elderly, poor, and wise in “life learning” rather than “book learning.” Eva admonishes Nel: “Well, you gone be sick later on.” This, too, is rhythmically blunt and substitutes another standard English word, “gone,” for “going.” Hurston might have rewritten the line to be: “Well, yo’ gwine git sick later on.” The effect would dramatically alter Eva’s characterization. Rhythmically and tonally, Eva with a Hurston-like revision would sound less blunt, more musically folksy, and more southern!

Language is a dynamic, wonderful terrain for writers to explore! Historical time period, region, gender, class, age, and ethnicity all have

the power to influence both the style and the content of a character’s speech.

When reading, pay attention to differing representations of speech-dialogue. Also, listen to those around you. Use your journal to record snippets of interesting dialogue. In time you’ll learn to trust your own ear in re-creating sounds. While writing fine dialogue is challenging, it is also satisfying and essential to good fiction.

NARRATIVE VOICE

Ordinarily, we think of playwriting, not fiction, as rich with monologues (scenes where a solo actor speaks directly or indirectly to an audience). First person point of view stories can be understood as extended monologues—the reader is the “audience.” These stories’ strong narrative voice depends upon a unique character captured in sound. Like the best oral storytellers, the “I,” often through the monologue (the telling of the story), teaches moral and ethical lessons.

First person monologues should follow many of the same principles as two-person dialogues:

- Σ surface and/or underlying tensions (subtext);
- Σ distinct word selection and rhythm patterns;
- Σ emotional restraint;
- Σ actions/reactions;
- Σ and as few tags as possible, to make a strong narrative.

But, unlike dialogue, first person voices also control larger issues of how the story is told and how conflict is revealed. A first person voice can summarize, provide background information and perspective, and command story structure in ways that are more explicit than two characters engaged in dialogue. Nonetheless, if you consider first person narratives to be monologues governed by the same principles of good dialogue, you’re bound to write more effective voices.

For example, in "The Life You Live (May Not Be Your Own)," J. California Cooper's Molly advises:

Love, marriage, and friendship are some of the most important things in your life . . . if you ain't sick or dyin'! And, Lord knows, you gotta be careful 'cause you sometimes don't know you been wrong 'bout one of them till after the mistake shows up! Sometimes it takes years to find out, and all them years are out of your own life! It's like you got to be careful what life you live, 'cause it may not be your own! Some love, marriage, or friend done led you to the wrong road, 'cause you trusted 'em!

Of course, I'm talking 'bout myself, but I'm talkin' 'bout my friend and neighbor, Isobel, too. Maybe you, too! Anyway, if the shoe don't fit, don't put it on!

Contrast this voice with policewoman, Leigh Ann, in Chassie West's novel *Sunrise*:

I'd counted on Sunrise being the same little hamlet it had been in my childhood and so far, thank God, I hadn't been disappointed.

I was on leave with no clock to punch, no one to account to. I was free (well, unmarried anyway), black (on the toasted almond end of the spectrum), and solvent (one gas card and one credit card for emergencies). I was here on a whim, just passing through, as it were, and one sure way of attracting attention, which I wanted to avoid, would be to drive around the residential sections of town at five-fifty-five in the morning. So I told myself I might as well have breakfast at Fred's Diner.

That's when the trouble started.

The two women characters have strikingly different voices. Read each voice aloud and you'll hear Molly's breathless, rapid pace and

Leigh Ann's voice filled with sassy asides and qualifying phrases. Both writers, consciously not randomly, created these voices through word selection and patterning of sentences. Narrative voice, just like dialogue, creates a vision of the character. However, dialogue is limited in scope, revealing characterization in specific scenes. Narrative voice, on the other hand, not only reveals character but structures the entire fictional world. The narrative voice *is* the storyteller; and as storyteller, the sentences tend to be less fragmented. Though narrative voice controls the story, a writer must still be conscious of how the "voice as character" develops through word choice, complexity of sentences, and rhythms.

Some love, marriage, or friend done led you to the wrong road, 'cause you trusted 'em!

Of course, I'm talking 'bout myself, but I'm talkin' 'bout my friend and neighbor, Isobel, too. Maybe you, too! Anyway, if the shoe don't fit, don't put it on!

Molly's diction is informal, exclamatory black dialect. Her speech creates a vision of a welcoming, generous, commonsense woman dispensing advice on her front porch. As in good dialogue, Molly reveals tensions (the "wrong road"), but shows remarkable restraint by not rushing headlong into what's wrong. Molly, like a good storyteller, is going to take her time weaving her tale for the best effect. Her language also gives clues about her reaction/responses to the "wrong road." Her voice is upbeat, confiding, and that of a survivor!

On the other hand, Leigh Ann's standard English is more formal, more intellectual than emotional than Molly's voice:

I was here on a whim, just passing through, as it were, and one sure way of attracting attention, which I wanted to avoid, would be to drive around the residential sections of town at five-fifty-five in the morning.

Despite her whim to visit Sunrise, Leigh Ann's language suggests such impulsiveness is unusual for her. Her complex sentence structure suggests thoughtful, probing intelligence. There is a policewoman's precision to her language—the exact time is “five-fifty-five”; she drives specifically through the “residential sections of town.” Leigh Ann can be depended upon to tell the facts of any story.

As in good dialogue, Leigh Ann reveals tensions (she wants her presence undetected) and, like Molly, she shows emotional restraint by not rushing headlong into what's wrong. “That's when the trouble started” lures readers into the story, but Leigh Ann will tell it in her own good time. Leigh Ann's language also gives clues about her reaction/responses to the “trouble.” She will try to avoid being pulled into the trouble, but when pulled into it, she'll give a good analytical and precise account of herself.

The key to capturing anyone's voice (either as narrator or as dialogue speaker) is to listen. Through practice you can capture sounds as you hear them. Consistency is essential. If you drop vowels, substitute “ain't” for “am not,” or replace short “e” sounds with “i,” then you need to do so consistently in your dialogue. Likewise word selection, sentence structure and rhythm shouldn't conflict with characters' backgrounds and experiences.

All dialogue should be read aloud. Following your own instincts, the dialogue should move with the natural energy of “real” speech. If dialogue seems stagnant, if you lose breath before finishing a sentence, then you need to revise.

Writing strong dialogue is a skill which will serve you well in each and every story. Characters don't truly come alive until they *speak*, and their speech exposes conflict and advances plot. Every hour spent practicing dialogue will reward you with more readable and interesting stories. As you become more sensitive to the sounds and speech about you, your characters will whisper, holler, and sigh new emotions and new stories.

EXERCISE I

TALKING SOLO VOICE

Spend two days listening for a person whose speech interests you. It can be the FedEx driver from the Bronx, a Wall Street financier, or a Jamaican immigrant. Select a co-worker or family member, if you prefer; but their speech must intrigue you, must be fundamentally exciting. As you're searching for a voice, record in your journal *why* you think certain voices appeal to you. *What is it you like hearing?* Is it the rhythm, the word choices, the dialect lilt? What sentence pattern do you hear most often? Is the tone emphatic? Whiny? Measured? Aggressive? Blunt? Hesitant and shy?

Once you've selected a voice, ask the speaker if you can tape-record their dialogue. If this is impractical, rely on transcription and memory.

Next, select *one* of the situations below and write a monologue using your newly captured voice.

- Imagine a suspected bank robber pleading innocence and fabricating an alibi for a detective.
- Imagine an abused wife trying to explain to a social worker why she won't leave her husband.
- Imagine a clerk at the convenience store trying to explain to a fellow employee his infatuation with a customer who comes in every Monday and Friday for a quart of milk, two beers, and a carton of cigarettes.
- Imagine a youth explaining to his parents why he needs to abandon college to pursue a singing career.
- Imagine a middle-aged man or woman, desperate for a job, trying to explain to an interviewer why they're best qualified for a sales job beneath their skills.