

Improving Sentence Patterns: Varying Dialogue

When writing dialogue, a good writer will continually change the way the speeches are written. This makes reading the dialogue more interesting. A good writer will move the speech tags, or the “Mary said” part, to the front, back, or middle of the speech.

Example 1:

“Do you like apples, or do you prefer bananas?” Mary said.

Change to: “Do you like apples,” Mary said, “or do you prefer bananas?”

or: Mary said, “Do you like apples, or do you prefer bananas?”

A good writer will also change the order of the speech tag and use other words besides *said*.

Example 2:

“Do you like apples,” asked Mary, “or do you prefer bananas?”

Rewrite the sentences below moving the speech tags to a different location. You may also change the speech tag make the speech more interesting. Make sure you punctuate the sentences correctly.

1. “It is late,” the policeman said.
2. “When the sun rises, I feel like singing,” Anne said.
3. “If you like, we can come with you,” Robert said.
4. “The dog barked because the burglar was outside!” Mr. Thomas said.
5. “Thank you, Emily, for bringing the popcorn,” he said.
6. “Quick! Get a bucket of water!” she said.
7. “Are you sure you want a puppy?” her mother said.
8. “I would have told you, but you didn’t ask,” the man said.

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Example 2:

“Do you like apples,” asked Mary, “or do you prefer bananas?”

Rewrite the sentences below moving the speech tags to a different location. You may also change the speech tag make the speech more interesting. Make sure you punctuate the sentences correctly.

Student’s answers will vary. Examples of correct answers:

1. “It is late,” the policeman said.

The policeman said, “It is late.”

2. “When the sun rises, I feel like singing,” Anne said.

“When the sun rises,” said Anne, “I feel like singing.”

3. “If you like, we can come with you,” Robert said.

“If you like,” Robert offered, “we can come with you.”

4. “The dog barked because the burglar was outside!” Mr. Thomas said.

Mr. Thomas cried, “The dog barked because the burglar was outside!”

5. “Thank you, Emily, for bringing the popcorn,” he said.

“Thank you, Emily,” he said, “for bringing the popcorn.”

6. “Quick! Get a bucket of water!” she said.

“Quick!” she exclaimed, “Get a bucket of water!”

7. “Are you sure you want a puppy?” her mother said.

“Are you sure,” her mother asked, “you want a puppy?”

8. “I would have told you, but you didn’t ask,” the man said.

“I would have told you,” said the man, “but you didn’t ask.”