

Universal Dialogue Pass

THE
SCRIPT
READER

Unless you already have an idea of existing weaknesses, it can be really difficult to identify problem areas within your own dialogue. That's where this universal pass come in.

Read through your dialogue sentence by sentence and assess it against the checklist below.

The Four Basic Functions

To be effective, a line of dialogue should be fulfilling one (or more) of these functions. If it isn't, consider cutting or revising the line to be more effective.

- Is the line **moving the story forward**?
(Does it advance the plot, reveal crucial info, or set up future events?)
- Is the line **delivering pivotal exposition**?
(Does it provide essential info that's necessary for us to understand the story or character motivations?)
- Is the line **revealing a character trait**?
(Does it offer any insight into a character's personality, values, or background?)
- Is the line **hugely entertaining**?
(Is it engaging, witty, or emotionally resonant, adding any entertainment value to the scene?)

Character Voice

As we can't yet see the characters on screen at this stage, ideally, we should be able to recognize each character from their distinct voice on the page. Each character should have a unique way of speaking that reflects their personality and background.

- Is the line reflecting the character's personality, background, or culture?
- Is the line reflecting the time period, place, or world?
- Is the line something that only this character would say?
- Is the line revealing character relationships and dynamics?
- Is the line serving the characters motivations and objectives?

Efficiency

Let's check for **filler words** that yes, can certainly help make dialogue feel natural, but let's face it, wouldn't be missed if they were cut. Pay particular attention to any **orphans** on the page (the one or two words at the end of a sentence that take up a whole line to themselves). Rewording a sentence to cut these can help shorten the page count and streamline the story. And let's make sure there's no needless **repetition**, which can look like sloppy writing.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is there Q&A dialogue that's slowing the pace? If so, consider getting to the point quicker | <input type="checkbox"/> Is every word in the line absolutely needed? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can the line be considered as pointless small talk? If so, consider cutting it. | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the line repeating information we already know (whether from a past conversation, an earlier action, the scene description, or scene heading)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Could abbreviating words help trim the word count and sound less formal? | <input type="checkbox"/> Are words or phrases being used repeatedly? If so, could you vary language to make speech more dynamic? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the line easy to say and easy to understand, or is it a mouthful that's hard to digest? | |

Subtext

Not every line needs to contain subtext. In fact, being on-the-nose can be extremely useful in the right circumstances, so let's double-check whether a line needs to be direct or if there's an opportunity to let the audience read between the lines, which enhances the immersion, adds layers to the narrative, and deepens the audience's engagement with the story.

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|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the line acting as an exposition dump, feels forced, or sounds like a character's explaining something solely for the benefit of the audience? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the line blatantly revealing inner emotions or thoughts? If so, consider using subtext to make the audience read between the lines. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Could the exposition be shown to us instead of being told to us? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does the line foreshadow any future events, actions, or lines? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the line too cliché, obvious, or boring? If so, can you do more to disguise this? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a hidden agenda or conflicting desire behind the line? If not, should there be? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can the line be replaced with a look, reaction, action, or silence? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does the line contain a double meaning? If not, could it? |

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