DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE as an obstructed and inhibited speech

"We tend to believe people when it costs them something to say whatever it is they have to say...the more it means to a character, the more difficult it is to say."

Robert Towne

"...The eloquence of our language is in its pauses, stutterings, and inability to communicate..."

Eugene O'Neill

The actual meaning of dialogue is in the implicit, not the explicit--in what is NOT said, what's IN BETWEEN the words.

1. Dialogue Scene
BEGINNING/MIDDLE/END **-** each scene has beginning/middle/end. The best way to enter a scene is at the last possible moment -- when the conflict is high. Try to skip the pre-amble, and avoid the "Hi, how are you" busy chat unless it adds to the tension of the scene.

2. Conflict
The best dialogue is head-to-head confrontation.
Dialogue is conflict.

3. Text-Subtext

Dialogue (TEXT) is a sort of code, the tip of the iceberg. What is left NOT said (SUBTEXT) has the most impact.

TEXT - is the surface.
SUBTEXT - is the essence, the inner life, the truth.

TEXT is what we say explicitly. SUBTEXT is what we imply (we never spell it out). TEXT only is the pretext to conveying SUBTEXT. SUBTEXT is the essence of our message.

Dialogue never spells out the PREMISE of the story.
Dialogue never spells out the CONFLICT of the scene.

4. Conversation vs. Dialogue

Dialogue is NOT a conversation. Real conversation is chaotic, lengthy, boring and doesn't make a point. Dialogue sounds like a real conversation (uses colloquial language, profanities, etc.), but is purposeful and carefully designed.

Dialogue gives the ILLUSION of reality.
Don't justify bad dialogue by saying: "People talk like that."

5. On-the-Nose Dialogue

On-the-nose dialogue is dialogue that says the obvious or tells us what we already know or says what we see.

a) He: "I love you." We SEE Him embracing and kissing Her.

b) Tom: "Oh, look, here comes Jack." We SEE Jack coming.

Good dialogue is NOT explicit.
Good dialogue is dialogue that illuminates what the characters are NOT saying.
Good dialogue COUNTERPOINTS action.

6. Less Is More Dialogue

ECONOMY AND COMPRESSION.
Omit needless words. When a sentence is made shorter, it usually becomes stronger. If your character can say something in six words rather than seven, take out the extra word. There will be more to emotionally act. An actor can communicate with look, gesture, and facial expression.

Use incomplete (elliptical) fragmented sentences or single words as substitutes for complete sentences.

"When?" as opposed to: "When are you leaving for LA?"
"I did it..." as opposed to: "I killed your husband so that we could live happily together ever after."

Don't **talk** about what we can **see!**

VISUAL APPROACH TO THE SCENE.
Action speaks louder than words. The first attack on the scene is -- how can I do it VISUALLY? Resorting to dialogue is a second choice.

INDISPENSABILITY.
Every word of dialogue must be INDISPENSABLE (must have a function).

SIMPLICITY.
Dialogue must be understandable the first time.

7. "Ping-Pong" Dialogue

Dialogue is an exchange of words and thoughts. It should have the dynamics of the Ping-Pong game.

Lengthy speeches, monologues do not belong into a screenplay.

If dialogue is longer than four lines - you are in trouble.

8. The Arc of Dialogue

Dialogue arches through the scene.   Every line of dialogue twists and changes the scene!

Beats - the smallest building blocks of a scene. Single emotions and subjects. They represent the internal rhythm of a scene. A scene unfolds and arches beat-by-beat (incrementally, by moving from one beat to the next).

9. The 180-Degree Dialogue

Take the obvious and turn it 180 degrees, flip it upside down.
Dialogue contradicts action; example:
Action says: "I'm trying to seduce you..." the dialogue says: "I'm NOT trying to seduce you..."

10. Functions of Dialogue

A) Dialogue informs about character's:
- sociology (education, social class...)
- psychology (choleric/phlegmatic, stressed out/relaxed...)
- geography (slang, accent...)

B) Dialogue reveals character's thoughts (things that cannot be SEEN)

C) Dialogue is the least graceful way to inform about the story.   ACTION tells   the story.   Dialogue may be used to inform about secondary elements of the story – back-story, subplots, exposition, etc.

11. Speech Pattern

EVERY CHARACTER HAS HIS OR HER UNIQUE SPEECH PATTERN
Speech pattern reveals character.
Speech pattern differentiates characters.