"Say What?"
Basic Elements of Dialogue

Dialogue is the way writers show speech and conversation between characters. Before you can learn how to use dialogue as a storytelling tool, you need to learn the basic rules of punctuating and structuring dialogue. Check out this source for more information: https://www.novel-writing-help.com/punctuating-dialogue.html

Dialogue can be **direct** or **indirect**. Here's an example:

Direct: "Casey, do you want to go to the pool later?" asked Karen.
Indirect: Karen asked Casey if she wanted to go to the pool later.

Indirect dialogue uses the narrative to show conversation between characters. Alternating between direct and indirect dialogue (narrative) is a good way to control the pacing of your scene and make conversations feel more natural to the reader.

For example:

"I have news!" Kristy exclaimed as she burst into Sally's room.

Sally looked up from the book she was reading. Practically the president of the school's gossip society, Kristy always had news, and Sally had figured out a long time ago that it usually wasn't true. "Yeah?"

Kristy plopped down on the end of Sally's bed. "Well, do you want to hear it or not?"

"Not really."

Kristy told her anyway. Henry—Sally's long-time crush—was newly single, and, word was, he was looking for a new date to prom.

"Aren't you glad I told you?" Kristy asked.

Sally admitted that she was.

Other qualities of "Good" Dialogue:

1. Good dialogue might be grammatically imperfect (ie fragments, etc…)
2. Good dialogue doesn't spell everything out (info dump). It favors short, clipped sentences.
3. Good dialogue is matter-of-fact and avoids pleasantries and greetings.

4. Good dialogue avoids repeating the obvious, especially people's names. Characters who know each other usually share a large amount of information, so they don't have to spell everything out through dialogue. You can allude to shared information, but avoid using dialogue to insert info dumps.
5. Good dialogue realizes that very small doses of characterization (dialect, slang, profanity, etc…) go a long way to create the necessary effect
6. Good dialogue shows people <u>interacting</u> with each other, not making speeches <u>at</u> each other. Avoid monologues.
7. Good dialogue is a representation of real speech, but is NOT a literal replication of what people say in life.

For more tips and examples, check out this source:
https://www.creativekidstales.com.au/tips/writing-dialogue

Action Tags

Sometimes writers insert narrated action, bodily gestures, and facial expressions into their character's conversation to avoid the problem of "disembodied dialogue" (dialogue that doesn't seem to be assigned to a speaker). Action tags help the writer "show" emotion instead of "telling" it. Strategically placed, a small amount of these "action tags" can go a long way. Look at the following example:

"So—you don't want to." It was a question, but Maria already knew the answer.

"No," Sam said.

"You're sure. You're absolutely sure."

"Yes."

"You've thought about it, then."

Sam looked away, gazing off toward the far wall. He brought his eyes back to hers.

"Yes. Yes, I have."

"Well, all right. I guess it's settled then."

<u>Writing Exercise</u>

Write a scene in which one character tries to tell another character something, but can't. Think about all the ways a character might circle around the topic and hint at things without saying them outright. How will body language play into this conversation?

Things to think about:

- Make sure your characters have voices that are distinctly theirs, so that it's possible to distinguish them from one another even without dialogue tags (for at least a line or two).
- Make sure that you favor action over adverbial dialogue tags (show don't tell).
- Overall, the point here is to practice modulating between narrative, indirect dialogue, and direct dialogue.