

### ACTIVITY ONE – VERY WELL

How many ways can you say the word 'Well'? Try it out with a friend, and see how many different meanings you can come up with, depending on how you say it.

Now write a list of all those different ways of saying 'well', using just ONE word to describe how you said it each time. For example:

Well – question

Well – sarcastic

Etc.

### ACTIVITY TWO – ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Pair up. One person has to say each variation of the word 'well', and the other has to perform an action that would let us know how the speaker said 'well' even if we couldn't hear them.

Now write a list of all the different actions you did that went with each 'well', using just ONE SHORT PHRASE. For example:

Well – shrugged

Well – scratched head

Etc.

### ACTIVITY THREE – TAGS AND BEATS

You have now learned the difference between tags and beats:

#### *TAGS*

A tag is what you did in activity one, when you described HOW the word was said. A tag relates to how the speaker's VOICE sounds WHILE they are talking.

#### *BEATS*

A beat is what you did in activity two, when you described WHAT the speaker was doing WHILE they spoke. A beat relates to the speaker's BODY. (Or things they do with their voice OTHER than talking, e.g. laughing.)

In the passage below, highlight the TAGS in one colour, and the BEATS in another.

I propped myself up. That was it. "Gem, there's something weird about my pen."  
"Mm hmm."

I twisted around to snag the pencil case and dug out the pen. I stared at the pen's translucent emerald casing. It wasn't anything I could immediately spot, but there was definitely something off about it.

"Bummer." Gem screwed up her nose. "Tissue? I smudged."

I plucked a tissue from the bedside table and threw it at her. She caught it as it floated down and glanced at my pen. "Looks fine to me."

I frowned, turning it over in my hands. "No," I said. "There's definitely something different about

it. It feels..." I trailed off, unable to find the words.

Gem shrugged. "Scott had it. Of course it's going to feel weird. It's probably covered in his mutant DNA. Oh, urgh." She shuddered.

I giggled. "I thought you didn't mind him."

"What, Scott?" She stared up at me, shocked. "The hideous cretin who keeps tormenting my best friend? No way. I mean, he's gorgeous, and charming, and I suspect much smarter than he lets on, and did I mention gorgeous? But no. Just, no. Not after how he's harassed you."

I grinned, somehow relieved to know that Gem had my back on that one.

"Actually," Gem said, straightening. "It might be mutant DNA. Close your eyes."

"What?" I wrinkled my brow at her.

"The pen! Close your eyes."

I did.

"What can you see?"

My heart leapt. "Black."

Gem huffed. "Well duh, your eyes are closed. I mean with your Road Mastery."

I shook my head. "No, that's what I mean. The pen's black, it has a print, or is covered in one, or something, and it's all black."

Gem was silent, and I opened my eyes to find her staring at me, lips twisted. "Don't... take this the wrong way or anything," she said after a moment. "It's not like I know how Road Mastery works or anything. But are you sure? I mean, black on black? Definitely?"

I shook my head. "It's a different black. Promise."

What proportion of tags to beats did you find? (I.e. which are there more of?)

#### ACTIVITY FOUR – DIALOGUE 101

In pairs, write a conversation (just the dialogue, nothing else – pretend you're writing notes to each other in class, for example), taking it in turns to write one line each. Punctuate each sentence properly, and remember that we don't have to be grammatical when we speak – we can use fragments and bad grammar and slang. Aim for no more than twenty lines. Make it interesting!

EXAMPLE (but make it more interesting than this):

Hi! How are you today?  
I'm great, how are you?  
What are you doing on the weekend?  
I'm going to the zoo. What are you doing?  
Homework.  
Sounds boring.  
Yeah. Pretty much.  
Would you like to come to the zoo with me?  
Yeah! That would be awesome!  
Okay, I'll call my parents.  
Great, I'll call mine too.

Now go through and put quote marks at the beginning and end of each person's line.

Congratulations! You have just written correctly punctuated dialogue 😊

## **ACTIVITY FIVE – NO MORE TALKING HEADS!**

Dialogue that has no tags or beats is quite hard to follow, and hard for a reader to imagine. We call it ‘talking heads’, because it’s like two random blank heads talking in a blank room. This is what you created just now in Activity Four.

Let’s learn how to cure talking heads!

### PART ONE: Decisions

For EVERY SINGLE LINE in your conversation, make notes on a separate page about two things:

- 1) The speaker’s tone (like in activity one)
- 2) The speaker’s body, gestures and/or facial expressions (as in activity two)

Do this in a separate document, though you may wish to number your lines to keep everything organised.

### PART TWO: Practice

Rehearse your dialogue to make sure your decisions in part one create the meaning that you want. To do this, stand facing each other, preferably where you can both see the script. Alternate lines, delivering each line in the TONE you have decided on, and with the ACTION/S you have chosen.

Revise: does the dialogue work as you have intended? Could you change the tone or action at any point to add further meaning or make it more interesting? Revise as needed.

### PART THREE: Beat Those Tags

Generally speaking, writing is much more interesting with more beats and fewer tags, and also generally speaking, it’s best to stick to just ‘said’ or ‘asked’ for your tags UNLESS the tone of voice is IMPORTANT to the meaning, AND you can’t convey that tone through a beat.

For example, you could write:

Alex slammed the door. “I hate you!”

The fact that she slammed the door (a beat) and the exclamation mark (punctuation) both imply that she is shouting, so we don’t need to add a tag ‘she shouted’. It’s pretty obvious.

So: review the tones you have chosen for your dialogue. Which ones of them are ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY to convey through a tag? Which ones can you imply through punctuation (a question mark or exclamation mark) or through a beat (a physical action)? Highlight the ones that are ABSOLUTELY necessary. You’re doing to delete the rest!

### PART FOUR: Tagging Along

For every tag that you have decided to keep, add it either before or after your line of dialogue like this...

- A) For tags that you've decided to put BEFORE the dialogue, start with a capital letter and finish with a comma:

*He shouted, "This is my line of dialogue!"*

- B) For tags that you've decided to put AFTER the dialogue, start with a lower case letter and finish with a full stop. If your dialogue ended in a full stop, erase it and use a comma instead.

*"This is a line of dialogue," she whispered.*

REMEMBER, each line of dialogue should have started on a NEW LINE. Don't change this when you add in tags!!

#### PART FIVE: Dance to the Beat

Now we decide on our beats. What actions are strictly necessary to convey meaning? What actions are necessary to tell us something about the character or their feelings? What actions are necessary to show that some time is passing between one line of dialogue and the next? Highlight all the actions you want to keep.

Delete the rest!

#### PART SIX: The Final Frontier

Now add your beats into your dialogue passage. REMEMBER: one person's action goes WITH their line of dialogue in the SAME paragraph. You can choose whether the beat goes before or after the dialogue.

Punctuating the beat is easy: it's just a full sentence on its own. It starts with a capital letter and ends with the appropriate punctuation: a full stop, an exclamation mark, or a question mark.

*Kas scratched her head. "How many wells are we supposed to create?"*

*Anna shrugged. "We have five."*

*"We have fifty!" said Lauren. She jumped out of her chair in excitement.*

TA DA!!! You now have a passage of beautifully punctuated dialogue, complete with a variety of beats and tags that help add meaning to your dialogue 😊 Congratulations.