

# Guidelines for Writing and Dialogue



## Steps for Writing Dialogue Letters (10 minutes)

1. *Time* the writing
2. Begin with framing a question that asks, "*How do I feel about...?*" or "*How do I feel when...?*" Write it at the top of your page (Click on "**Dialogue Questions**" on website for a list of questions for problem areas of your relationship).
3. Address your partner with a greeting or salutation, ("*Dear \_\_\_\_\_*")
4. Mention something that you *like* about your partner ("*I like that you...*") or something that you *feel gratitude* for ("*Thank you for...*") or something that you *appreciate* about your partner ("*I appreciate you for...*").
5. In the body of the letter, address the question, focus on feelings and describe your feelings fully, ("*I feel like...*"). There are no right or wrong answers.
6. Use the **P.I.I.B.M.** method (**P**hysical sensations, **I**mage, **I**nnner conversation, **B**ehavior, **M**emory or past experience). Use the "**Prescription for Dialogue**" form for the first several weeks to help structure your response.
7. Closing ("*Love, \_\_\_\_\_*")

## Steps for Verbal Dialogue (10 minutes)

1. *Exchange* letters.
2. Read each others letter *silently*.
3. Then take turns reading each other's letter *out loud*. Decide who wants to go first, and then follow the steps below before the other reads out loud.
4. After you read your partner's letter, *feed back to your partner* what you have read and understood without adding any of your own response. You can ask questions for clarification and help in understanding your partner's feelings. ("*Can you tell me more about this?*" "*When you said this what did you mean?*" "*Could you give me another example of a past experience?*" "*Is it kind of like when we experienced \_\_\_\_\_ together?*"). No *why* questions. You are simply requesting a fuller *description* of the feelings.
5. Continue inquiring into your partner's feelings until you experience the full depth and breadth of the feeling (about 5 or 6 minutes). Avoid tendency to "fix" or have your partner "explain" his or her feelings. Your goal is to

*understand the phenomenon of your partner's feelings with true empathy, to walk for a moment in your partner's shoes. When you feel that you have understood your partner's feelings, let him/her know. "I think I understand how you feel."*

6. As the responder, seek to stay with *description* vs. explanations, apologizing for having the feeling, justifying the feeling, trying to figure out *why* you have the feeling etc. When you feel that your partner has understood your feelings let him or her know that ("*You seem to understand my feelings*").
7. Then *switch* with the other reading and responding following the steps above (3 through 6).
8. Spend about 5 or 6 minutes on each letter. After 10 to 12 minutes, *close the exercise* and move on to something else. DO NOT DRAG IT ON!
9. Take turns deciding on a question for your next dialogue. Schedule a time and a place.
10. You can close with a kiss or a hug or a thank you.

**Tips:**

If we can substitute "I am" for "I feel" then we are expressing a *feeling*

If we can substitute "I think" for "I feel" we are expressing a *thought* or a *judgment*

**Example:** I *feel* satisfied...I *am* satisfied = a feeling. I feel *you* are upset...I think *you* are upset = a judgment or an interpretation

**To form your own dialogue questions:**

Choose a situation you are experiencing at the moment that evokes feelings within you. Then form a question around it that asks for feelings.

**Example:** "How do I feel about moving to a new home" or "How do I feel about my relationship with..." or "How do I feel when you..." or "How do I feel when I..."

There are hundreds of dialogue questions on the website for every area of your life and relationship. Start with those until you have mastered the art of dialogue. Take turns choosing from the list. Do the dialogues *daily*. It is a twenty-minute gift of love to one another.

[www.achangeinthinking.com/homework](http://www.achangeinthinking.com/homework)