

## How do fictional conversations differ from real speech?

Informal spoken communication has various characteristics that make it different from other types of communication (e.g. written or online discourse). Using findings and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 (BNC2014), this worksheet discusses some of the unique features of informal spoken language and how close fictional language is to how we speak in real life. We will look at different types of spoken language - from written dialogue in novels, to written-to-be-spoken dialogue in dramas, television and movies, to spontaneous natural conversation. Contrasting these different representations of spoken language with real conversations between British English speakers from the BNC2014 can help us identify typical characteristics of spoken communication in English.

### Task 1

Read through the three excerpts from a novel, a television series dialogue, and a naturally occurring conversation. All three texts contain conversations involving teenagers. Focus on the way the conversation runs, the words used and the structure of the sentences. What differences have you noticed? Consider the differences at the level of (a) vocabulary, (b) sentences, (c) interaction between the speakers and (d) communicative style.

**Excerpt A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Excerpt B:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Excerpt C:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Task 2

One of the most frequent words in Extract C, taken from the British National Corpus 2014, is 'yeah'. However, this word does not appear much in extracts A and B, representing fictional dialogues. Do you think 'yeah' is typical for spoken conversation? Go to BNClab, search for 'yeah' and consider the following questions:

-  What is the overall frequency of 'yeah' in conversations? Do you think it is a frequent or an infrequent word in informal spoken communication?
-  What is the function of 'yeah' in informal spoken communication? (Tip: You can check some examples of 'yeah' by going to the Concordance button).
-  In your opinion, why does this word not appear so frequently in the fictional dialogues below?
-  Think of other words that are typical for spoken communication. Search them in BNClab to check how frequently they occur in people's conversations.

