



# HE SAID/SHE SAID

Crafting Super Realistic Dialogue



Gregg Bridgeman

# Why Dialogue Matters

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Dialogue instantly reveals your skill as a writer. It's one of the first things a literary agent or an editor will check when evaluating the marketability of any book.



# Why Dialogue Matters

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Dialogue can establish the mood. Playing off characters' verbal exchanges can set an atmosphere for each scene.

There's tension in what's spoken, and especially in what's not spoken.



# Why Dialogue Matters

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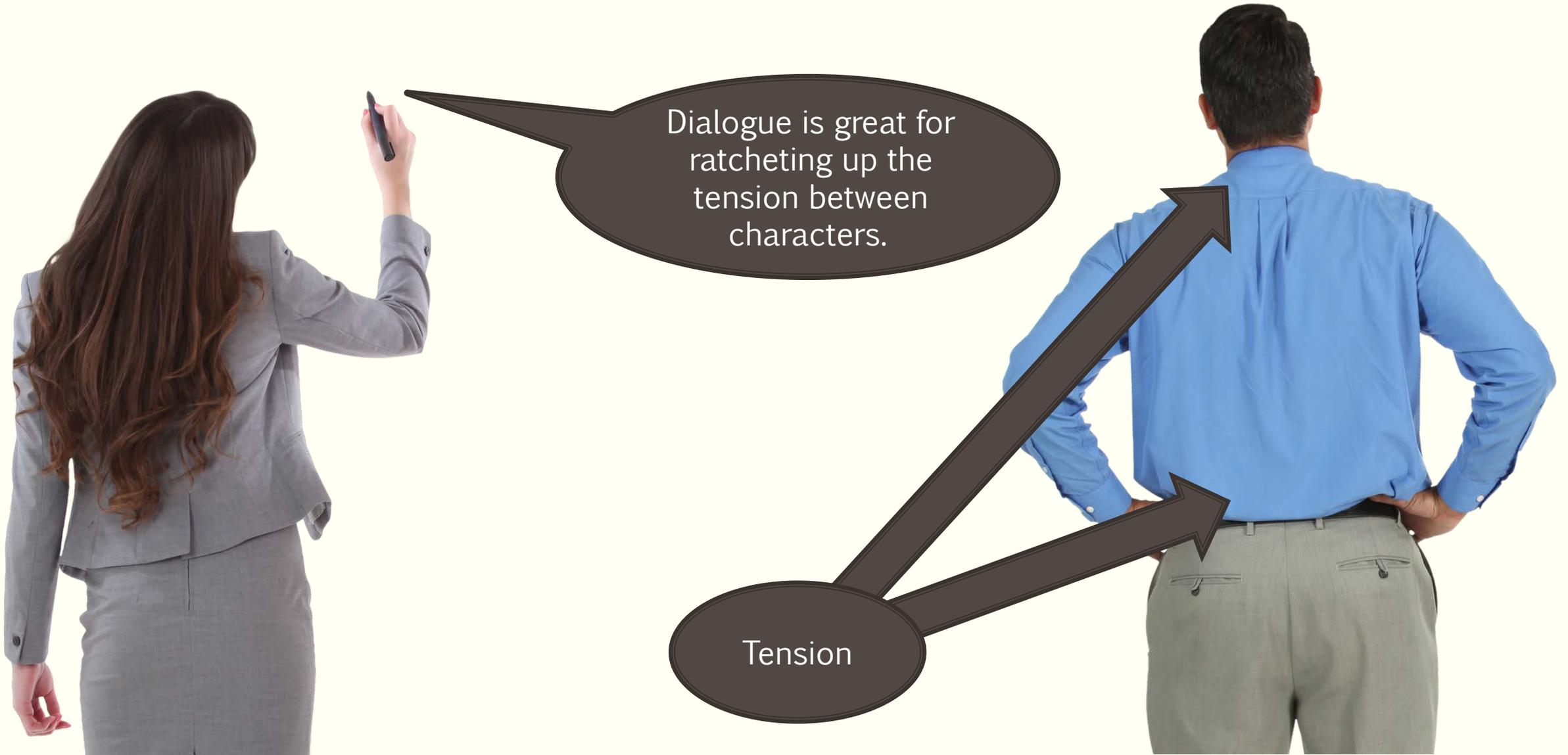


Dialogue can help establish the backstory and reveal important plot details that the reader may not know about yet.

# Why Dialogue Matters

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# Why Dialogue Matters

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Bad dialogue signals the work of an amateur who has failed to grasp the mechanics of speech.

Good dialogue illuminates your characters, moves your plot forward, and develops relationships.



# Common Dialogue Tendencies

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In my experience, there are three groups of writers.

**Most** writers fall into one of first two groups:

- 1.) either they hate writing dialogue and try to avoid it as much as humanly possible, OR
- 2.) they love writing dialogue and fill their entire novel with mostly useless exchanges.

The **third group** of writers:

3) understand the importance of dialogue in a story and know how to use dialogue as a tool to enhance their storytelling.

THAT is the group you want to join forever and ever.



# Agenda (Three Acts)

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- I. Characteristics of Good Dialogue
- II. He Said / She Said
- III. Techniques for Super Realistic dialogue



I.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD DIALOGUE

# Good Dialogue...

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1. has a purpose
2. is not weighed down by exposition
3. is never “on the nose”
4. without sounding *precisely* like the way people talk in real life, *evokes* the way people actually talk
5. Isn't redundant
6. doesn't use too many 'ly' adverbs
7. goes easy on exclamations, exhortations, & aposiopesis
8. is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what
9. reveals personality, and characters only very rarely say precisely what they are thinking
10. employs Jargon, Dialect, and occasionally drops some words
11. sounds unique for every character

1

SAMPLE 1 - BY ACLILTOCLIMB

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Going to the Park

GOOD DIALOGUE HAS A PURPOSE

# Good dialogue has a purpose

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Write dialogue with purpose. If each line doesn't move the plot forward OR say something about the character saying it OR build relationships with other characters to enrich the story—you may want to throw it out!

“Hello, Mary.”

“Hi, Sylvia.”

“My, that’s a wonderful outfit you’re wearing.”

“This old thing?”

“Old thing! It looks practically new.”

“It’s not new, but thank you for saying so.”

“Do you have time for a coffee?”

“I’d love a coffee. I’ll make time.”

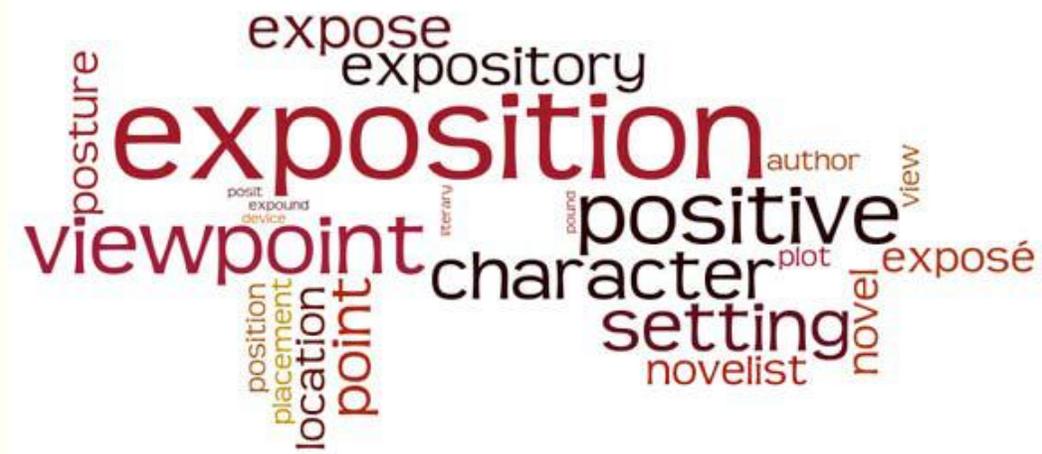
“Mary! Hello!”

“Sylvia. Didn’t see you.”

“My, that’s a wonderful outfit you’re wearing.”

“I’d love a coffee. You free?”

2



GOOD DIALOGUE IS NOT WEIGHED  
DOWN BY EXPOSITION

# Good dialogue is not weighed down by exposition

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When the dialogue is carrying exposition and trying to tell the reader too much, characters end up saying a lot of very unnatural and unwieldy things.

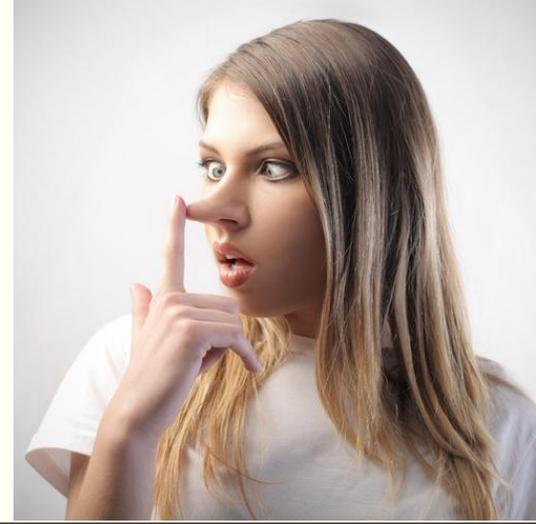
“Remember that time we stole the frog from Miss Jenkins and she ended up giving us two hours of detention and that’s how we met?”

“Yeah, totally! And now we’re in Sixth Grade and have to dissect frogs for our science project, which is due tomorrow. I don’t know how we’re going to get it finished in time.”

So much of this dialogue would already be apparent to the characters. They’d know how they met without having to talk about it, they’d know they’re in 6th grade without having to talk about it, they’d know the science project is due without talking about it. So it’s very clear to the reader that they’re not talking to each other: they’re really talking to the reader.

Exposition and dialogue only really mesh when one character genuinely doesn’t know what the other character is telling them and it’s natural for them to explain at the moment they’re explaining it. Otherwise, if you’re just trying to smush in info, your reader is going to spot it a mile away.

3



GOOD DIALOGUE IS NEVER “ON THE NOSE”

## Good dialogue is never on the nose

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The term “On the nose” can refer to overly expository narrative text, but more often generally refers to unnatural sounding dialogue where the characters say exactly what they think, or where they describe in excruciating detail what they plan to do, somewhat like a ‘60s Bond villain on a monologue.

When they got in the car, Natasha said, “Boris, I am so mad at you because you always flirt with my sister, Doris, and you know how jealous I get and how competitive I am with her.”

Is this something Natasha would actually say? Sounds pretty unnatural, forced, stilted, etc., doesn't it? That's because real people often go to great lengths to NOT say exactly what they're thinking or feeling. What if Natasha said this to Boris instead?

When they got in the car, Natasha said, “Remind me the next time we're at my parents. I think they have a copy of Doris's prom picture. You can keep it in your wallet.”

## Good dialogue is never on the nose

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The following example is from the late **Elmore Leonard**. Leonard was known as a master of dialogue.

Elmore Leonard's earliest novels were Westerns published in the '50s but he went on to specialize in crime fiction and suspense thrillers. Many of his books and short stories have been adapted into dozens of motion pictures and television shows like *Out of Sight*, *Hombre*, *Mr. Majestyk*, and *3:10 to Yuma* as well as the long running FX television series *Justified* which is set in Kentucky.

You would never read one of his books and expect to find something like this farcical example.

In the following scene, two criminals, Bill and Marty, are planning a bank heist. Marty is a two time loser and a hardened criminal with a penchant for violence. Bill is socially awkward, and rather a weak man, but he is able to open the safe.

## Good dialogue is never on the nose

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Bill asked Marty, “But why do we have to be there before lunch? Can’t we just eat lunch then go?”

Marty answered, “Are you actually the dumbest bank robber alive? We have to go there before lunch for three reasons. First, because the vault is on a timer. Second, because the armored car arrives between noon and one so if we go in the afternoon, the vault will be empty. Third, our contact at the alarm company can only disable the alarm for a short amount of time. If we don’t get in and get back out before lunch, we need not even do this!”

As you can see, the answer I supplied for Marty here is very, very on the nose. It is also well out of character for two-time loser and general tough guy, Marty. Elmore actually wrote the dialogue in that scene like this:

Bill asked Marty, “But why do we have to be there before lunch? Can’t we just eat lunch then go?”

“Shut up,” Marty explained.

4



WITHOUT SOUNDING *PRECISELY* LIKE THE WAY PEOPLE TALK IN REAL LIFE, GOOD DIALOGUE *EVOKES* THE WAY PEOPLE ACTUALLY TALK

# Good dialogue *evokes* the way people actually talk in real life

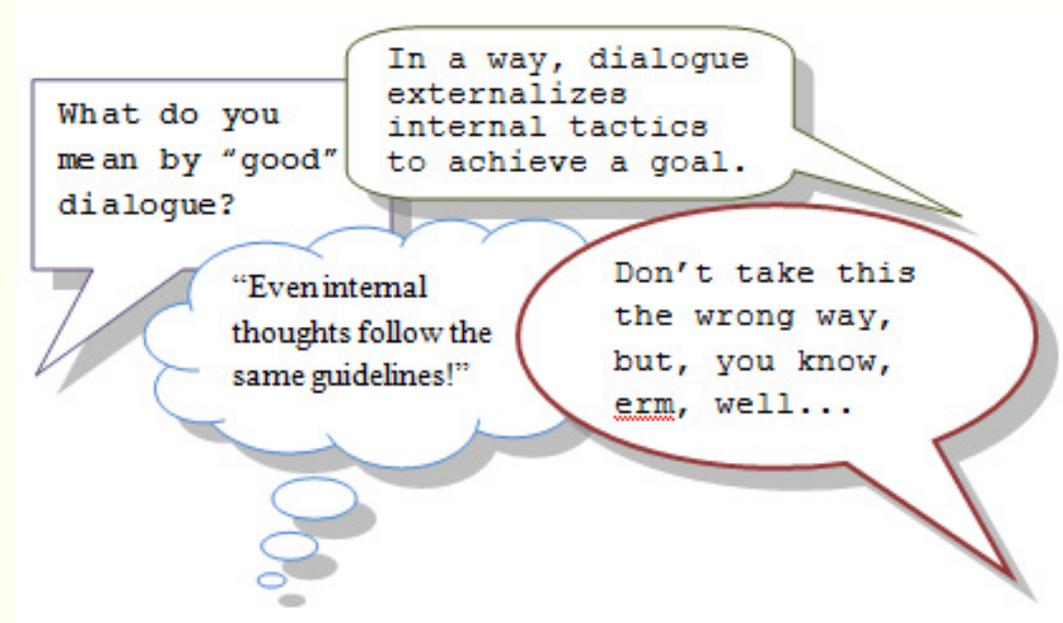
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In real life our conversations wander around all over the place, and a transcribed real life conversation is a meandering mess of free association and stutters.

In a novel, a good conversation is focused and has a point.

Dialect, slang, and voice is used *sparingly*. Just a hint of flavor is enough. As Jennifer Hubbard wrote, “good dialogue sounds like conversation, but is not an exact reproduction of conversation.”

To paraphrase Elmore Leonard, good writers “leave out the boring parts”. This goes doubly for dialogue: it’s usually best to cut to the chase rather than spending time on the pleasantries that normal people use in everyday conversation.



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*Page 37. I have described the darkness in fifteen distinct ways. Now I must describe how this made the character feel...*



**GOOD DIALOGUE ISN'T REDUNDANT**

# Good dialogue Isn't redundant

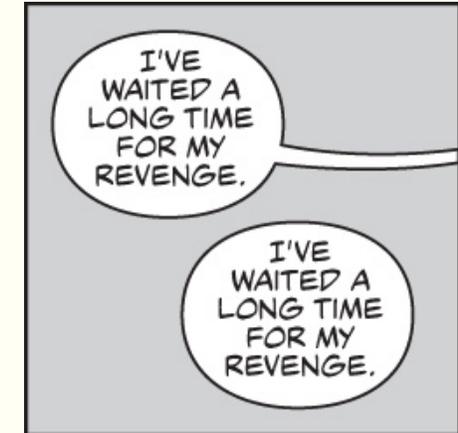
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- 1) Don't repeat information we've already heard or can see for ourselves. Don't tell us about the action, the scene, or the plot; show us. Cut down redundant beats and never say the same thing twice unless the tactic, subtext, or context has changed.
- 2) Don't use redundant dialogue tags.

“That is fantastic news,” he said happily.

Look right? If it does, you have just fallen into a very common trap.

In this example, you're actually telling your reader about your character's feelings twice. 'That is fantastic news' clearly conveys happiness, so why use the redundant adverb 'happily' to reiterate this?



6

A photograph of a person's hand holding a dark brown sign with gold lettering. The sign reads "THE CAUTIONARY TALE OF ADVERBS". The background is a blurred image of a person in a blue and white plaid shirt holding a red pencil.

THE CAUTIONARY  
TALE OF ADVERBS

**GOOD DIALOGUE DOESN'T USE TOO  
MANY 'LY' ADVERBS**

## Good dialogue doesn't use too many 'ly' adverbs

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Writers sometimes attempt to break the monotony of using the word *said* by replacing it with 'ly' adverbs (happily, sadly, angrily).

Some writers tend to use 'ly' adverbs to smuggle emotion into their dialogue and, by doing this, they are actually smuggling in unnecessary explanation. A powerful dialogue conveys emotion through **what's being said** rather than how it is being said.

If your character is **sad**, it is your responsibility to **show** this **sadness** and to **show** what there is about your character that **makes him/her sad**.

“I don't think I can keep going,” Marcy said sadly.

Marcy dabbed at the tear trailing down her cheek. “I don't think I can keep going,” she said.



# Good dialogue goes easy on exclamations, exhortations, & aposiopesis

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Interjections, audible pauses, grunts, interruptions, trailing off, and so forth are kind of like carpet cleaning concentrate.

They must be diluted or else you'll burn a hole in the floor.

When writers overuse exclamations, they can exhaust the reader with their excitability. When they overuse verbal tics and crutches, they can drive the reader crazy.

“Mary!”

“You look great!”

“It's been such a long time!”

“Joan!”

“So do you!”

“Three years at least!!!”

When a character overuses “Ughs” and “Blechs” or “Hmms” and “Ahhs” they can easily sound petulant.

## Good dialogue goes easy on exclamations, exhortations, & aposiopesis

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The most common misuse of an ellipsis is to indicate a trailing off (technical term: aposiopesis) intended to build tension. This device is overused and very often ineffective where more precise and fully developed narrative is more effective.

Bad dialogue:

Jill sobbed and answered, “I just don’t know how... to say this... It’s just... I’m in love... with someone else...”

Good dialogue:

“I don’t know how to say this. It’s just,” Jill answered with a sob. “I’m in love.” She shook her head and whispered, “With someone else.”



**GOOD DIALOGUE IS BOOSTED BY DIALOGUE TAGS, GESTURES, AND ACTION, SO THE READER CAN EASILY FOLLOW WHO IS SAYING WHAT**

Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what

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If you've written powerful dialogue, the last thing you want to do is draw attention away from it.

Explanations and 'ly' adverbs disrupt the flow of your dialogue because they jump out at the reader and signal, if only for a second, that you, *the writer*, are hard at work behind the scenes.

It will take the reader out of the story and inhibit his or her ability to suspend disbelief.

Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what

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You may not like this, but truth be told, the verb *said* should really be your go-to verb when writing dialogue.

*Said* is an unusual word primarily because we interpret it in a very mechanical way.

In fact, when we see the word *said*, we simply gloss over it as if it were no more than a comma or a full stop.

Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what

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BUT you don't want to use it every single time. In a lot of submissions, I review I tend to find things like this:

“blah, blah,” he said.  
“blah, blah,” she said.  
“blah, blah,” he said.  
“blah, blah.” she said.  
“blah, blah,” he said.  
“blah, blah?” she said.



Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what

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However, there are a ton of words you can use in place of SAID. The next 2 slides contain nearly 600 of them...

... and this file is available to you as a spreadsheet.

<b>A</b>	Bargained	Chimed in	Craved	Empathized	Growled
Abjured	Barked	Chipped in	Cried	Emphasized	Grumbled
Accepted	Bawled	Chirped	Cried out	Encouraged	Grunted
Accused	Beamed	Choked	Criticized	Ended	Guessed
Acknowledged	Beckoned	Chortled	Croaked	Enjoined	Guffawed
Added	Began	Chuckled	Crooned	Enjoyed	Gulped
Addressed	Begged	Circulated	Cross-examined	Entreated	Gurgled
Admitted	Believed	Cited	Crowed	Enumerated	Gushed
Admonished	Belittled	Claimed	Cursed	Enunciated	<b>H</b>
Advertised	Bellowed	Coaxed	Cussed	Equivocated	Haggled
Advised	Berated	Comforted	<b>D</b>	Estimated	Hastened to add
Advocated	Beseeched	Commanded	Debated	Exacted	Hastened to say
Affirmed	Besought	Commented	Deceived	Exaggerated	Hedged
Agonized	Bleated	Communicated	Decided	Exclaimed	Held
Agreed	Blew up	Complained	Declared	Exhorted	Hemmed and Hawed
Alleged	Blubbered	Conceded	Decreed	Expatriated	Hesitated
Allowed	Blurled	Conceited	Defended	Explained	Hinted
Alluded	Blustered	Concluded	Delivered	Exploded	Hissed
Announced	Boasted	Concurred	Demanded	Exposed	Hollered
Answered	Boomed	Condemned	Demurred	Expostulated	Hooted
Apologized	Bossed	Condescended	Denied	Expounded	Howled
Appealed	Bragged	Conferred	Denoted	Expressed	Hypothesized
Appeased	Breathed	Confessed	Denounced	Extended	<b>I</b>
Approved	Broadcasted	Confided	Described	Extolled	Imagined
Argued	Broke in	Confirmed	Detected	<b>F</b>	Imitated
Articulated	Brought forth	Confused	Determined	Faltered	Imparted
Asked	Burst	Confuted	Dictated	Fancied	Implied
Assented	<b>C</b>	Conjectured	Digressed	Finished	Implored
Asserted	Cackled	Consented	Directed	Foretold	Imported
Asseverated	Cajoled	Consoled	Disclaimed	Forewarned	Importuned
Assumed	Calculated	Contemplated	Disclosed	Founded	Inclined
Assured	Called	Contended	Discussed	Fretted	Indicated
Attested	Caroled	Contested	Disposed	Fumed	Inferred
Attracted	Carped	Continued	Disrupted	<b>G</b>	Informed
Avered	Cautioned	Contradicted	Disseminated	Gagged	Inquired
Averted	Censured	Contributed	Distributed	Gasped	Insinuated
Avoided	Challenged	Cooed	Divulged	Gawped	Insisted
Avouched	Changed	Corrected	Doubted	Giggled	Instructed
Avowed	Chanted	Coughed	Drawled	Glowered	Insulted
Awakened	Charged	Counseled	Droned	Granted	Interjected
<b>B</b>	Chatted	Countered	<b>E</b>	Greeted	Interposed
Babbled	Chattered	Courted	Echoed	Grieved	Interpreted
Baited	Cheered	Crabbed	Elaborated	Grinned	Interrogated
Bantered	Chided	Cracked	Emitted	Groaned	Interrupted

Intimated	Nagged	Prompted	Refused	Sniffled	Trilled
Intimidated	Narrated	Promulgated	Reiterated	Sniveled	Trumpeted
Intoned	Necessitated	Pronounced	Rejoiced	Snorted	Twanged
Invited	Nodded	Prophesied	Rejoined	Sobbed	Twittered
Itemized	Noted	Proposed	Related	Solicited	<b>U</b>
<b>J</b>	Notified	Protested	Released	Sought	Underestimated
Jabbered	<b>O</b>	Provoked	Remarked	Specified	Understood
Jeered	Objected	Publicized	Remembered	Speculated	Undertook
Jested	Observed	Published	Reminded	Spieled	Upbraided
Joked	Offered	Puled	Remonstrated	Spluttered	Urged
Joshed	Orated	Put forth	Repeated	Spoke	Uttered
Judged	Ordered	Putout	Replied	Spouted	<b>V</b>
Justified	<b>P</b>	<b>Q</b>	Reported	Sputtered	Validated
<b>K</b>	Panted	Quacked	Reprimanded	Squeaked	Ventured
Keened	Passed on	Quaked	Reputed	Stammered	Verbalized
Kibbitzed	Perceived	Qualified	Requested	Stated	Verified
<b>L</b>	Persisted	Quarreled	Required	Stipulated	Vociferated
Lamented	Persuaded	Quavered	Requisitioned	Stressed	Voiced
Laughed	Pestered	Queried	Responded	Stuttered	Volunteered
Lectured	Petitioned	Questioned	Restated	Suggested	Vouched
Leered	Piped up	Quibbled	Retorted	Supposed	Vouched for
Lied	Pleaded	Quipped	Revealed	Surmised	<b>W</b>
Lilted	Pledged	Quizzed	Roared	Suspected	Waffled
Lisped	Pointed out	Quoted	<b>S</b>	Swore	Wailed
Listed	Pondered	<b>R</b>	Said	Sympathized	Wangled
<b>M</b>	Postulated	Raged	Sang	<b>T</b>	Wanted
Made known	Pouted	Railed	Schmoozed	Tattled	Warbled
Made public	Praised	Rambled	Scoffed	Taunted	Warned
Magnified	Prayed	Ranted	Scolded	Teased	Went on
Maintained	Preached	Rattled off	Screamed	Testified	Wept
Marveled	Predicted	Raved	Screeched	Thanked	Wheedled
Mentioned	Premised	Reassured	Seconded	Theorized	Whimpered
Mewled	Presented	Rebuffed	Seethed	Thought aloud	Whined
Mimicked	Presumed	Recalled	Settled	Threatened	Whispered
Moaned	Presupposed	Recited	Shared	Thundered	Whooped
Mocked	Prevaricated	Reckoned	Shouted	Ticked off	Wondered
Mourned	Probed	Reckoned that	Shrieked	Told	Wooded
Mouthed	Proceeded	Recommended	Shrugged	Told off	<b>Y</b>
Moved	Proclaimed	Reconciled	Shuddered	Tolerated	Yakked
Mumbled	Prodded	Recorded	Sighed	Touted	Yapped
Murmured	Profaned	Recounted	Snapped	Trailed off	Yawped
Mused	Professed	Recovered	Snarled	Transferred	Yelled
Muttered	Proffered	Recriminated	Sneered	Transmitted	Yelped
<b>N</b>	Promised	Referred	Snickered	Trembled	Yowled

## Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what

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Armed with verbs other than *said*, there is a temptation to transform the previous example into something like the following:

“blah, blah,” he asked.

“blah, blah,” she replied.

“blah, blah,” he reiterated.

“blah, blah.” she interjected.

“blah, blah?” he queried.

“blah, blah,” she protested.

In a misguided effort to avoid “repeating oneself” (redundancy) with *said* after *said* after *said*, the author comes up with a variety of identifying verbs and, let’s be honest, in some cases they don’t even accurately relate to the dialogue.

The obvious problem is that it is equally bad.

## Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what

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It's fine to leave off the identifier entirely whenever it's **crystal clear** who is speaking. You can also look for an opportunity to enhance characterization. Can you enhance the dialogue with some secret inner thought or emotion? Maybe add some "stage business" like picking up a coffee mug or tapping a fingernail on a table top?

"blah, blah." Boris kept his face perfectly schooled and tried to hide the tension in his neck as he awaited her reply.

"blah, blah." Natasha studied his face, sensing that Boris hid something much bigger behind his casual question.

"blah."

"blah, blah, blah, blah." She knew something else, something unsaid, lurked behind his deep voice.

"blah." Boris signaled for the waitress to bring him the bill.

"blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," Natasha blurted, regretting it almost immediately.

9



GOOD DIALOGUE REVEALS PERSONALITY, AND  
CHARACTERS ONLY VERY RARELY SAY PRECISELY  
WHAT THEY ARE THINKING

# Good dialogue reveals personality, and characters only very rarely say precisely what they are thinking

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Characters who say exactly what they mean are **generic**.

Characters who talk **around** their emotions and objectives are much more interesting.

Despite all the words at our disposal, words tend to fail us at key moments, and even when we know what we want to say we spend a whole lot of time trying to describe and articulate what we feel without being quite able to do it properly. We misunderstand, overemphasize, underemphasize, grasp at what we mean, and conversations go astray.

When two characters go back and forth explaining precisely what they are feeling or thinking to each other, it doesn't seem remotely real.

# 10



GOOD DIALOGUE EMPLOYS JARGON, DIALECT,  
AND OCCASIONALLY DROPS SOME WORDS

# Good dialogue employs Jargon, Dialect, and occasionally drops some words

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Use proper jargon. Sparingly, but accurately, for realism.

Military, Law Enforcement, Pilots, Lawyers, and just about every other profession use lots of jargon and acronyms. Do your research and use the proper jargon to keep it real.

“Roger, Twelve-Alpha. I read you Five-by-Five.”

# Good dialogue employs Jargon, Dialect, and occasionally drops some words

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If your character has an accent or uses dialect, you may wish to reflect that in your dialogue as well. Don't be afraid to experiment as long as your spelling remains consistent and reads like it sounds.

“Aye, Lass. Thus is a kilt Ahm weerin, an a tartan broach as weel. An wut’n you like ta take a wee keek at mah broadsword, no doubt. Aye. I seen ya haverin.”



# Good dialogue employs Jargon, Dialect, and occasionally drops some words

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Occasionally, in real life conversations, people speak with a certain brevity that drops words from one or more sentences.

Instead of:

“I’m so very sorry, Boris, but I simply can’t come over right now.”

A character might say:

“Sorry, Boris. Can’t make it.”



11



**GOOD DIALOGUE SOUNDS UNIQUE FOR EVERY CHARACTER**

# Good dialogue sounds unique for every character

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- Every character has to have his or her own voice complete with his or her own preferred speech pattern, rhythm, and dialect.



- Otherwise, all of your characters are going to sound like just one person.

## II.

# HE SAID / SHE SAID

The key to super realistic dialogue

# HE and SHE differ greatly



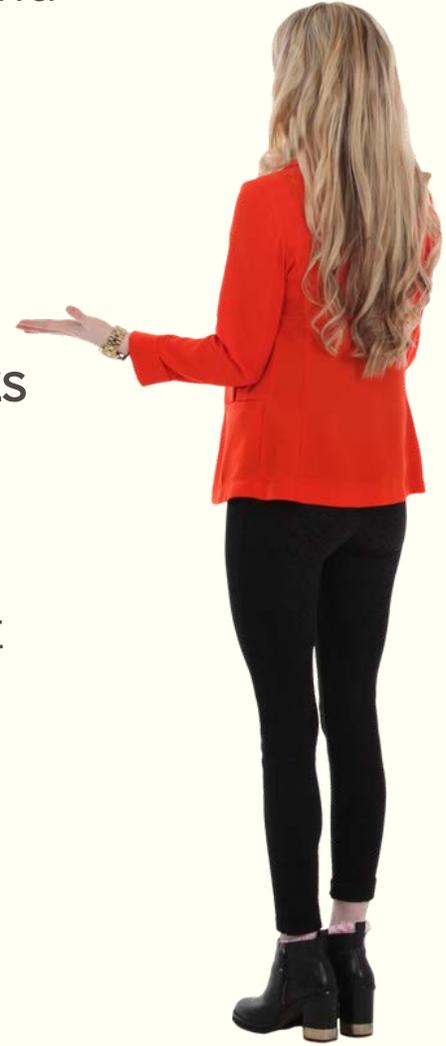
- Men and women are DIFFERENT despite what the secular world proclaims
- Men and women have different biology and different biological needs
- Men and women perceive problems differently
- Men and women perceive relationships differently
- Men and women THINK differently
- Men and women SPEAK differently

# HE and SHE each SPEAK differently

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- There are fundamental differences between men and women and you can accurately depict these differences in your dialogue (and the narrative).
- Women tend to speak very **passively** at all times to either sex while men tend to speak more **actively** to men and somewhat less actively to women.
- Men tend to measure their self-worth by **their accomplishments**
- Women tend to measure their self-worth by **the quality of their relationships**.
- Therefore, Men focus on accomplishments by having important sounding job titles or speaking about things actively and with ownership.
- Women tend to focus on emotions and perceptions.



# HE and SHE each SPEAK differently

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## Why speak at all?

- **He** believes communication should have a **clear purpose**.

Behind every conversation is a **problem that needs solving** or a **point** that needs to be made. Communication is used to get to the root of the dilemma as efficiently as possible.

- **She** uses communication to **discover** how she **feels** and what she **wants to say**.

She sees conversation as an **act of sharing** and an **opportunity to increase intimacy** with her partner. Through sharing, she releases negative feelings and solidifies her bond with the man she loves or strengthens relationships with friends and loved ones.



# HE and SHE each SPEAK differently

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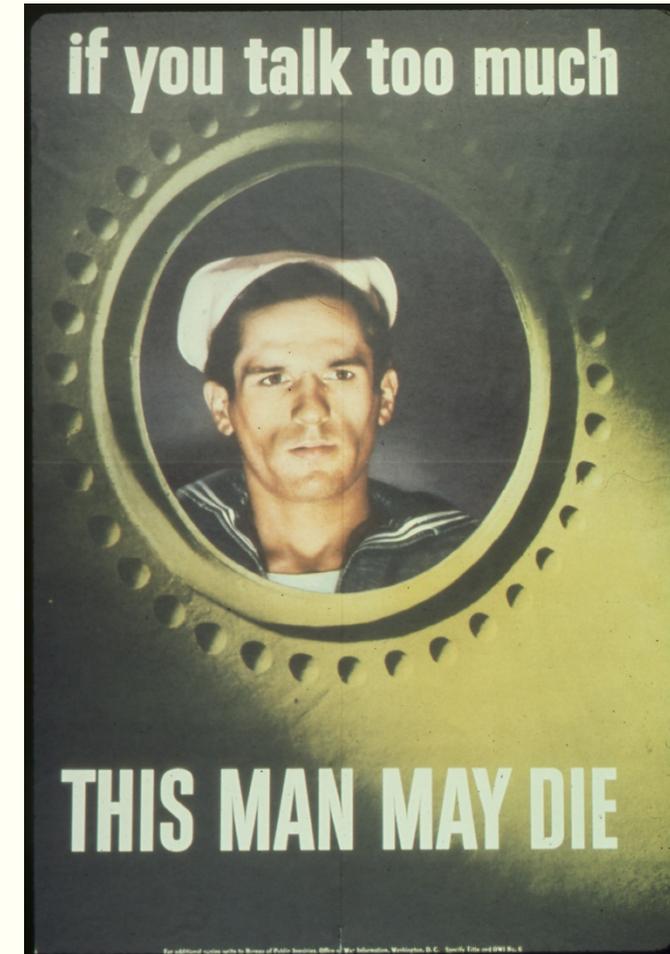
## What's the point?

- She uses communication to **explore** and **organize** her thoughts — to discover the point of the story.

SHE isn't necessarily searching for a solution when she initiates a conversation. SHE'S looking for someone to listen and **understand what she's feeling**. SHE may not know what information is **necessary or excessive** until the words come spilling out.

- He **prioritizes** productivity, economy, and **efficiency** in his daily life, and conversation is no exception.

When HE tells a story he has **already sorted through the details** in his own head, and shares only those details that he deems **essential to the point** of the story. HE might wonder, "Why do women need to talk as much as they do?" Often, HE may even **interrupt** a woman once he has heard the point, or **offer a solution**.



# HE and SHE each LISTEN differently

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## Did you HEAR that?

- He is conditioned to listen actively.

When a woman initiates conversation he assumes she is seeking his advice or assistance. He engages with the woman, filtering everything she's saying through the lens of, "What can we actually do about this?" Learning to listen patiently doesn't come easily to him.

- She sees conversation as a productive end in and of itself.

If she feels sufficiently heard or understood she may not need to take further action to resolve a problem or "make things better." The fact that she **has been listened to** assuages her anxieties and dulls the pangs of negative feelings. Sharing with someone who understands and loves her heals her from the inside and equips her with the emotional tools necessary to handle the trials and tribulations of the outside world.



# HE and SHE each COPE WITH STRESS differently

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- When **HE** feels stress or any negative emotion, the very **LAST THING** he wants to do is **TALK** about his **feelings**. In fact, talking about his feelings would be equal to torture.
- **HE** will often withdraw into his “cave” (become quiet and withdrawn) when upset or stressed. A man’s “cave time” is like a short vacation: **HE** reduces stress by forgetting about his problems and focusing on other things like watching television, reading the newspaper, or playing video games. In reality, **HIS** subconscious mind is **processing** and determining a COA (Course of Action) to take to resolve the problem by confronting it head on.
- **HE** will **almost always** avoid communication with **HER** during times of duress. If **SHE** persists with nurturing questions or criticism, he will withdraw even further, feeling that **SHE** doesn’t trust him to “take care of business” on his own.
- If **SHE** gives him space and lets him process his stress, **HE** feels understood and respected.

# HE and SHE each COPE WITH STRESS differently

---

- By using words as tools to explore and express her difficult emotions when **SHE** is upset, **SHE** is able to **process** her negative emotions... and let them go.
- **SHE** values **support** and **nurture**, and is most fulfilled by sharing, cooperation, and community because this builds or strengthens relationships.
- When **HE** shows interest in **HER** by asking caring questions or expressing heartfelt concerns, **SHE** feels loved and cared for because **HE** is fulfilling her first primary love need.



# HE speaks much more actively and with ownership

---



I did this. I fought that.  
I grilled this or that.  
I killed something.  
She cooked the thing I killed yesterday.  
I caught something else.  
I'll go do that tomorrow.  
I made some money. He ran a 10k.  
You should to do this or that.  
He ought to know better.  
I showed her how to do it twice already.  
How much should we make/take/bring?

## There are exceptions when HE speaks.

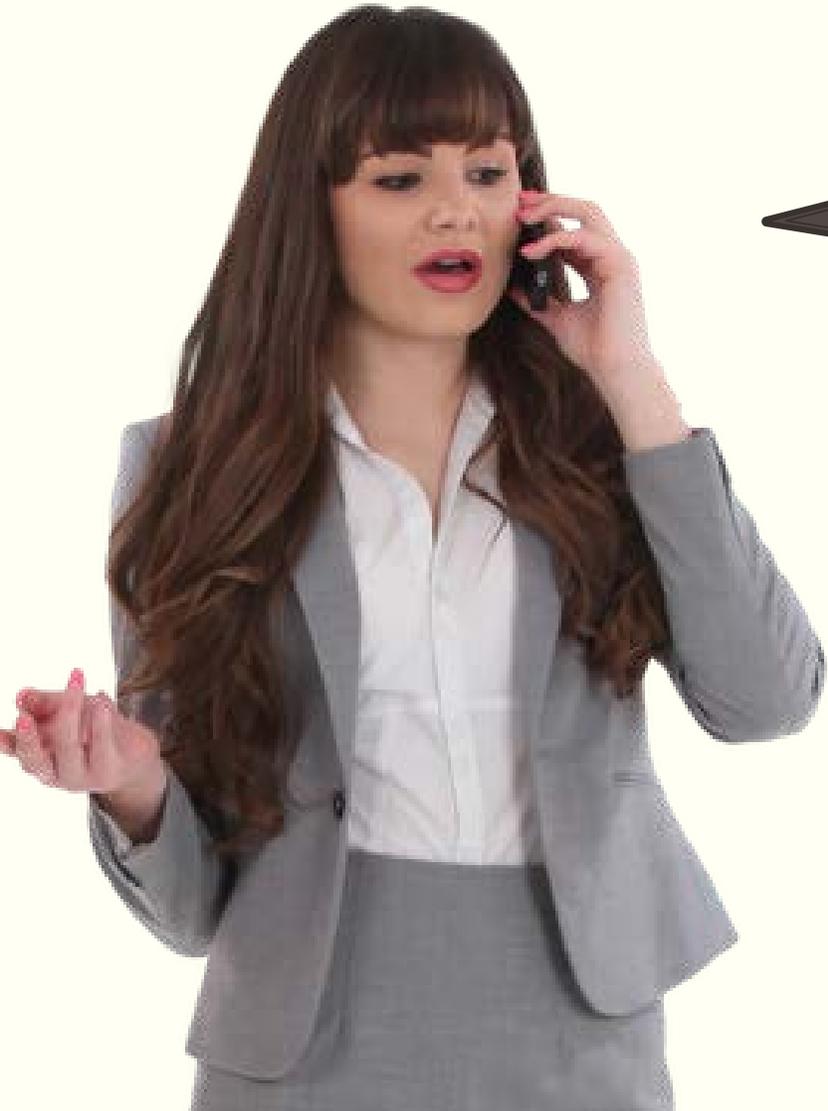
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- Familial relationship matters are often **passive**, for example. “I **was** thinking of my sister.” “My wife **was** amazing giving birth to my son.”
- NOTE: This allows the person who he feels **deserves all the credit** to actively claim all the credit for the **accomplishment**.
- However, if it doesn't involve a very close relationship, then men generally tend to describe events very **actively** and as if they were personally involved in whatever transpired.



# SHE speaks more passively

---



I was thinking about what you said.  
Seemed like he was enjoying our conversation.  
He is such a good boy.  
She is so pretty.  
My hair is not cooperating today.  
Traffic was really bad and made me late.  
I was starving. That was a really good meal.  
She was talking about that last week.  
He is going to be trouble.

Is Are Was Were Be Being Been  
Seem Seems Seemed Seemingly

# There are exceptions when SHE speaks...

---

- Familial relationship matters are often active, for example. “I called my sister. I gave birth to my son.”
- NOTE: This is because she feels directly and **actively** responsible for **the quality of that relationship**.
- However, if it doesn't involve a relationship then women generally tend to speak very passively and as if they were not personally involved in what transpired.



# HE and SHE each SPEAK differently

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- For men, they are typically the captain of every event they experience in life.
- One of their favorite short words is probably the pronoun “I.”
- Women tend to speak passively because, generally, women rarely describe any event as if they have any personal stake in that event when it is the case that the event has little to do with a relationship.



# SHE tends to hint. HE tends to speak with directness.

---

---



Does it feel cold in here to you? It feels colder than usual.

It's cold.

Do you like Mexican or Chinese food? Maybe pizza?

I'm hungry.

What is that you're watching? Is that something you should be watching do you think? Isn't there something else?

Turn that off.



# SHE uses a **LOT** more words per day than HE does

---



- Turns out **women do talk more than men**, but only a few thousand words per day on average. (4/5/2007 University of Texas at Austin)
- Research has shown that **women talk almost three times as much as men**. In addition, women generally speak more quickly and devote more brainpower to speaking. (2/20/2013 Science World Report)
- Previous research by Louann Brizendine at the University of California found that women speak an average of **20,000** words daily compared to only **7,000** words for men. This means that on average, women talk **nearly three times as much as men**. (2/22/2013 U Penn)

# SHE uses a **LOT** more words per day than HE does

---

- Video Clip from *Aloha*, Sony Pictures Entertainment (2015)
- Written and Directed: Cameron Crowe
- Stars: Rachel McAdams, Bradley Cooper, John Krasinski
- Also: Bill Murray, Emma Stone, Alec Baldwin, Danny McBride
  
- Just FYI: This movie is a **HORRIBLE MESS** of a film
- I'm embarrassed that I watched most of it
- But it does have this one (PG rated) 1:33 minute scene...





You can't just  
let people go.

# SHE speaks a LOT more than HE does

---

- Men tend to use far fewer words than women on a daily basis
- According to various studies, men speak anywhere from **2,000** to **8,000** to **13,000** fewer words per day than women!
- Men also tend to stick to the minimum required facts and/or explain events in **logical** order—when forced to speak at all—and rarely relate events in **chronological** order.
- For women, events that bear little relevance to any personal relationship tend to “just happen” to them and are described in a **chronological** and **linear** fashion.



# THE FLAT TIRE EXAMPLE

A lone human being drives a truck down a hill, runs over something sharp, and this is the end result.



## Flat Tire HE SAID

---

---

I blew a tire when I ran over something sharp driving my truck down that hill.

All very active (blew, ran, driving) and factual but **not** chronologically ordered.

This is **not** in chronological order. He clearly had to be driving down the hill first, run over the sharp thing next, then get the flat tire last.

The tire blowing event, which he considers the most significant event, appears in his dialogue before the actual running over the sharp thing or even the driving down the hill.



## Flat Tire SHE SAID

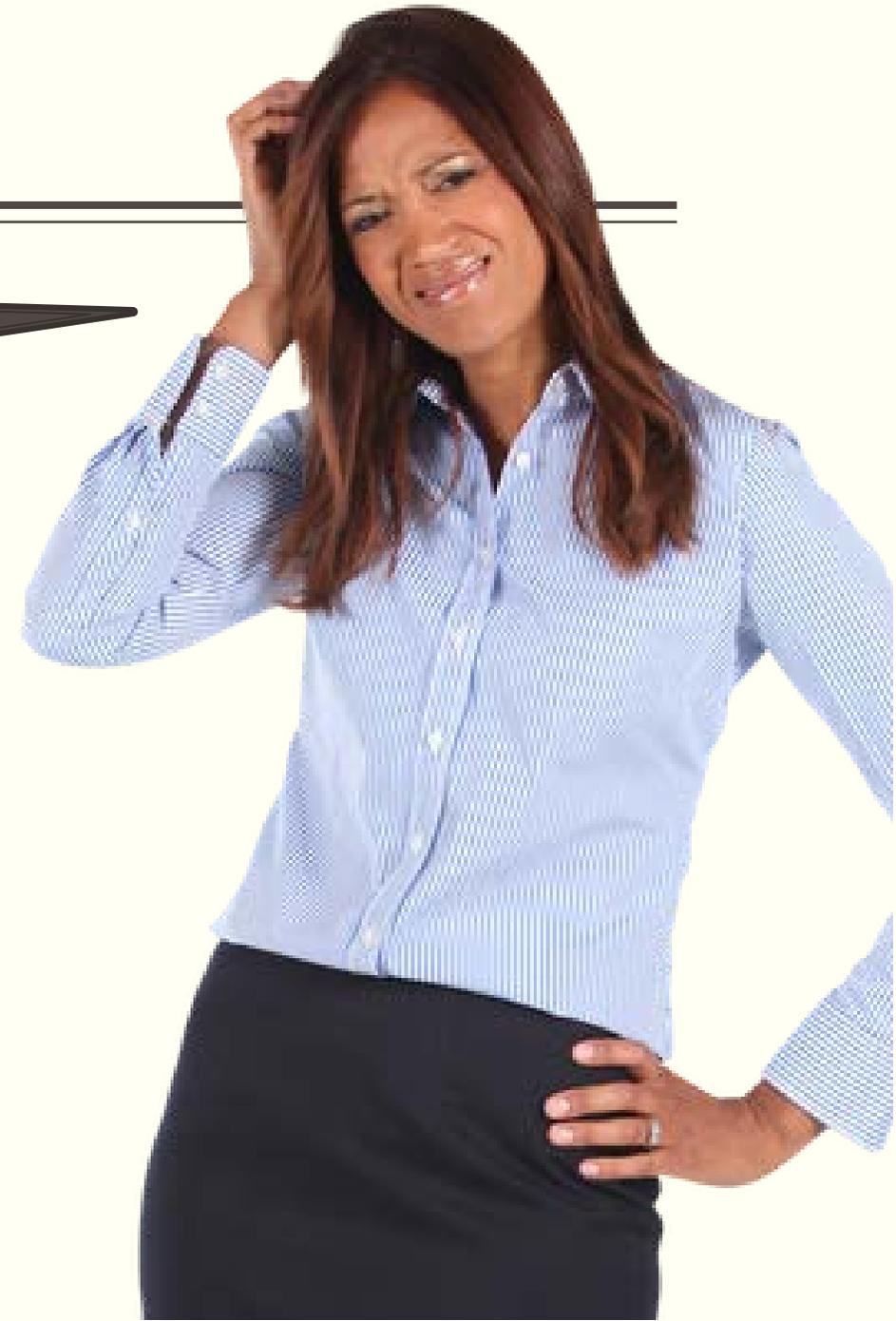
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I was coming down that hill in the truck and then there must have been something sharp in the road because now the tire is flat.

In her dialogue, even though she was actually driving the truck, her phrasing could lead one to believe she was merely a passenger in the truck.

Note that events are described in exact chronological order and stated using “to be” verbs instead of active verbs: WAS, BEEN, IS.



# Translating He Said She Said

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- Generally speaking, men use fewer words, more active verbs, and describe events factually or logically, listing (what they perceive as) the **significant events first**, while **owning** whatever happened.

The most significant incident (in this case, the flat tire) is worth describing and prioritizing. The other details are perceived as mundane and nearly irrelevant by most males.

- Generally speaking, women will describe the incident **chronologically** as events unfolded and as something that just “happened” with little to **no ownership** of any of the milestones or waypoints.

It is more important to women to understand how that incident emotionally affected them, affected a relationship, or was perceived by others.

# THE NEW HOUSE EXAMPLE

PROBLEM! A married couple has outgrown their house and they need to buy a larger home.



## New House SHE SAID

---

Wouldn't it be great if there were a nice, quiet little house in the suburbs for sale? A house in a good school district with low property taxes? There are neighborhoods with community pools and playgrounds for the kids. Maybe there's a place with a basement for the quilting supplies and a nice kitchen. Oh, and a garage for your tools and your workbench. And a nice yard with room for a flowerbed and maybe a little victory garden out back. If we get a few acres, we could put in some fruit trees. Wouldn't that be great?

Wordcount=94

Sentences=7

Active verbs=2

“to be” verbs=4



# New House HE SAID

---



I should probably buy us a bigger house.

- Wordcount=8 Sentences=1
- Active verbs=1 (100%) “to be” verbs=0

# New House HE said/SHE said

---



Wordcount=94 Sentences=7  
Active verbs=2 (33.33%)  
“to be” verbs=4 (66.66%)

Wordcount=8 Sentences=1  
Active verbs=1 (100.00%)  
“to be” verbs=0 (0.00%)



# Translating He Said She Said

---

- Remember, generally speaking, women will describe events (even future/predicted events) **chronologically** and as something that just “happened” with **little to no ownership**, using **more words** than their male counterparts, and using **fewer active verbs**.

How women anticipate something will make them feel **EMOTIONALLY** is more important than the something itself. For her, the problem and solution are less important than that she will feel a certain way once the problem is solved.

- Generally speaking, men use **fewer words**, **more active verbs**, and describe events factually or logically, listing the **significant events first**, while **owning** whatever happens.

For him, he has identified a problem (house is too small) and a solution (buy a new house) and that is **LOGICALLY** the end of the matter. Problem solved!

# INTERROGATION

Questioning, Interviewing, and Lying Liars.



## When HE or SHE is questioned...

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- The heart of interrogation techniques can be summed up with the acronym **L.E.R.I.**
  - Listen
  - Empathy
  - Rapport
  - Influence
- **Listen** to the subject and try to determine the underlying state of mind or emotional state of the subject.
- **Empathize** and establish common ground.
- Establish **Rapport** by which information can flow freely
- **Influence** the subject to disclose vital information and thus achieve your own goals.



# When HE or SHE is questioned...

---

- An effective interrogation technique that law enforcement and trained military interrogators employ is to force any male suspect to review events **CHRONOLOGICALLY**.



- An effective interrogation technique employed with women is to force any female suspect to speculate about how significant events made others **FEEL** while asking about those events **out of context with the timeline** in which they took place.

# When HE or SHE lies

---



- When men tell lies, most are incapable of creating a logically coherent and realistic **timeline**. Usually, when a male suspect is forced to review events in a linear and chronological way, he will eventually slip up and leave some gap or create an impossible overlap in time.

This is why interrogators will often “Take it from the top.”



- When women are lying, they often cannot appropriately ascribe **emotional depth** or significance to events or incidents when those events are taken out of chronological sequence.

This is why interrogators will often ask, “How do you think that made \_\_\_\_ feel when that happened?”

WHEN SHE ASKS  
EMOTIONALLY  
CHARGED QUESTIONS



## When HE or SHE is questioned...

---

- Women tend to ask **many** more **emotionally** charged questions than their male counterparts.



- Men tend to **dodge** emotionally charged questions as **often as possible**.

SHE will ask EMOTIONALLY CHARGED questions

---



## SHE will ask EMOTIONALLY CHARGED questions

---



Natasha took a deep breath. “Okay. Here goes. Do you hate commitment? Is calling on the phone so awful? Do you have something against communication? Do you believe in the girlfriend stereotype? Are you actually afraid of settling down? Do you think your life ends when you get married? Do you tell your friends we’re engaged? Do you tell your mom everything? Do you notice when I gain weight? Do you want to dump me? Are you actually unhappy? Do I make you unhappy? Do you ever think about your ex-girlfriend when we’re together?”

## SHE will ask EMOTIONALLY CHARGED questions

---



Natasha took a deep breath. “Okay. Here goes. Do you hate commitment? Is calling on the phone so awful? Do you have something against communication? Do you believe in the girlfriend stereotype? Are you actually afraid of settling down? Do you think your life ends when you get married? Do you tell your friends we’re engaged? Do you tell your mom everything? Do you notice when I gain weight? Do you want to dump me? Are you actually unhappy? Do I make you unhappy? Do you ever think about your ex-girlfriend when we’re together?”



Boris frowned, caught her eye, and said, “No.”

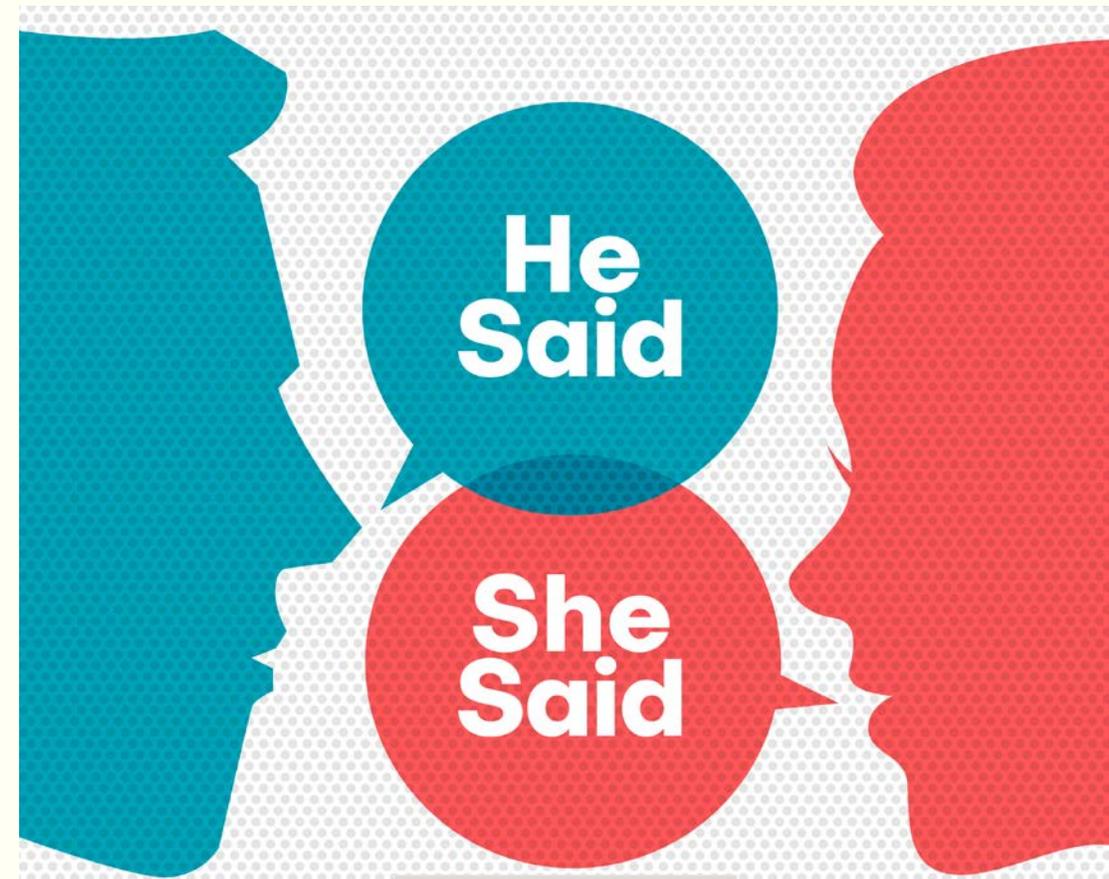
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# TECHNIQUES FOR SUPER REALISTIC DIALOGUE



# DIALOGUE REVISION TIPS

Putting it all together



## Given the differences between HE SAID / SHE SAID dialogue

---

For female characters when events “just happen” around them, they are in a “state of being.” So, in the dialogue in those cases, the “to be” state of being verbs are perfectly fine.

**Actively describe any emotional response** to those same events that “passively” happened.

Depending on the circumstances, female dialogue can also be a bit wordy and that’s fine, also. As I’ve already said, and we all intuitively realize, women use thousands or tens of thousands more words per DAY than men and rarely feel that a simple “yes or no” answer is the full and complete answer.

## Given the differences between HE SAID / SHE SAID dialogue

---

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In the male dialogue, revise a lot of the initial passive “to be” verbs in their speech. When revising male dialogue, generally make it as active as possible.

Give them ownership. “I did this/I said that/I worked to **achieve** something.”

With most male characters, make their speech just as succinct as possible, nearly to the point of sounding terse. We can steal a page from Elmore Leonard’s playbook, here.

“Shut up,” Marty explained.

That is some good, tight, active, male dialogue.

REMEMBER: There are exceptions. Loving male relatives will speak softly, gently, using passive verbs, and at length with loved ones.

# CREATE OR RESOLVE CONFLICT



# Conflict: HE minimizes how SHE experiences stress/negative emotions

---



I feel so stressed right now. I have all these negative emotions I am struggling to cope with. Can I just talk about them with you?

Reality check!

You're making a mountain out of a mole hill. You're getting overly emotional about all this.





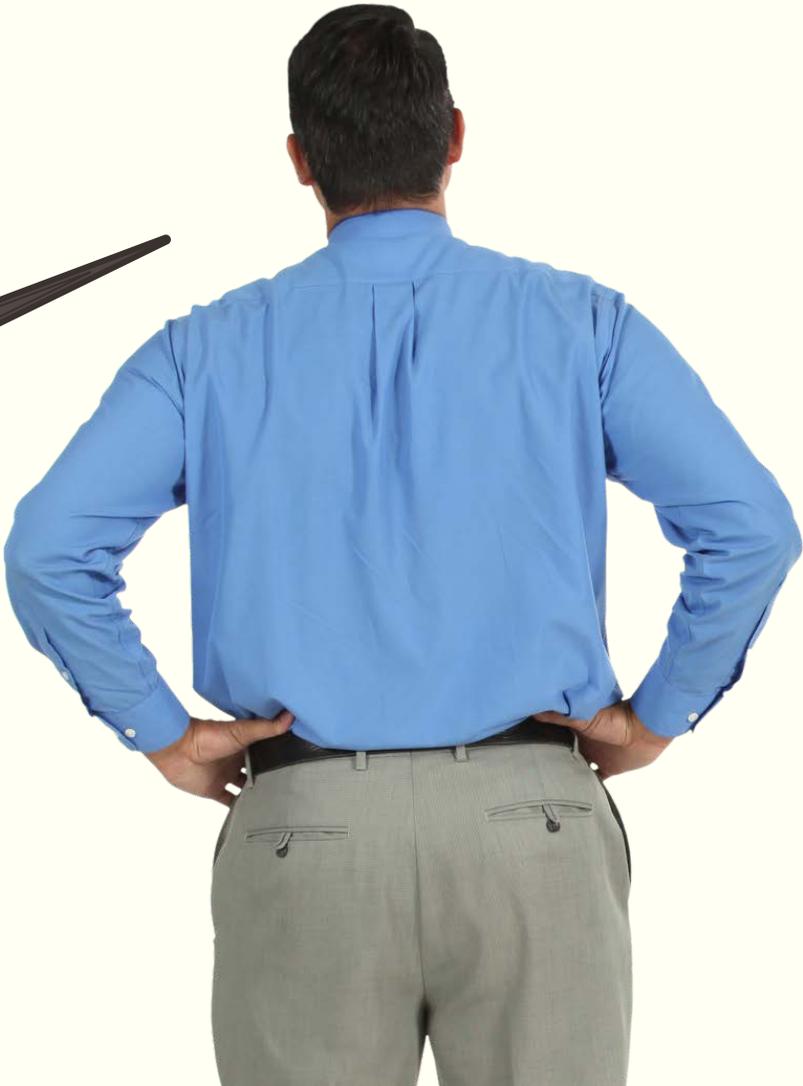
# Conflict: SHE interrogates him about how HE copes with stress or negative emotions

---

---



You'll feel better if you just tell me how you FEEL right now. Let's really talk a lot about your feelings.



Leave me alone!  
I'm in my CAVE!



# Conflict: SHE feels SHE isn't being heard

---



Have you even heard  
a single word I've said?



That's a really strange way to  
start a conversation.



# Conflict: HE feels disrespected

---



I just assumed...

That I enjoy disrespect?





# Conflict: SHE hears any of the following...

---

---



Can we talk?

“Calm down.”

“What is it *now*?”

“Why do you always do that?”





## Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What he expects)

---

I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

Yes. I'd love some. Thanks.



Branch 1: The binary answer is in the affirmative.



# Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What he expects)

---



## Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What he expects)

---

I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

No, thanks. Not super hungry just now.

Branch 2: The binary answer is in the negative.



# Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What he expects)

---



## Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What actually happens)

---

I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

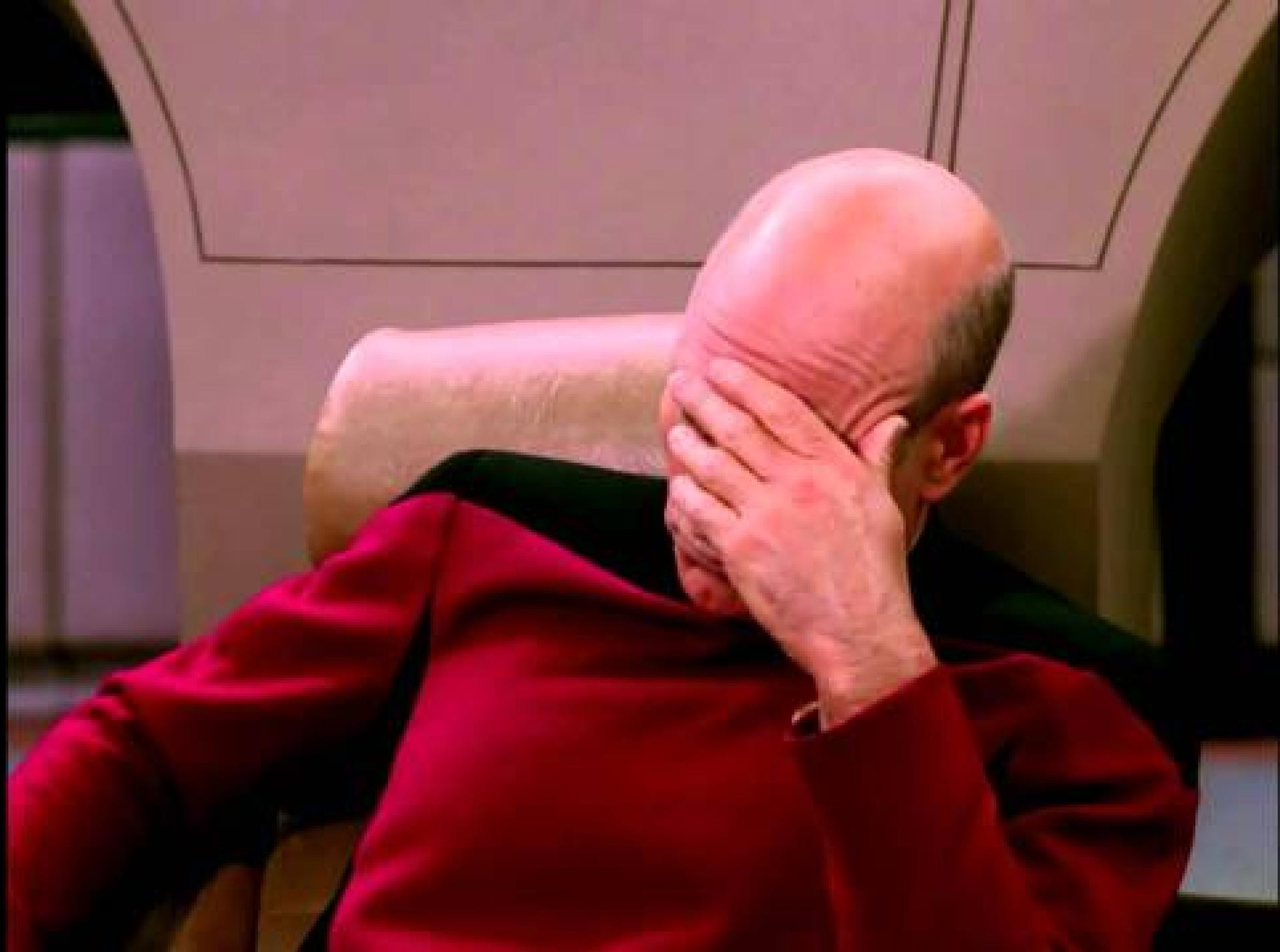
Where are you ordering from?

Papa John's.

Okay.

Branch 3: The binary answer is unobtainable.





## Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What actually happens)

---

---



I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

Where are you ordering from?

Papa John's.

Okay.

Okay, so do you want some pizza?

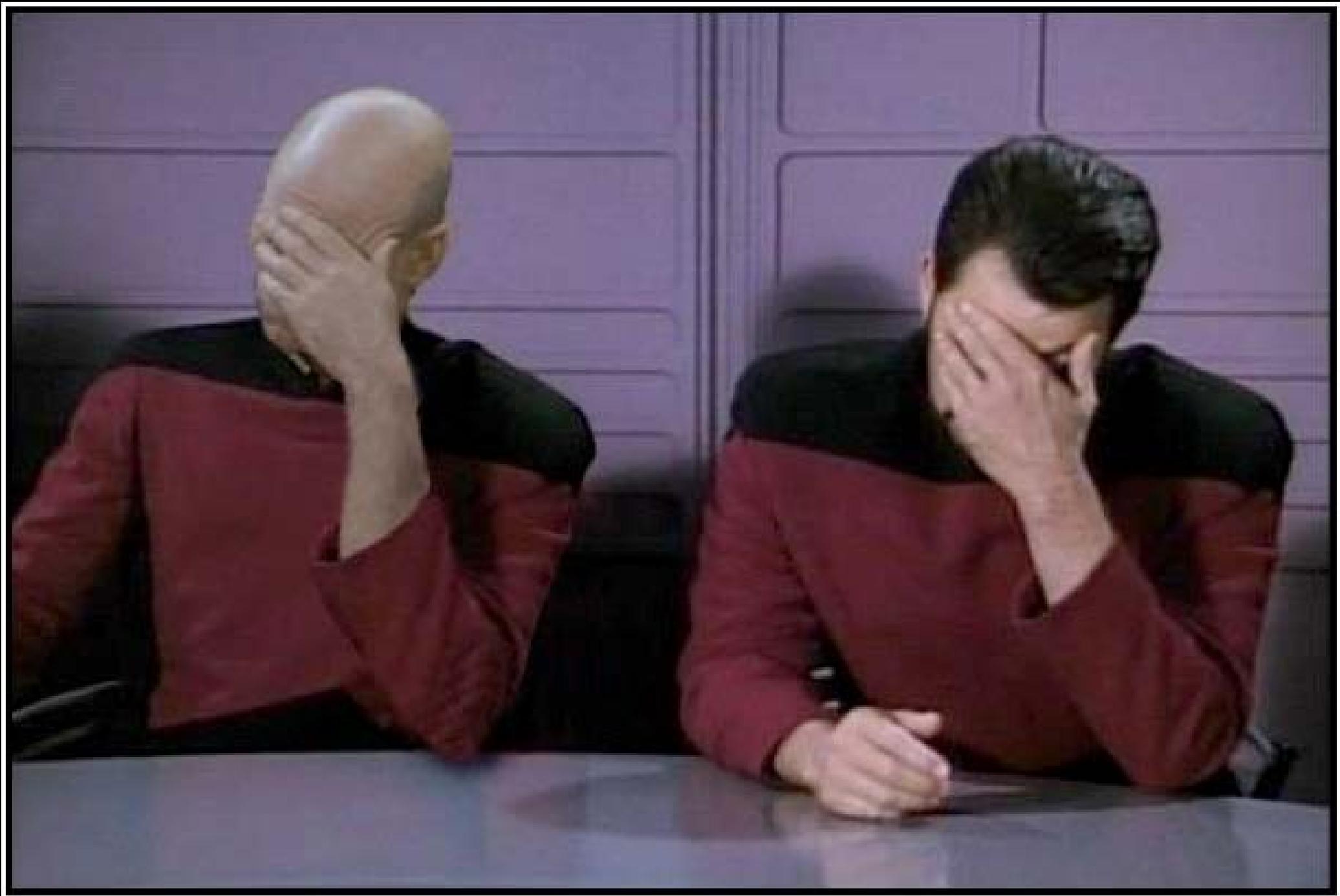
I said 'yes'.

No. You didn't.

Fine. What are you having on yours?

The usual. Do you want some pizza?





## Conflict: HE can't get a simple YES or NO (What actually happens)

---

---



I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

Where are you ordering from?

Papa John's.

Okay.

Okay, so do you want some pizza?

I said 'yes'.

No. You didn't.

Fine. What are you having on yours?

The usual. Do you want some pizza?

What do they have?

For pizza? Toppings. Cheese. Meat. Veggies.  
DO YOU WANT A PIZZA?

Are you picking it up?

I'm starting to think I should.

Why?





# Conflict: SHE feels HE won't "get real" about his feelings

---

---



Why won't you answer me?

Why won't you return my calls?

Didn't you get my text message?

...

SUDDENLY...

**GRRR!**



# EAVESDROP.

Really. Go ahead. You're allowed.



# Eavesdrop...

---

- ...and keep a close eye out as well
- Become a student of conversation
- Coffee shops, shopping malls, and restaurants are alive with people talking, laughing and sharing stories.
- While away a Saturday morning in a local coffee shop, jotting down conversation topics that are bandied around from table to table.
- Unabashedly pay attention to gestures, tones, facial expressions, and reactions as those very snippets from real life can help you write compelling, believable dialogue.
- Conversation isn't merely an exchange of words. Oh no, we also use body language to get our message across, so it goes without saying that this needs to be captured in your dialogue.



# ACT IT OUT

Read it aloud.



## Read it aloud. Act it out.

---

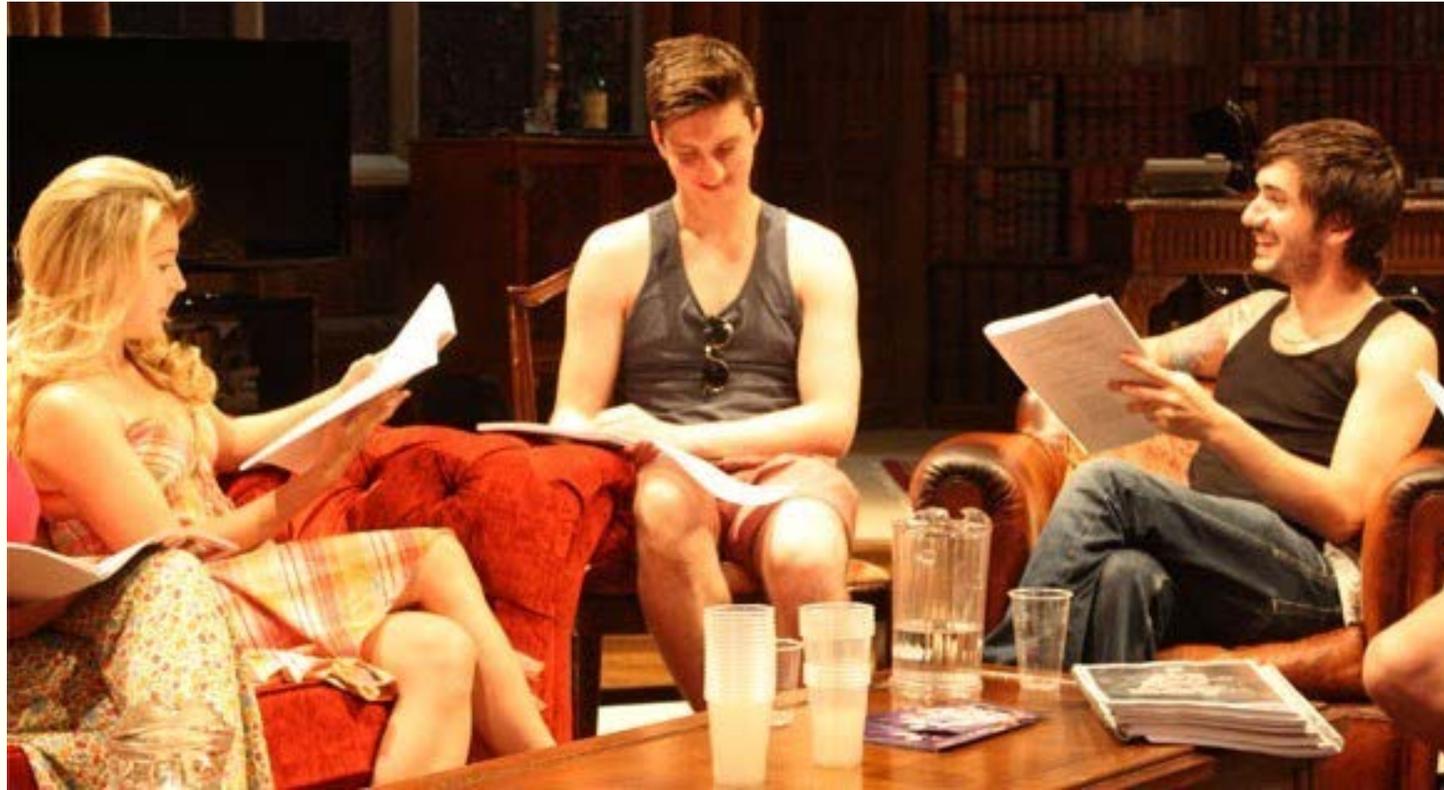
- During the editing process, you should always read your manuscript aloud, and do pay special attention to your dialogue.
- If the dialogue doesn't flow, or you're tripping over your words, it's not going to sound right to the reader either.
- Even though you're not capturing every part of a conversation in your dialogue, everything that's written should sound like an actual person said it. If not, it's time to erase and try again.



## Read it aloud. Act it out.

---

- Listen for **clichés**. Listen for **overuse** or **repeated use** of any phrases.
- Listen to see if each character has a **unique voice**.
- If you're in a writers' group, you might even ask other members to read your dialogue aloud





# QUESTIONS

