

## USING DIALOGUE TAGS

### Tips on Dialogue Tags

- If it is understood who is talking, the dialogue can sometimes be stronger without using any dialogue tag.
- Using the simple “said” is the most detracting for readers.
- If the dialogue isn’t strong enough to use “said,” consider rewriting it.
- Don’t use more than one dialogue tag per paragraph.
- It is best to show the character’s emotions when speaking rather than telling them. For example, instead of using “*I didn’t mean to hurt you,*” *she pouted* use *Her lower lip trembled. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”*
- You can use some descriptive dialogue tags, but use them sparingly.
- Avoid using adverb tags that end in –ly, such as mysteriously or slyly.
- Extreme dialogue tags can make the characters sound melodramatic or even silly. For example, having the heroine “shriek” something makes her sound harsh.
- If you use a dialogue tag other than “said,” make sure it is physically possible. For example, you can’t “laugh” a comment. You can use: *She laughed. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”*
- You can’t add a verb description and force it to be part of a dialogue tag. For example, a person can’t physically grimace a comment. You can use: *He grimaced. “I’m sorry about that.”*
- Another often used dialogue tag that is physically impossible is “hissed.”
- Try not to add adverbs to the dialogue tags unless it really adds something to the dialogue. For example, if the character’s words already show anger, don’t add “angrily” (*he said angrily*).
- Avoid using these tags in a love scene: ejaculated, cockily

### Dialogue Tags to Avoid

- Exclaimed, shouted, asserted, demanded, thundered
- Cried, shrieked, barked, snarled, growled, sniffed, hissed
- Grimaced, grinned, smiled, frowned
- Murmured, whimpered, whispered
- Inquired, queried
- Interjected, interrupted, counseled, conceded

### Correct Grammatical Use of Dialogue Tags

- The subject should go before the verb, such as *Starla said* and not *said Starla*.
- Adding a comma after a tag with a descriptive phrase following it can weaken the dialogue. For example, “*Do you hate snakes as much as I do?*” *Penny asked, wrinkling her nose in displeasure.* This would be stronger by using “*Do you hate snakes as much as I do?*” *Penny wrinkled her nose in displeasure.*

## More Words Often Wrongly Used as Dialogue Tags

acknowledged	added	admitted
admonished	advised	agreed
announced	answered	apologized
argued	attempted	baited
balked	basked	beamed
began	begged	bellowed
blazed	bleated	boasted
breathed	broke in	burped
cackled	called	cautioned
charged	chattered	chided
choked	choked out	chortled
chuckled	coaxed	completed
concerned	concluded	considered
continued	cooed	corrected
coughed	counseled	countered
criticized	croaked	crowed
declared	defended	denied
dictated	disagreed	dodged
encouraged	erupted	explained
exploded	expostulated	expounded
finished	fretted	fumed
gaspd	gloated	grated
greeted	grilled	grinned
ground out	groused	grumped
grunted	guessed	haggled
hooted	hypothesized	improvised
informed	inserted	insisted
instructed	intoned	introspected
invited	jeered	jested
joked	judged	jumped in
kidded	lamented	lashed out
leered	looked	managed
marveled	mimicked	moaned
mocked	mocked	mouthed
mused	nodded	objected
observed	offered	opinionated
ordered	panicked	panted
paused	persisted	pleaded
pointed out	pontificated	postulated
prayed	pressed	pressed on
promised	prompted	pronounced
protested	puzzled	questioned
quipped	quoted	raged
ranted	rasped	rationalized
reasoned	rebuked	recanted
reciprocated	recited	referred
remanded	remembered	reminded

remonstrated	repeated	requested
required	responded	retorted
returned	reveled	sang
scolded	scorned	scowled
seethed	shared	shot back
shot out	shrugged	sighed
slurred	smirked	snapped
sneezed	snickered	soothed
spat	spat out	spewed
spit	spoke	spouted
sputtered	squealed	stammered
stated	stopped	stuttered
suggested	summarized	supplied
swallowed	sympathized	teased
tested	testified	theorized
threatened	trumpeted	urged
uttered	ventured	vociferated
waffled	wailed	warned
welcomed	went on	whined
worried		