

Toss Out Male Tropes: Men are More Than Black and White

He Said/She Said—Crafting Super Realistic Dialogue

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Why Dialogue Matters

Common Dialogue Tendencies

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)

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

ACT I: Characteristics of Good Dialogue

Good Dialogue...

1. has a purpose
2. is not weighed down by exposition
3. without sounding precisely like the way people talk in real-life, evokes the way people actually talk
4. doesn't use too many 'ly' adverbs
5. Isn't redundant
6. goes easy on exclamations, exhortations, & aposiopesis
7. is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, to easily follow who is speaking
8. reveals personality, and characters only very rarely say precisely what they are thinking (never "On the Nose")

9. occasionally employs accurate jargon, dialect, and drops some words
10. sounds unique for every character

1. Good dialogue has a purpose

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!

Not so good dialogue:

“Hello, Doris!”

“Hi, Natasha.”

“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.”

You can see how the dialogue above is weighed down. Would this be better?

“Doris! Hello!”

“Natasha. 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

“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 *evokes* the way people actually talk in real-life

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.

To paraphrase Elmore Leonard, good writers “leave out the boring parts”. This goes double 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.

As Jennifer Hubbard wrote, “good dialogue sounds like conversation, but is not an exact reproduction of conversation.”

4. Good dialogue doesn't use too many 'ly' adverbs

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.

Not so good dialogue:

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

Pretty good dialogue:

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

5. Good dialogue Isn't redundant

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.

Don't use redundant dialogue tags.

"That is fantastic news," Boris said happily.

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

6. Good dialogue goes easy on exclamations, exhortations, & aposiopesis

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.

Not so good dialogue:

"Natasha!"

"Doris!"

"You look great!"

"So do you!"

"It's been such a long time!"

"Three years at least!!!"

When they overuse verbal tics and crutches, they can drive the reader crazy. When a character overuses "Ughs" and "Blechs" or "Hmms" and "Ahhs" they can easily sound petulant.

Ellipsis gone wild

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.

Not so good dialogue:

Natasha sobbed and answered, "I just don't know how... to say this... It's just... I'm in love... with someone else..."

Pretty good dialogue:

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

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

You may not like this, but truth be told, the verbs *said*—or *asked* in the case of an interrogative—should really be your “go-to” verb when writing dialogue.

Said and *asked* are unusual words primarily because we interpret them in a very mechanical way. In fact, when we see either of these words, we mentally gloss over them as if they represented no more than a comma or a full stop.

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:

Not so good dialogue:

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

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.

Nearly 600 words to use instead of “Said” or Asked”

* Written words such as letters, emails, texts, signs, etc.

A	Advised	Apologized	Assumed	Avowed
Abjured	Advocated	Appealed	Assured	Awakened
Accepted	Affirmed	Appeased	Attested	
Accused	Agonized	Approved	Attracted	B
Acknowledged	Agreed	Argued	Authored*	Babbled
Added	Alleged	Articulated	Autographed*	Baited
Addressed	Allowed	Asked	Avered	Banged Out*
Admitted	Alluded	Assented	Averted	Bantered
Admonished	Announced	Asserted	Avoided	Bargained
Advertised	Answered	Asseverated	Avouched	Barked

Bawled	Commented	Decreed	Exploded	Imagined
Beamed	Committed*	Defended	Exposed	Imitated
Beckoned	Communicated	Delivered	Expostulated	Imparted
Began	Comped*	Demanded	Expounded	Implied
Begged	Complained	Demurred	Expressed	Implored
Believed	Composed*	Denied	Extended	Imported
Belittled	Conceded	Denoted	Extolled	Importuned
Bellowed	Conceited	Denounced		Inclined
Berated	Concluded	Described	F	Indicated
Beseeched	Concurred	Detected	Faltered	Indicted*
Besought	Condemned	Determined	Fancied	Inferred
Bleated	Condescended	Dictated	Finished	Informed
Blew up	Conferred	Digressed	Foretold	Inked*
Blubbered	Confessed	Directed	Forewarned	Inquired
Blurted	Confided	Disclaimed	Formulated*	Inscribed*
Blustered	Confirmed	Disclosed	Founded	Insinuated
Boasted	Confused	Discussed	Fretted	Insisted
Boomed	Confuted	Disposed	Fumed	Instructed
Bossed	Conjectured	Disrupted		Insulted
Bragged	Consented	Disseminated	G	Interjected
Breathed	Consoled	Distributed	Gagged	Interposed
Broadcasted	Contemplated	Divulged	Gasped	Interpreted
Broke in	Contended	Doubted	Gawped	Interrogated
Brought forth	Contested	Drafted*	Ghosted*	Interrupted
Burst	Continued	Drawled	Giggled	Intimated
	Contradicted	Drew Up*	Glowered	Intimidated
C	Contributed	Droned	Granted	Intoned
Cackled	Cooed	Dropped A	Greeted	Invited
Cajoled	Copied*	Line*	Grieved	Itemized
Calculated	Corrected	Dropped A	Grinned	J
Called	Corresponded*	Note*	Groaned	Jabbered
Caroled	Coughed		Growled	Jeered
Carped	Counseled	E	Grumbled	Jested
Cautioned	Countered	Echoed	Grunted	Joked
Censured	Courted	Elaborated	Guessed	Joshed
Chalked*	Crabbed	Emailed*	Guffawed	Jotted Down*
Challenged	Cracked	Emitted	Gulped	Judged
Changed	Craved	Empathized	Gurgled	Justified
Chanted	Created*	Emphasized	Gushed	
Charged	Cried	Encouraged		K
Chatted	Cried out	Ended	H	Keened
Chattered	Criticized	Engraved*	Haggled	Kibitzed
Cheered	Croaked	Engrossed*	Hastened to add	Knocked Off*
Chided	Crooned	Enjoined	Hastened to say	Knocked Out*
Chimed in	Cross-	Enjoyed	Hedged	
Chipped in	examined	Entreated	Held	L
Chirped	Crowed	Enumerated	Hemmed and	Lamented
Choked	Cursed	Enunciated	Hawed	Laughed
Chortled	Cussed	Equivocated	Hesitated	Lectured
Chuckled		Estimated	Hinted	Leered
Circulated	D	Exacted	Hissed	Lettered*
Cited	Dashed Off*	Exaggerated	Hollered	Lied
Claimed	Debated	Exclaimed	Hooted	Lilted
Coaxed	Deceived	Exhorted	Howled	Lisped
Comforted	Decided	Expatiated	Hypothesized	Listed
Commanded	Declared	Explained	I	

M	Predicted	Reckoned that	Sighed	Turned Out*
Made known	Premised	Recommended	Signed*	Twanged
Made public	Presented	Reconciled	Snapped	Tweeted*
Magnified	Presumed	Recorded	Snarled	Twittered
Maintained	Presupposed	Recounted	Sneered	Typed*
Marveled	Prevaricated	Recovered	Snickered	Typewritten*
Mentioned	Printed*	Recriminated	Sniffled	
Mewled	Probed	Referred	Sniveled	U
Mimicked	Proceeded	Refused	Snorted	Underestimated
Moaned	Proclaimed	Reiterated	Sobbed	Understood
Mocked	Prodded	Rejoiced	Solicited	Undertook
Mourned	Profaned	Rejoined	Sought	Upbraided
Mouthed	Professed	Related	Specified	Urged
Moved	Proffered	Released	Speculated	Uttered
Mumbled	Promised	Remarked	Spieled	
Murmured	Prompted	Remembered	Spluttered	V
Mused	Promulgated	Reminded	Spoke	Validated
Muttered	Pronounced	Remonstrated	Spouted	Ventured
	Prophesied	Repeated	Sputtered	Verbalized
N	Proposed	Replied	Squeaked	Verified
Nagged	Protested	Reported	Stammered	Vociferated
Narrated	Provoked	Reprimanded	Stated	Voiced
Necessitated	Publicized	Reproduced*	Stipulated	Volunteered
Nodded	Published	Reputed	Stressed	Vouched
Noted	Puled	Requested	Stuttered	Vouched for
Noted Down*	Pushed A	Required	Suggested	
Notified	Pencil*	Requisitioned	Supposed	W
	Put forth	Responded	Surmised	Waffled
O	Put in Writing*	Restated	Suspected	Wailed
Objected	Put Out	Retorted	Swore	Wangled
Observed		Revealed	Sympathized	Wanted
Offered	Q	Rewrote*		Warbled
Orated	Quacked	Roared	T	Warned
Ordered	Quaked		Tattled	Went on
	Qualified	S	Taunted	Wept
P	Quarreled	Said	Teased	Wheeled
Panted	Quavered	Sang	Testified	Whimpered
Passed on	Queried	Schmoozed	Texted*	Whined
Penciled*	Questioned	Scoffed	Thanked	Whispered
Penned*	Quibbled	Scolded	Theorized	Whooped
Perceived	Quipped	Scrawled*	Thought aloud	Wondered
Persisted	Quizzed	Screamed	Threatened	Wooded
Persuaded	Quoted	Screeched	Thundered	Wrote Down*
Pestered		Scribbled*	Ticked off	Wrote Up*
Petitioned	R	Scribed*	Told	Wrote*
Piped up	Raged	Scrivened*	Told off	
Pleaded	Railed	Seconded	Tolerated	Y
Pledged	Rambled	Seethed	Took Down*	Yakked
Pointed out	Ranted	Set Down*	Touted	Yapped
Pondered	Rattled off	Set Forth*	Trailed off	Yawped
Posted*	Raved	Settled	Transcribed*	Yelled
Postulated	Reassured	Shared	Transferred	Yelped
Pouted	Rebuffed	Shouted	Transmitted	Yowled
Praised	Recalled	Shrieked	Trembled	
Prayed	Recited	Shrugged	Trilled	Z
Preached	Reckoned	Shuddered	Trumpeted	Zipped

Armed with this, in a misguided effort to avoid “repeating oneself,” the author may come up with a variety of identifying verbs and, let’s be honest, in some cases they don’t even accurately relate to the dialogue.

“blah, blah,” he asked.

“blah, blah,” she replied.

“blah, blah,” he reiterated.

“blah, blah.” she interjected.

“blah, blah?” he queried.

“blah, blah,” she protested.

The obvious problem is that this is equally bad.

It’s fine to leave off the identifier entirely whenever it’s crystal clear who is speaking. Otherwise it is NEVER fine to leave off the identifier.

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.

8. Good dialogue employs Jargon, Dialect, and occasionally drops some words

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

A surgeon in an operating room is going to use jargon and speak in acronyms. A computer specialist is going to employ a ton of technical terms. Research is essential in every case.

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

If your character has an accent or uses dialect, 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 brooch as weel. An wut’n you like ta take a wee keek at mah broadsword, no doubt. Aye. I seen ya haverin.”

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,” Natasha said, “but I simply can’t come over right now.”

A character might say:

“Sorry, Boris,” Natasha said. “Can’t make it.”

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

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.

Good dialogue is never “on the nose”

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.”

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

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.

10. Good dialogue sounds unique for every character

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.

Act II: HE SAID / SHE SAID

HE and SHE differ greatly

- Men and women are DIFFERENT despite what the secular world would like us to think
- 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

There are **fundamental differences between men and women** and you can accurately depict these differences in your dialogue (and the narrative).

- SHE tends to speak very **passively** at all times to either sex.
- HE tends to speak more **actively** to men and somewhat less actively to women.
- SHE seeks **consensus**, agreement, validation and **without ownership**.
- HE makes **individual** choices and **with ownership**.

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 hit bad traffic on the way in.
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?

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.

HE and SHE each SPEAK differently

- HE is typically the captain of every event HE experiences in life.
- One of HIS favorite short words is probably the pronoun "I."
- SHE tends to speak passively because, generally, SHE rarely describes any event as if SHE has any personal stake in that event when it is the case that the event has little to do with a relationship.
- SHE tends to measure HER self-worth by the quality of HER relationships.
- HE tends to measure HIS self-worth by HIS accomplishments.
- SHE tends to focus on intangibles like emotions and perceptions because relationships are paramount.
- HE has important sounding Job Titles, and displays Awards, Certificates, Ribbons, Badges because accomplishments are paramount.

There are exceptions when HE speaks...

- 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.

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.

Why Speak at All?

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

Behind every conversation is a **problem that needs solving** or a **point** that needs to be made. He uses communication 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.

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**.

Did you HEAR that?

- **HE** is conditioned to **listen actively**.

Learning to listen patiently isn't natural for him. When **SHE** initiates conversation, **HE** assumes **SHE** wants his advice or assistance. **HE** engages with her, filtering everything **SHE** says through the lens of, "What can we actually do about this?"

- **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 Copes with Stress differently than **SHE** does

When **HE** feels stress or any negative emotion, the very **LAST THING** that **HE** wants to do is **TALK** about his **feelings**. In fact, talking about his feelings would feel like torture.

Often, when upset or stressed, **HE** will withdraw into his "cave" (become quiet and withdrawn). A man's "cave time" is like a tiny 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 viable COA (Course of Action) to take to resolve the problem, usually 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 usually 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.

SHE Copes with Stress differently than HE does

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.

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

SHE tends to seek **group consensus**.

-This means SHE often **drops hints** hoping someone else may interject and validate her observations.

HE tends to make **individual choices**.

-This means HE is often **very direct** in his individual observations.

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

HE: It's cold.

SHE: Do you like Mexican or Chinese food? Maybe pizza?

HE: I'm hungry.

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

HE: Turn that off.

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.

* 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)

* 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)

* 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)

Sometimes HE doesn't speak at all

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 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.

Generally Speaking, Women Like to Socialize and Men Do Not



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.

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.

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.

- Generally speaking, men use fewer words, more active verbs, and describe events factually or logically, listing 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.

Flat Tire SHE SAID

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.

Also, events are listed in chronological order and stated using “to be” verbs instead of active verbs: WAS, BEEN, IS.

- 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 or affected a relationship.

THE NEW HOUSE EXAMPLE

PROBLEM!

A couple has outgrown their house and they need to buy a bigger 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 (twice as many)

- 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.

New House HE SAID

I should probably buy us a bigger house.

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

- 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 the end of the matter. Problem solved!

Translating HE Said

Generally speaking, **HE** will:

- use **fewer words** than SHE will
- more **active verbs**
- describe events **factually** or **logically**,
- List events by what they perceive as **significant events first**,
- **own** whatever happened

The most significant incident—like the *flat tire*—is worth describing and prioritizing. Likely, HE perceives the other details as mundane and nearly irrelevant.

When HE identifies a **problem** (like the house is too small) and a **solution** (buy a new house) then that is **LOGICALLY** the end of the matter. Problem solved!

Translating SHE Said

Generally speaking, SHE will

- **passively** describe the incident using **fewer active verbs**.
- describe it **chronologically** as events unfolded
- Describe it as something that just “happened” with little or **no ownership** of any of the milestones or waypoints
- use **more words** than their male counterparts

For her, it is more important to understand how the event **emotionally** affected them, affected a **relationship**, or was **perceived** by others.

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

Interrogation

Questioning, Interviewing, and Lying Liars.

The heart of interrogation techniques can be summed up with the acronym **L.E.R.I.**

Listen
Empathy
Rapport
Influence

L—Listen to the subject and try to determine the underlying state of mind or emotional state of the subject.

E—Empathize and establish common ground.

R—Establish Rapport by which information can flow freely

I—Influence the subject to disclose vital information and thus achieve your own goals.

Subjective ways to tell when either HE or SHE is lying

(Additional info no longer in slide deck)

Unconscious behaviors are known as **deceptive indicators**.

1. Behavioral pause or delay before responding

You ask HIM or HER a question and there is a longer than normal delay, before the response. This can be an indicator.

Asking: “On this date seven years ago, what were you doing that day?” Anyone **should** pause before responding.

Asking: “On this date seven years ago, did you murder your neighbor?” A pause before answering is a significant indicator.

2. Verbal/non-verbal disconnect

A common verbal/nonverbal disconnect to watch out for occurs when a person nods affirmatively while answering in the negative or when a person shakes his or her head from side to side while answering in the affirmative.

3. Hiding the mouth or eyes

A deceptive person will often **hide his or her mouth or eyes** when being untruthful. Shielding the mouth is a subconscious attempt to cover over a lie. Shielding the eyes, or failure to make eye contact while answering, can be a subconscious attempt to shield oneself from the reaction of those who are being lied to.

4. Throat-clearing or swallowing before answering

If a person clears his or her throat, or performs a significant swallow, **prior to** answering a question, that’s a potential indicator. If this occurs mid-answer or after the answer it is less of an indicator.

5. Hand-to-face activity

When the subject bites or touches the lips or ears once the question is asked, this is an indicator. It is likely that your question created a spike in anxiety because a truthful response would be incriminating. That anxiety, in turn, triggers the autonomic nervous system to dissipate the anxiety, thus draining blood from the surfaces of the face, ears, and extremities—which often creates a sensation of cold or itchiness. Without the person even realizing it, the subject’s hands are drawn to the mouth or ears.

6. Grooming gestures

Some people dissipate anxiety through physical activity in the form of personal grooming or tidying up the immediate surroundings.

When lying in response to a question, HE might adjust his tie or shirt cuffs, or maybe his glasses. SHE might move a few strands of hair behind her ear, or straighten her skirt. If either wipes sweat off his or her forehead when responding to a question, that’s significant.

Tidying up surroundings is another form of grooming gesture. You ask a question, and suddenly the phone isn’t turned the right way, the glass of water is too close, or the pencil isn’t in the right place. (following remains in slide deck)

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 HE lies, most men are incapable of creating a logically coherent and realistic **timeline**. Usually, when HE 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 SHE lies, SHE often cannot appropriately ascribe **emotional depth** 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

SHE tends to ask **many** more **emotionally** charged questions than their male counterparts.

HE tends to **dodge** emotionally charged questions as **often as possible**.

Emotionally charged questions stress men out. They have measurable physical and physiological reactions when confronted with emotions, especially emotions they consider unreasonable.

SHE will ask EMOTIONALLY CHARGED questions

“Okay. Here goes.” Natasha took a deep breath. “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 setting 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 happy? 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.”

Act III: Techniques for Super Realistic dialogue

Putting it all together

DIALOGUE REVISION TIPS

For SHE SAID

Depending on the circumstances, female dialogue can be a bit wordy and that’s fine. SHE use thousands or tens of thousands more words per DAY than HE does and rarely feel that a simple “yes or no” answer is the full and complete answer.

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

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

For HE SAID

In the male dialogue, revise a lot of the initial passive “to be” verbs in his 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,” he 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: SHE feels SHE isn’t being heard

SHE: Have you even heard a single word I’ve said?
HE: That’s a really strange way to start a conversation.

Conflict Resolution: SHE feels heard

SHE: Have you even heard a single word I’ve said?
HE: Of course I’m listening. I’m trying to understand how you feel about what you’re saying.

Conflict: HE minimizes how SHE experiences stress/negative emotions

SHE: 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?
HE: Reality check! You’re making a mountain out of a mole hill. You’re getting overly emotional about this.

Conflict Resolution: HE empathizes with how SHE experiences stress/negative emotions

SHE: 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?
HE: Absolutely. Let me make you some tea and you tell me how you feel. Take all the time you need. I’m here to listen.

Conflict: HE feels interrogated about how HE copes with stress or negative emotions

SHE: You’ll feel better if you just tell me how you FEEL right now. Let’s really talk a lot about your feelings.
HE: Leave me alone! I’m in my CAVE!

Conflict Resolution: SHE gives him space to cope with stress or negative emotions

SHE: I can tell you’re stressed. I’m going to give you your space but I’ll be around if you need anything.
HE: Thanks.

Conflict: SHE hears any of the following...

SHE: Can we talk?

HE: “Calm down.” or “What is it now?” or “Why do you always do that?”

Conflict Resolution: SHE hears something like...

SHE: Can we talk?

HE: Of course. Talk to me. What’s on your mind?

Conflict: HE feels disrespected

SHE: I just assumed...

HE: That I enjoy disrespect?

Conflict Resolution: HE feels Respected

SHE: I don’t understand why you did/say this but I respect you.

HE: You are amazing!

Conflict: SHE feels HE won’t “get real” about his feelings

SHE asks:

Why won’t you answer me?

Why won’t you return my calls?

Didn’t you get my text message?

HE: [nothing]

Conflict Resolution: HE “gets real” about his feelings

SHE asks:

Why won’t you answer me?

Why won’t you return my calls?

Didn’t you get my text message?

HE: This is hard for me to talk about but here goes...

Conflict: SHE will not answer the actual question HE asked

Scenario: QUESTION—True of False.

Hon? I know where we keep everything in the house. I live here, remember?

Said no husband ever.

Scenario: ANSWER—True

Hon? I could never, EVER say something like that.

You move my stuff ALL THE TIME!

Scenario: HE needs a hammer and some nails to hang a picture.

HE sets the hammer down and goes to retrieve the nails. Upon his return, the hammer is no longer where HE left it. HE is certain he left it there, and that it cannot move itself, and concludes that the most efficient way to get it back is to question the most likely suspect.

HE asks: Did you move my hammer? I left it next to the sink.

SHE answers: Maintenance said they were sending someone tomorrow.

Why does this conflict even happen?

SHE interprets the question far differently than HE does.

HE wants a simple, efficient, immediate, correct, and very simple answer to his immediate and actual question.

SHE interprets that HE has some subtext and HE is *really* asking about some other event, also involving tools, thinks that imaginary scenario through to its conclusion, and answers the question she *anticipates* HE will eventually ask.

Resolution: SHE answers the question that HE asked

HE will be more ready to move on if the actual question HE asked is addressed.

Having to ask additional questions to arrive at the answer will only magnify HIS stress. HE may even begin to think she is being intentionally obtuse.

HE asks: Did you move my hammer? I left it next to the sink.

SHE answers: Oh. I put it back in your toolbox. I didn't know you were still using it.

HE says: Never touch my tools.

SHE says: I'm sorry.

HE says: I forgive you. Where's my hammer?

And they live happily ever after.

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

HE asks: I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

He expects one of only two possible binary responses:

Branch 1: The binary answer is in the affirmative.

HE asks: I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

SHE: Yes. I'd love some. Thanks.

And then, HE and SHE enjoy some pizza.

Branch 2: The binary answer is in the negative.

HE asks: I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

SHE: No thanks. Not super hungry just now.

And then, HE enjoys some pizza and she is fine with that.

His expectation is that she will answer his binary request for a YES or a NO but often that does not happen.

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

HE: I'm ordering pizza. You want some pizza?

SHE: Where are you ordering from?

HE: Papa John's.

SHE: Okay.

HE: Okay, so do you want some pizza?

SHE: I said 'yes'.

HE: No. You didn't.

SHE: Fine. What are you having on yours?

HE: The usual. Do you want some pizza?

SHE: What do they have?

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

SHE: Are you picking it up?

HE: I'm starting to think I should.

SHE: Why?

Conflict Resolution: Obviously:

The resolution to this conflict is to provide an answer using one of the binary options: Either a YES or a NO.

EAVESDROP

Really. Go ahead. You're allowed. It's called RESEARCH!

- ...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.

- 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.
- 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

REVISE, REVISE, REVISE

Revision Can be VERY Important. (Editor's note—Please revise this sentence for proper punctuation!)

A woman without her man is nothing.

HE punctuates:

A woman, without her man, is nothing.

SHE punctuates:

A woman: without her, man is nothing.

Biographies and Contact Info

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JP Robinson is a full-time author of historical and political fiction. He is also a PA-certified teacher with fifteen years of experience in marketing and education. Publishers Weekly and other industry leaders have praised his high-adrenaline novels. Bilingual in French and pursuing his master's degree in Education, JP frequently speaks at writers conferences and to church groups across the nation. He has been happily married for over fifteen years to his high school sweetheart.

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Gregg Bridgeman is the Editor-in-Chief at Olivia Kimbrell Press. He is husband to best-selling Christian author Hallee Bridgeman and parent to three. He continues to proudly serve in the US Armed Forces and has done so in either an active or reserve capacity for more than twenty years as an Airborne and Air Assault qualified paratrooper, earning a Bronze Star for his service. Most importantly, he was ordained in October of 2001 after surrendering his life to Christ decades earlier.

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