FREE WRITER RESOURCE

# 10 Dialogue Mistakes That Make Your Characters Sound Fake

## And How to Fix Them

**Better dialogue does more than sound realistic.**
It reveals character, creates tension, controls pacing, and keeps readers turning pages. Use this quick guide to spot common dialogue problems and strengthen conversations in your manuscript.

## BOSHERS ACADEMY

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# How to Use This Guide

Read through the ten mistakes and mark the ones you recognize in your own manuscript. You do not need to fix every line at once. Choose one issue, revise a scene, then read the conversation aloud. Small changes can make dialogue feel dramatically more natural.

## 1. Making Dialogue Too Grammatically Perfect

Real conversation is rarely polished prose. People use contractions, fragments, interruptions, unfinished thoughts, and shortcuts. Dialogue that is too formal can make characters sound as though they are reading from cue cards.

**Quick fix: Read the line aloud. Remove words a real person would naturally skip. Use fragments when they fit the character and moment.**

## 2. Letting Every Character Sound Alike

If you can remove the dialogue tags and no longer know who is speaking, your characters may be sharing one voice. Vocabulary, sentence length, humor, confidence, background, age, and habits can all shape speech.

**Quick fix: Give each major character two or three speech traits. One may be blunt and brief. Another may dodge questions. Another may ramble when nervous.**

## 3. Overusing Names in Conversation

Writers often use names to make the speaker clear, but people usually do not repeat each other's names in ordinary conversation. Too many names can make a scene feel staged.

**Quick fix: Keep a name when it adds emphasis, emotion, warning, intimacy, or clarity. Otherwise, try deleting it.**

## 4. Explaining What Characters Already Know

Dialogue can become an information dump when characters tell each other facts they both already understand simply because the reader needs the information.

**Quick fix: Give the information a reason to surface. Turn it into disagreement, accusation, correction, discovery, or a question that naturally belongs in the scene.**

## 5. Overusing Dialogue Tags

A forest of 'he said,' 'she said,' 'he exclaimed,' and 'she replied' can make the mechanics of conversation louder than the conversation itself. Fancy tags can be even more distracting.

**Quick fix: Use 'said' when a tag is needed, omit tags when the speaker is obvious, and use action beats when movement or emotion can do useful work.**

## 6. Making Characters Say Exactly What They Feel

People often hide, soften, redirect, joke about, or deny what they really mean. When every character states every feeling directly, the scene loses subtext.

**Quick fix: Ask: What does this character want to say, and what are they willing to say? Put some distance between those two answers.**

## 7. Forgetting Action Beats

Long stretches of floating dialogue can make readers lose their sense of place. Characters have bodies. They look away, fold laundry, grip steering wheels, close doors, stir coffee, and avoid eye contact.

**Quick fix: Add purposeful action where it reveals emotion, changes the rhythm, clarifies the speaker, or reminds us where the scene is happening.**

## 8. Writing Speeches Instead of Conversations

Long uninterrupted blocks can make dialogue feel like a lecture. Conversation usually involves reaction, resistance, interruption, questions, silence, and shifts in power.

**Quick fix: Break long speeches at natural pressure points. Let the other character react, interrupt, misunderstand, or refuse to answer.**

## 9. Using Dialogue That Does Not Change Anything

A conversation can sound realistic and still be unnecessary. Strong story dialogue should reveal something, create tension, deepen character, move a decision, change a relationship, or push the story forward.

**Quick fix: After the scene, ask: What is different because these people spoke? If the answer is 'nothing,' give the conversation a job.**

## 10. Forgetting to Read Dialogue Aloud

Your eyes can forgive awkward dialogue that your ears catch immediately. Reading aloud exposes repetition, stiff wording, unnatural rhythm, and sentences that are too long.

**Quick fix: Read each character's lines aloud separately, then read the full exchange. If you stumble over a line, your reader may stumble too.**

# Dialogue Quick-Fix Checklist

Before you call a dialogue scene finished, run through this list:

- Each character has a recognizable voice.
- The conversation has a purpose in the story.
- Characters are not explaining information they both already know.
- Names are used naturally, not as speaker labels.
- Dialogue tags are simple and not overused.
- Action beats add meaning rather than clutter.
- Characters do not always say exactly what they feel.
- Long speeches are broken up when another character would realistically react.
- The scene contains tension, desire, conflict, discovery, or change.
- The formatting makes it immediately clear who is speaking.
- I have removed unnecessary greetings, filler, and repetition.
- I have read the conversation aloud.

**One last test:** If you removed the dialogue tags, could you still tell who is speaking from voice, context, and action?

## Ready to Make Your Dialogue Stronger?

If this guide helped you spot problems in your manuscript, take the next step with **Writing Dialogue That Sounds Real: How to Write Conversations Readers Believe** from Boshers Academy.

- ✓ Create natural conversations without copying everyday chatter word for word
- ✓ Give individual characters distinct voices
- ✓ Use subtext, conflict, tags, and action beats effectively
- ✓ Format dialogue correctly
- ✓ Edit conversations with a professional eye
- ✓ Practice with worksheets, prompts, checklists, and course exercises

## Current course price: $49

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