

# What If?

GRAPPLING WITH GRAMMAR

*Dialogue and Punctuation*



**Confusion often sets in when it comes to punctuating dialogue but the rules are really very simple.**

The main thing to remember is that there are usually two parts to a sentence with dialogue. The part that your character is actually saying is the quotation. Words that identify the speaker or an action are called a tag line.

A quotation without a tag line is opened and closed with quotation marks with the punctuation inside.

*"What do you want to do today?"*

*"My brother got his driver's license."*

If you add a tag line at the beginning or end of the quotation, you must use a comma outside the quotation marks if the tag is in front or inside if it is at the end.

*The man asked, "Is your mother home?"*

*"She'll be home soon," Tim said.*

Please note, as in the above examples, a sentence cannot have two periods. If the tag line comes at the end, you use a period at the end of the sentence and a comma at the end of the quote. The only time this changes is if the quote is a question or exclamation.

*"Why do you want to know?" asked Sarah.*

*"None of your business!" the man shouted.*

When the tag line comes in the middle of a sentence use commas to separate the tag line.

*"I like your new car," Tom said. "It's really cool."*

*"I like it too," Allan replied, "because it goes really fast."*

Notice in the above examples how the sentences are handled. In the first example the first quote and tag line form a complete sentence so they end with a period. The second quote opens with quotation marks and a capital.

In the second example the tag line breaks the quote sentence in two. In this case you use a comma after the first part of the quote and after the tag line. The second part of the quote opens with quotation marks but no capital because it is part of the previous sentence.

Always start a new paragraph with each speaker. Narrative relating to the speaker may be included in the paragraph but as soon as someone new speaks you must start a new paragraph.

*"I don't like it here," said Samantha.*

*"Me neither," said Jessica. She looked around the party. All the guys were drinking beer.*

*Sam stood up. "Let's go home," she said.*

That's all there is to it. Good dialogue adds colour and interest to your story and if you remember these few simple rules you're well on your way to creating clear and readable conversation.