Writing Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
Dialog Tags and Saidisms

TAG--a way to indicate who spoke. Writers tag dialog with
 1. specific words (said, asked, etc.)
 2. indenting
 3. juxtaposition of speaker with quote

SAIDISMS--overabundance of tag words, as in the following example:
    "When did you arrive?" she asked.
    "This morning," he said.
    "Why didn't you call?" she queried.
    "I was afraid," he whimpered.
    "You're afraid of everything!" she exclaimed.
    "I am not," he protested.
    "You are. I know you're a wimp," she accused.
    "I've done nothing to deserve that," he reasoned.
    "You never do anything!" she exploded.
    "You're making me mad," he growled.
    "Good. Good. Get mad," she screamed.
    "It's too late," he shouted. "I'm mad already.
For hours they continued to whine, screech, moan, bleat, cajole, groan, wheedle, joke, whisper, declare, sigh, bellow,
insinuate, yell, etc. All readers fled the scene after fewer than two minutes.

Guidelines for using tag words:
 1. Don't use tag words.
 2. If you must use a tag, keep it simple: stick to said and asked. Avoid using other tag words.
 3. Use tag words (said and asked) more abundantly if you are writing for the children's market.
 4. Place said or asked after the person's name, not before:
    "It's time," said Andy. The tag word here calls too much attention to itself.
    "It's time," Andy said. The tag word here is almost invisible.

Ways to tag conversation without tag words:
 1. Tag once, then rely on indenting to suggest switch in speaker:
    "When did you arrive?" she asked.
    "This morning," he said.
    "Why didn't you call?"
    "I was afraid."
    "You're afraid of everything."
    "I am not."
 2. Place the speaker close to the quote:
    "When did you arrive?" She looked at her fingernails and yawned.
    "This morning." He glanced around the room.
Writers abuse the following pattern: placing a tag word and a name after a speech, followed by a an -ing word to
name an action:
    "I think someone is coming," Nancy said, looking out the window.
The pattern can become annoying in its repetition; avoid it with minor rewriting:
    "I think someone is coming." Nancy looked out the window.