

Put a text-message exchange in a scene

What this is for

Characters text each other, and a page of *"Where are you?" she typed* gets old fast. Write can set an exchange the way readers see it on their own phones—bubbles, yours on the right and theirs on the left—and print it that way in the paperback and the ebook, on the same line grid as the prose, so nothing drifts. There are four looks to choose from, and the exchange is still words: it's searched and counted like any paragraph, and in Suggesting a changed bubble is proposed whole (see *Suggest changes instead of making them*).

Adding one

1. Put the cursor in the paragraph the messages should follow.
2. Open the **Paragraph style** menu in the toolbar and, under *Insert*, choose **Text messages**.
3. An exchange appears with one empty bubble on the right—that's you, or rather the character whose phone the reader is looking at. Type the first message.
4. Press **Enter** for the next message. It goes to the other person, and Enter again comes back to you, so a back-and-forth is just typing and Enter. To leave the exchange and get back to prose, press Enter on an empty bubble.

Above the first bubble is a field for **who the messages are with**—a name, or leave it empty for no header—and beside it the style. The **x** on the right takes the whole exchange out. If that was a slip, **Ctrl+Z** (**Cmd+Z** on a Mac) brings it straight back.

Screenshot: a text-message exchange in the editor

Screenshot: a text-message exchange in the editor, with a few bubbles on each side, the field for who the messages are with and the style menu above the first bubble, and the x on the right.

Who's talking

Hover a bubble, or put the cursor in it, and a small tag appears at its shoulder saying who sent it. Click the tag to change the sender: the people already in the exchange are listed, and there's a box at the bottom for someone new. More than one other person makes it a group chat, and their names print above their bubbles the way a phone does.

Screenshot: the sender tag's menu

Screenshot: the sender tag's menu open on a bubble, listing the people in the exchange with the pencil and colour swatch beside each name, the box for someone new at the bottom, and Pause before it.

The pencil beside a name in that menu **renames the person throughout the exchange**—handy when you started with a placeholder. A name you no longer use disappears on its own once no message is from them.

Taking a message out

Open the sender tag on the message and choose **Delete this message**. The cursor moves to the message before it. If it's the only message, the whole exchange goes with it, and the menu says so before you click. An empty bubble goes with **Backspace**, too.

A pause

When time passes between two messages—she doesn't answer for an hour—open the sender tag on the later message and tick **Pause before it**. The bubble sets a line apart from the one above, which is how readers see a gap on a phone.

The four styles

- **Phone** — rounded bubbles, yours filled and theirs outlined. The usual choice for contemporary books.
- **Holo** — squared panels with an accent bar and a ruled, letterspaced header. For science fiction.
- **Terminal** — a block of prompt lines in a typewriter face, like a console. For hackers, ships' logs and AIs.
- **Torn paper** — each message a scrap of parchment with torn top and bottom edges, in the book's own serif, under a small filigree. For fantasy: sending stones, enchanted notes, letters.

Each exchange can choose its own style from the little menu beside its header, or follow the book's default. The default lives in **Chapter header setup**, under *Messages*, so a whole series of holo exchanges doesn't need telling one at a time.

Colours, for colour print and the ebook

By default everything is set in greys, which prints well in black and white. If you're printing in colour, or want the ebook to look like a real phone, give each person a colour: click the swatch beside a name in a sender tag's menu, or set them all at once under *Messages* in Chapter header setup (me is the reader's side). Phone uses the colour as the bubble's fill; Holo and Torn paper as

the ground, with the bar and edges a few shades darker; Terminal as the ink. If a colour is dark, the type goes white on it by itself. Colours are per book, and names match in any case.

Your own line under the header

In the same *Messages* section you can choose a picture to print under the name the exchange is with—a line, a flourish, a small emblem—in place of the style's rule or filigree. It takes the same **Height**, **Width** and **Air** settings as the other decorations (see *Choose a scene-break ornament* in the decorations book), and the stock library has a few header lines drawn for the purpose.

In print and the ebook

The exchange prints on the grid: every bubble is a whole number of lines tall, so the prose after it lands where it should. A long exchange breaks across a page between messages, never through one. In the ebook the bubbles follow the reader's font size and go light-on-dark in night mode.

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