



Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words: A Writer's Guide to Getting It Right

By Bill Bryson

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One of the English language's most skilled and beloved writers guides us all toward precise, mistake-free usage.

As usual Bill Bryson says it best: "English is a dazzlingly idiosyncratic tongue, full of quirks and irregularities that often seem willfully at odds with logic and common sense. This is a language where 'cleave' can mean to cut in half or to hold two halves together; where the simple word 'set' has 126 different meanings as a verb, 58 as a noun, and 10 as a participial adjective; where if you can run fast you are moving swiftly, but if you are stuck fast you are not moving at all; [and] where 'colonel,' 'freight,' 'once,' and 'ache' are strikingly at odds with their spellings." As a copy editor for the London *Times* in the early 1980s, Bill Bryson felt keenly the lack of an easy-to-consult, authoritative guide to avoiding the traps and snares in English, and so he brashly suggested to a publisher that he should write one. Surprisingly, the proposition was accepted, and for "a sum of money carefully gauged not to cause embarrassment or feelings of overworth," he proceeded to write that book—his first, inaugurating his stellar career.

Now, a decade and a half later, revised, updated, and thoroughly (but not overly) Americanized, it has become *Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words*, more than ever an essential guide to the wonderfully disordered thing that is the English language. With some one thousand entries, from "a, an" to "zoom," that feature real-world examples of questionable usage from an international array of publications, and with a helpful glossary and guide to pronunciation, this precise, prescriptive, and—because it is written by Bill Bryson—often witty book belongs on the desk of every person who cares enough about the language not to maul or misuse or distort it.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Bestselling author Bryson's latest book is really his first: this guide to usage, spelling and grammar was first published in 1983 when Bryson (In a Sunburned Country, etc.) was an unknown copyeditor at the London Times, and has now been revised and updated for use in the U.S. Alphabetically arranged entries include commonly misspelled and misused words. He also includes common problems with grammar, as well as an appendix on punctuation. Bryson often cites the 1983 edition of H.W. Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* as an authority, though he also makes a handful of references to recent texts, such as the Encarta World English Dictionary and Atlantic Monthly columnist Barbara Wallraff's "Word Court." Despite the revisions, the book often betrays its origins as a British text, as in citing words in common usage throughout the U.K. and British Commonwealth, but rarely used by American writers, such as Taoiseach, the Prime Minister of Ireland or City of London vs. city of London. In addition, Bryson avoids taking on computer lingo, such as distinguishing between the Internet and the World Wide Web. Despite these shortcomings, Bryson's erudition is evident and refreshing. His passage on split infinitives, for example, asserts that it is "a rhetorical fault a question of style and not a grammatical one." Readers looking for the author's trademark humor will not find it here. Instead they will find a straightforward, concise, utilitarian guide, albeit one listing Bryson's "suggestions, observations, and even treasured prejudices" on newspaper writing primarily in Britain, circa 1983.

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From Library Journal

Offering "some 60 percent" new material, Bryson author of *A Walk in the Woods*, among other titles, and a former London Times copy editor has updated his 1984 work, *The Facts On File Dictionary of Troublesome Words*. He maintains a broad audience appeal by humorously addressing topics ranging from easily confused place names to geology's stalactite and stalagmite. The 1000 alphabetically arranged entries are often of the gantlet/gauntlet type, which offers clarification of definitions, spelling, and differences between U.S. and British English. Redundant wording is the other usage error most frequently mentioned, as seen in the entry "complete and unabridged." Prominent usage questions, e.g., dangling modifiers and the word *hopeul*, receive full-page or longer entries. Most notable among the entries are examples of erroneous usage quoted from prestigious publications, particularly newspapers. As in the first edition, Bryson presents an appendix and a glossary covering punctuation and grammatical terms. His work can be compared with William Strunk and E.B. White's *Elements of Style* in its concision but focuses more on usage errors, while Strunk and White's work expands to general guidance on good writing. Recommended for public and academic libraries.

- Marianne Orme, Des Plaines P.L., IL

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From Booklist

This is a new edition of a book previously titled *The Penguin Dictionary of Troublesome Words* (1983), now out of print. Primarily known for his hilarious travel writing, Bryson once worked as a copy editor at the *London Times*. There he was daily faced with vexing language problems but found traditional reference works to be of no use because they often assumed readers were familiar with the intricacies of grammar. Sensing a need for a simple, concise guide to the more problematic aspects of the English language, he has compiled this alphabetical list of words and phrases that are often misused, accompanied by straightforward, often funny explanations of their correct usage. Just to keep things interesting, he quotes errors made by major publications, such as the *New Yorker* and the *Washington Post*. Admittedly narrow in range, this pithy

guide will work fine in conjunction with a full-blown style manual. Want to read the latest condemnations of the word *hopefully*? Should you use *more than* or *over*? Professional wordsmiths will want to know.

Joanne Wilkinson

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gabrielle Oneal:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in each way. By being competitive now, people have do something to make these individuals survives, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that sometimes many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. That's why, by reading a publication your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand than other is high. For you who want to start reading the book, we give you this Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words: A Writer's Guide to Getting It Right book as basic and daily reading book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

Amelia Page:

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Samantha Bond:

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Frank Tye:

Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words: A Writer's Guide to Getting It Right can be one of your basic books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to set every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing

Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words: A Writer's Guide to Getting It Right although doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource information that maybe you can be among it. This great information can drawn you into brand new stage of crucial imagining.

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