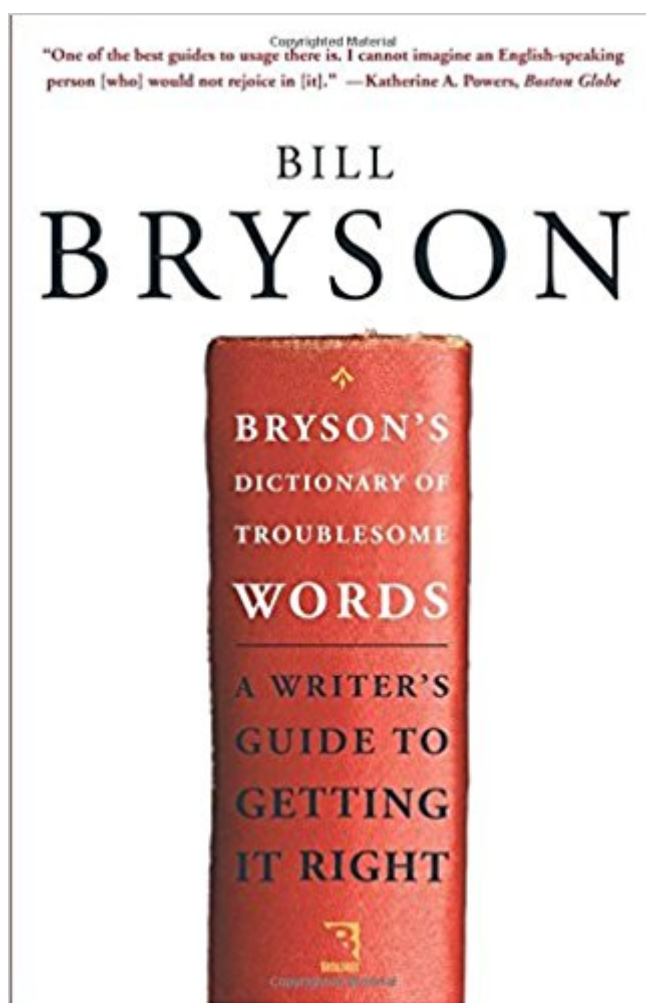


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# Bryson's Dictionary Of Troublesome Words: A Writer's Guide To Getting It Right



## Synopsis

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 *each* 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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## Customer Reviews

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. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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 Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

On the same day, I ordered two used copies from 2 different sellers. They both arrived as promised...and in near "Bookstore" condition. BONUS...one of them was signed by Mr. Bryson. I had just become acquainted with Bill Bryson months before when I was given his audiobook of "At Home"...which I have in my car and listen to when on the road. I listen to it in short segments as he offers so much information...my mind goes in to overload. I then ordered his "In the Woods" in audio which was delightful and a fairly "quick listen!" He has a huge store of information and a delightful way of sharing it. Even the *Dictionary of Troublesome Words* will make you smile. I love grammar so I love this book, "albeit" it did not have two of my favorite words included..."ergo" I should only give it 4 stars...but I acquiesced and give it a 5!! I have enjoyed all of his works to this point and hope to add more to my library. If you like words...this is a fun read!

This was a gift. I'm a writer/editor and already have many of Bill Bryson's books.

Fun to read, this is a great primer on the often subtle distinctions between words such as "gantlet" and "gauntlet." Set up dictionary-style, each word is presented concisely and authoritatively. If you want to hone your writing skills or just like to browse the endlessly fascinating words that make up the English language, you need this.

Bill takes all the trouble and makes it fun!

It is only after a lot of pages that you realize that yes, you really have been reading a dictionary. Amazing facts and comforting confirmations that you had understood a word. And slightly disconcerting discoveries that you had previously totally not understood the true meaning, or for that matter had any idea what the word or phrase had meant. Probable a must have for anyone who has to write stuff, which must be most of us at work these days. Maybe should be a legal requirement for

scrabble players.

I'm one of those people who does things like read reference books from front to back, because I often don't know what I don't know. There were lots of grammatical points I did not remember and I would not have thought to look up. I'm not even sure where I would look them up, if I had a question. Now, having read through this book, which true to all of Bryson's work, is funny, I know some of what I don't know, you know? I won't remember all situations from the book, of course, but the book has planted a seed so I probably will remember to check in the future. I've realized I write using an embarrassing number of redundant phrases. Besides, I won an argument with my coworker that a person is nauseated, not nauseous. Thanks Bill; it was worth \$5.

Bill Bryson's dictionary is a wonderful frolic through the foibles of the English language. The misused, the misunderstood and even the mis-spelled are treated with great humour and insight. Many people will choose to randomly browse through "Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words". I chose the option of reading it cover to cover. Either way, the book cannot fail to both entertain and inform. Unlike French, English is a work in progress with no bureaucracy trying to stifle change. An institution in the style of the French Academy is unthinkable for English. Indeed, herein lies the strength of English and the basis of its ability to continually re-invent itself and evolve through time. French, by way of comparison, looks increasingly like the fly stuck in amber. Bryson is a highly observant wordsmith and his book should be read by all those who cherish English and its marvelous journey.

I'm a sucker for reference books, and I've also started writing more. This small dictionary helps me sort out the words that always give me fits: current vs. currently, sensual vs. sensuous ... like that. Love this! P.S., the author has also written a couple of books about the English language, as well as the best-seller, *A Walk in the Woods*.

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