

HANDBOOK
OF
CURRENT
ENGLISH

SECOND
CANADIAN
EDITION

MOORE/AVIS/CORDER

HANDBOOK **OF** **CURRENT** **ENGLISH**

**SECOND
CANADIAN
EDITION**

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Preface

The second Canadian edition of the *Handbook of Current English* sustains certain convictions that have marked the book from its beginning: that selective and thoughtful use of language is important in every part of everyone's life; that some forms of expression are more effective and more appropriate in given situations than others; that a "good" language is a language suited to its speaker or writer, to the subject at hand, to the readers of the language, and to the context in which all come together. This edition has been revised to retain nearly all the coverage of the former edition, to expand some portions, and to add some new material. Most of the changes respond to suggestions made by many users of the popular first Canadian edition and to recent developments in our theories of language and of writing instruction. All changes, I hope, are in aid of clear, straightforward, and sufficient advice to Canadian students.

New material appears in various ways. Some chapters of the first edition, especially in Part One, needed only slight clarifications or updating. These relatively minor revisions make meaning fuller and plainer without noticeably altering arrangement or emphasis. In Part Two, the sections on outlining, on preparing a first draft, on using a dictionary, on the meaning of words, and on research essays are also basically unchanged.

Other chapters, however, have been extensively rewritten. For example, in chapter 19 the discussion of the relationship among writer, subject, and audience, and of the different types of writing is expanded and altered for more natural use. The chapter on revising has also changed. In former editions, that section focussed too narrowly on correcting a paper after it has been returned. The new first part of the section concentrates on the need for revising while the writing is still in progress. The chapter on practical writing tasks now includes fuller coverage of business correspondence and a new part on reports. A similar scale of revision is to be found in the chapters on sentence length and on the effect of words. The order (and hence the numbering) of the chapters in Part Two has also been modified to reflect better this book's assumption that, in rhetorical matters, purpose precedes and governs form. The sequence does not, however, preclude starting with words (26, 27, and 28) and working up to sentences (24 and 25) and paragraphs (22 and 23).

In a few important places, almost wholly new discussions or emphases are provided to replace or develop parts of the first edition. In chapter 18 (Discovering What You Have to Say) the treatment of "prewriting" techniques is, I think, appreciably strengthened. The new edition's advice on paragraphing is also

improved by being divided into two fully explained and illustrated chapters. Likewise, the approach to sentence styling in the second edition is more systematic.

A different sort of change is the increase in examples and exercises. One significant alteration in this respect is the general substitution of Canadian (and some broadly international) references and sample passages for American material. The examples also range more widely in subject matter and complexity, and there is a higher proportion of excerpts by women writers.

Of special significance in the Canadian edition is the shift to the metric system in conformity with the Canadian adoption of *Le Systeme International d'Unités* (SI); moreover, the Celsius scale replaces the Fahrenheit. Again, where instructions are offered for addresses relating to correspondence, the designations established by Canada Post for abbreviating the names of provinces and territories are used—as is the proper form and position of the Canadian Postal Code. Finally, in the treatment of figures and dates, the designated metric formula is also followed—as is the 24-hour system for specifying the time of day.

Throughout the revision, my purpose has been to make material accessible. I believe the present sequence is good and usable; at the same time, I believe that the sections can be rearranged according to the needs of particular teachers and particular classes, and that they can stand alone as reference sources. The organization and features of the *Handbook of Current English* are designed to make the text easy and effective to use, as the following discussion explains.

THE DESIGN OF THE BOOK AND ITS FOCUS ON WRITING

The first seventeen chapters of this book are about particular features of the English language—grammar, usage, punctuation, and other conventions. These sections describe the way edited English typically behaves as a system of language. The remaining chapters are chiefly about the written uses of language. The first seventeen chapters are a kind of *reference* or guide to language; the rest are about the *process* of writing.

No perfect order exists for talking about language and writing. It is possible to start almost anywhere and find a useful way of exploring the subject. As the book is arranged, the first seventeen chapters may be used for study in their own right or as continuous reference for writing assignments. The remaining chapters reflect,

to some extent at least, a sequence of events that many of us go through as we write, from discovering what is to be said, through the first efforts at planning and drafting, to concern about particular features of the writing, and on to completed works.

Much that is said throughout the book applies to both speaking and writing, but the focus here is upon writing. Most of us will go on talking, but there are fewer reasons to write. Telephones, computer-assisted communication, and increasingly sophisticated multiple-use television suggest that we will have many ways to communicate without writing.

Still, we need to write, for a variety of reasons. Some school and job assignments, of course, require it, but there are more compelling reasons for writing. Writing is almost inevitably a more conscious and deliberate act than speaking. Accordingly, writing gives us a chance to be more precise and more thorough than we are in speaking; we have in writing an opportunity to organize our thoughts and experiences deliberately, to establish connections carefully, to speculate and draw conclusions thoughtfully. Furthermore, writing is both portable and permanent; it can be taken easily to other times and other places. Through it we can remember what we have been and imagine what we will be. By its nature writing is an effort to go beyond the written structures that others have created, to seek what is still possible to say, to say what hasn't yet been said.

Introduction: The Languages We Use. The introduction is a discussion of the English language; it includes an account of distinctions between speaking and writing and of some varieties of English and the ways they can be used. The introduction suggests some ways of moving among varieties of English according to the principle of appropriateness. Some recommendations made throughout the text may be clearer if students read this material at the start of the course.

Part One: Conventions of the Language. Chapters 1 through 9 (Grammar and Usage) review the grammar of English sentences and the functions of various kinds of words and word groups. Chapters 10 through 16 (Punctuation and Other Conventions) discuss and illustrate the principles governing the use of punctuation, mechanics, and other conventions, as well as various customs for using capital letters, apostrophes, abbreviations, and numbers. The final section (Spelling) suggests ways to overcome various spelling problems.

The sections in this first half of the *Handbook* treat single, definite topics. Grammatical definitions are included where they

are relevant and necessary to the discussion. Many particular matters of usage are discussed at the point where they relate to general principles, but many more are included in the Glossary of Usage.

Part Two: The Writing Process. The second half of the *Handbook* serves as a brief rhetoric and as a practical guide to college and university writing. Chapters 18 through 21 (Prewriting) focus on the processes of discovering what can or should be written and on the first steps in giving shape and character to the writing. Chapters 22 through 25 (Paragraphs and Sentences) discuss means by which sentences and paragraphs can be managed and controlled to shape meaning; they show ways of using various sentence patterns and various patterns of paragraph construction to develop ideas. Chapters 26 through 28 (Diction) discuss the dictionary and deal with appropriate and effective uses of words. Chapter 29 (Revising and Submitting the Project) suggests ways of altering emphasis, mood, tone, and direction to suit the needs of the writing at hand. It also describes some conventional practices in preparing a manuscript for submission.

Part Three: Practical Writing Situations. The two chapters of this section consider a few specific writing tasks that arise frequently in school or on the job. Chapter 30 is devoted to the problems and techniques of research writing, and contains a sample research paper written by a student. Chapter 31 discusses and illustrates other writing situations such as examinations, correspondence, and reports; a sample report, prepared by a student, is included.

Glossary of Usage. The Glossary gives succinct advice about the words and constructions that most often cause confusion in college and university writing.

Exercises. Where possible, the exercises call for students to do some writing themselves, rather than to respond to another person's writing or to underline or to fill in blanks. The exercises characteristically appear, not bunched at the ends of sections, but within the sections, immediately following the pertinent material. Colored triangles mark exercises wherever they occur within the section.

Marginal Tabs and Correction Charts. The colored marginal thumb tabs correspond to each of the six main divisions discussed above. In the margin of each right-hand page is also the pertinent correction symbol or abbreviation to indicate the material on those pages.

Papers can be marked by using either the correction symbols or the section numbers; the two are co-ordinated in the correction chart on the inside front cover as well as on the marginal tabs. In the text itself, the handwritten correction symbols appear with specific suggests for revision, printed in color. Students should study the text that follows each suggestion whenever they are not sure why revision is necessary.

Appearing on the inside back cover of the book is a checklist for revision; it should be helpful for students to go over their papers with these questions in mind before they hand in their work.

Acknowledgments

I have sometimes used plural pronouns in the text, not because I think of myself as an editorial “we,” but because I’m glad to remember the contributions of my co-authors, Walter S. Avis and Jim W. Corder. The first Canadian edition of the book was prepared by Walter Avis, the eminent linguist at Royal Military College who died in December 1979. This second edition extends and broadens that work, and is dedicated to his memory. Jim Corder is the author of the American text (now in its sixth edition) upon which this book was originally based. Although the two versions of *Handbook of Current English* are now independent and increasingly dissimilar, they share much of Jim Corder’s spirit and style.

I cannot list all the teachers, scholars, and friends to whom I am indebted, but I want to mention some. Users of the *Handbook* whose valuable suggestions deserve acknowledgment include Stephen Adams (University of Western Ontario), Lilian Falk (St. Mary’s University), and Jack Lewis, D.H. Parker, and D. Wallace (Laurentian University). Equally important was the help and encouragement extended by colleagues at Wilfrid Laurier University, especially John Chamberlin, Meg Hancock, Ed Jewinski, and Charlotte Cox. I also thank editors Joan Kerr, Alicia Myers, and Geraldine Kikuta at Gage Publishing for their kindness and patience.

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Canadian English

Walter S. Avis

Language in Canada, as in most countries, is taken for granted. Some people, however, especially recent arrivals from the United Kingdom, refuse to accept the fact that the English spoken in Canada has any claim to recognition. Others, who themselves speak Canadian English, are satisfied with the view that British English is the only acceptable standard. To these people, the argument that educated Canadians set their own standard of speech is either treasonable or ridiculous.

One Canadian I know had his eyes opened in a rather curious way. While shopping in a large Chicago department store, he asked where he might find chesterfields. Following directions to the letter, he was somewhat dismayed when he ended up at the tobacco counter. He soon made other discoveries as well. Blinds were "shades" to his American neighbors, taps were "faucets," braces "suspenders," and serviettes "napkins."

Before long his American friends were pointing out differences between his speech and theirs. He said *been* to rhyme with "bean," whereas for them it rhymed with "bin"; and he said *shone* to rhyme with "gone," whereas for them it rhymed with "bone." In fact, their Canadian friend had quite a few curious ways of saying things: *ration* rhymed with "fashion" rather than with "nation"; *lever* with "beaver" rather than "sever"; *z* with "bed" rather than "bee." Moreover, he said certain vowels in a peculiar way, for *lout* seemed to have a different vowel sound from *loud*, and *rice* a different vowel from *rise*.

The English are also quick to observe that Canadians talk differently from themselves. For example, the English don't pronounce *dance*, *half*, *clerk*, *tomato*, *garage*, or *war* as Canadians do; and they always distinguish *cot* from *caught*, a distinction that few Canadians make. They also find that many of the words they use in England are not understood by people in Canada. Suppose an Englishman gets into a conversation about cars. Says he, "I think a car should have a roomy boot." No headway will be made till somebody rescues him by explaining that in Canada the boot is called a "trunk." Before the session is finished, he will probably learn that a bonnet is called a "hood" and the hood of a coupé is "the top of a convertible." Similarly, he must substitute *muffler* for *silencer*, *windshield* for *windscreen*, *truck* for *lorry*, and *gas* for *petrol*.

The examples I have mentioned suggest, quite correctly, that Canadian English, while different from both British and American

English, is in large measure a blend of both varieties; and to this blend must be added many features which are typically Canadian. The explanation for this mixed character lies primarily in the settlement history of the country, for both Britain and the United States have exerted continuous influence on Canada during the past two hundred years.

As the several areas of Canada were opened to settlement, before, during, and after the Revolutionary War in the 1770s, Americans were prominent among the settlers in many, if not in most, communities. American influence has been great ever since: Canadians often learn from American textbooks, read American novels and periodicals, listen to American radio programs, and watch American television and movies. Moreover, Canadians in large numbers are constantly moving back and forth across the border, as emigrants, as tourists, as students, and as bargain hunters. Finally, Canada shares with the United States a large vocabulary denoting all manner of things indigenous to North America. One need only leaf through the unabridged (or the concise) *Dictionary of Canadianisms* or the *Dictionary of Americanisms* to appreciate this fact.

On the other hand, Britain has also made an enormous contribution to the settlement of English-speaking Canada. For more than a century and a half, Britishers in an almost continuous stream and speaking various dialects have immigrated to Canada. In most communities, especially those along the Canadian-American border (where most of Canada's population is still concentrated), these newcomers came into contact with already established Canadians; and, as might be expected, their children adopted the speech habits of the communities they moved into. Only in certain settlement areas where relatively homogeneous Old Country groups established themselves did markedly British dialectal features survive through several generations. Such communities may be found in Newfoundland, the Ottawa Valley, the Red River Settlement in Manitoba, and on Vancouver Island. For the most part, however, the children of British immigrants, like those whose parents come from other European countries, adopt the kind of English spoken in Canada. Yet in the very process of being absorbed, linguistically speaking, they have made contributions to every department of the language.

That part of Canadian English which is neither British nor American is best illustrated by the vocabulary, for there are hundreds of words which are native to Canada or which have meanings peculiar to Canada. As might be expected, many of these words refer to topographical features, plants, trees, fish, animals, and

birds; and many others to social, economic, and political institutions and activities. Few of these words, which may be called Canadianisms, find their way into British or American dictionaries, a fact which should occasion no surprise. British and American dictionaries are based on British and American usage, being primarily intended for Britons and Americans, not for Canadians.

Prominent among Canadianisms are proper nouns, including names of regions: *Barren Grounds*, *French Shore*, *Lakehead*; names given to the natives of certain regions: *Bluenoses*, *Newfies*, *Herringchokers*; names associated with political parties: *New Democratic Party*, *Parti Québécois*, *Union Nationale*. In addition, there are a host of terms identified with places or persons: *Digby chicken*, *McIntosh apple*, *Quebec heater*, *Winnipeg couch*.

Languages other than English have contributed many Canadianisms to the lexicon: (from Canadian French) *brulé*, *caribou* (a drink), *joual*, *lacrosse*, *Métis*, *portage*; (from Amerindian) *babiche*, *Dene*, *kokanee*, *pemmican*, *shaganappi*; (from Eskimo) *atigi*, *Inuit*, *komatik*, *kuletuk*, *ulu*, *oomiak*. Sometimes the origin of such loan-words is obscured in the process of adoption; thus *carry-all*, *mush*, *siwash*, *snye*, and *shanty* derive from Canadian French *cariole*, *marche*, *sauvage*, *chenail*, and *chantier*.

Other Canadianisms are more or less limited to certain regions — to Newfoundland: *jinker*, *nunny bag*, *screech*, *tickle*, *tilt*; to the Maritimes: *aboideau*, *gaspereau*, *longliner*, *sloven*; to Ontario: *concession road*, *decker*, *dew-worm*, *fire-reels*; to the Prairie Provinces: *bluff* (clump of trees), *grid road*, *local improvement district*; to British Columbia: *rancherie*, *saltchuck*, *skookum*, *steelhead*; to the Northland: *bush pilot*, *cat-swing*, *cheechako*, *utilidor*.

Hundreds of Canadian words fall into the category of animal and plant names: *caribou*, *fool hen*, *inconnu*, *kinnikinnick*, *malemute*, *oolichan*, *saskatoon*, *sockeye*, *whisky-jack* or *Canada jay*. Many more fall into the class of topographical terms: *butte*, *coulee*, *dalles*, *sault*. Yet another extensive class includes hundreds of terms of historical significance: *Family Compact*, *Klondiker*, *North canoe*, *Red River cart*, *wintering partner*, *York boat*.

For many terms there are special Canadian significations: *Confederation*, *francization*, *Grit*, *height of land*, *reeve*, *riding*, *warden*. From the sports field come a number of contributions, especially from hockey and a game we used to call *rugby*, a term now almost displaced by the American term *football*: *boarding*, *blueline*, *convert*, *cushion*, *dasher*, *puck*, *rouge*, *snap*. And in the same area there are a number of slang terms that merit mention: *chippy*, *homebrew*, *import*, *rink rat*. Other slang or informal terms

include: *fuddle-duddle*, *horseman* (mountie), *moose pasture*, *peasouper*, *redeye*.

In pronunciation, as in vocabulary, Canadians are neither American nor British, though they have much in common with both. Although most Canadians pronounce *docile* and *textile* to rhyme with *mile*, as the British do, it is probable that most pronounce *fertile* and *missile* to rhyme with *hurtle* and *missal*, as the Americans do. And no doubt Canadians pronounce some words in a way that is typically Canadian. Most of us, for example, would describe the color of a soldier's uniform as *khaki*, pronounced (kär'kē). Yet no non-Canadian dictionary recognizes this Canadianism. Americans say (kak'ē), while the British say (kä'kē). In Canada, many people put flowers in a vase, pronounced (vāz); Americans use a (vās) and the British a (vāz). To be sure, a number of Canadians say something like (vāz), especially if the vase is Ming.

If we take imported dictionaries as our authority, such pronunciations as (kär'kē) and (vāz) are unacceptable. But surely the proper test of correctness for Canadians should be the usage of educated natives of Canada. Here are some other examples of pronunciations widely heard among educated Canadians; many of them are not recorded in imported dictionaries: *absolve* (ab zolv'), *arctic* (är'tik), *armada* (är mad'ð), *chassis* (chas'ē), *culinary* (kul'ð ner'ē), *evil* (ē'v ðl), *finale* (fð nal'ē), *fungi* (fung'gi), *jackal* (jak'ð l), *longitude* (long'gð tūd), *official* (ō fish'ðl), *opinion* (ō pin'yðn), *placate* (plak'āt), *plenary* (plen'ð rē), *prestige* (pres tēj'), *resources* (rizôr'sðz), *senile* (sen'īl), *species* (spē'sēz), *Trafalgar* (trðfol'gðr).

Of course, not everyone uses all of these forms; yet all are used regularly by educated Canadians in large numbers. Who can deny that (ri zôr'sðz) and (spē'sēz) are more often heard at all levels of Canadian society than (ri sôrs'ð z) and (spē'shēz), the pronunciations recommended in nearly all available dictionaries? Surely, when the evidence of usage justifies it, forms such as these should be entered as variants in any dictionary intended to reflect Canadian speech.

Another of the functions of a dictionary is to record the spellings used by the educated people of the community. In spelling, as in vocabulary and pronunciation, Canadian usage is influenced by the practice of both the Americans and the British. In areas where American and British practices differ, Canadian usage is far from uniform. Until recent years, British forms have predominated in most instances, for example, in *axe*, *catalogue*, *centre*, *colour*, *cheque*, *mediaeval*, *plough*, *skilful*, and *woollen* (and words of similar pattern), in spite of the obvious practical advantages of the

American forms: *ax*, *catalog*, *center*, *check*, *color*, *medieval*, *plow*, *skillful*, and *woolen*. In some cases, however, American spellings have asserted themselves to the virtual exclusion of the corresponding British forms, as in *connection*, *curb*, *jail*, *net*, *recognize*, *tire*, and *wagon* for *connexion*, *kerb*, *gaol*, *nett*, *recognise*, *tyre*, and *waggon*.

American spellings are becoming more commonly used in Canada. Many have, for example, been long ago adopted by Canadian newspapers, especially those in the larger centres, and by magazine and book publishers. Young people seem to use such spellings as *color*, *center*, *defense*, *medieval*, *program*, *skillful*, and *traveler* much more frequently than was formerly the case, the implication being that some American forms are accepted as proper in many Canadian schools. The fact is that educated usage is very much divided, varying from province to province and often from person to person. For the most part, however, Canadians respond to these variants with equal ease. Under such circumstances, a Canadian dictionary should include both forms, for here, as elsewhere, the lexicographer's obligation is to record usage, not legislate it.

It has been argued in these pages that there is such a thing as a distinctive variety of English that is Canadian; yet it should be observed that this distinctive variety is referred to as "Canadian English" and not as "the Canadian language." The fact is that Canadians share one language with Britons, Americans, Australians, and a host of other people, both inside the Commonwealth and beyond it. To claim that there is a Canadian language, or, as many Americans do, an American language, is to distort the meaning of the word *language* for nationalistic purposes. On the other hand, it is bullheaded to insist, as many do, that "English is English" and that only fools "dignify the slang and dialect" of Canada by giving it serious attention.

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