

COLLINS GEM

DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH USAGE

helpful guide to correct and effective usage



English Usage

Margot Butt
BA Hons (London)

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W. T. McLeod

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FOREWORD

Every language is in a continuous state of change and enlargement, and any dictionary is likely to be in some respects out of date by the time it is published. This was never more true than at the moment, when easier travel and technical advances in communication make people in areas where radio and television are available aware of what other people all over the world are doing, and conscious of at least some of the terms used to describe these activities. Nevertheless, we are far from achieving a world language, and even find difficulty sometimes in conveying what we want to say to our own fellow-countrymen. Words can form barriers as well as promote understanding.

There are many group languages in modern English. Apart from local dialects, there are the specialized vocabularies of scientists, administrators and teenagers, for example, which are often incomprehensible to others. This book does not attempt to throw light on these group words, but to help writers of books, articles, reports and letters to express themselves clearly and according to current practice, to use words

as they are generally understood amongst those who will be reading them. Sometimes this involves reference to their origin or former meaning.

We have thus tried to indicate that where usage is changing it is advisable to use the older sense in formal writing, while the newer, looser meaning may be acceptable in conversation. Where we regard a particular use as incorrect and inexact, it is put inside square brackets. This marking does not necessarily recommend instant banishment from the whole domain of the English language. Meaning depends to a large extent upon its context and much that defies the rules of grammar and takes a cavalier approach to vocabulary will nonetheless be understood by a number of people. However, a language is used most efficiently when it is understood by the greatest number of its users. The words which we place inside [] are thus stigmatized and not recommended for use in formal writing. If they are used elsewhere, it should be with care and comprehension.

Grammatical rules and definitions have been kept to a minimum, for we regard grammatical correctness as an expression of logical thinking rather than as an end in itself.

Among the words and expressions included in this book are many which cause difficulty

and confusion. Where there are grammatical idiosyncrasies, it has been our aim to explain and demonstrate the correct usage with reference to other words which operate in the language in a similar way. It is for this purpose that *cf.* has been used throughout: for example in the entry for **else** (where it is shown as being followed by *than* and not *but*) an analogy is made with *other* and *more*, both of which could be substituted for *else* in the example given.

Cross-references are used extensively in order to keep most of the entries short. The larger entries (see Index), written in the form of small essays or as clusters of information arranged under sub-headings, serve as focal points for cross-references and should be consulted for a wide view of some aspects of the English language, or for basic rules and definitions.

Malapropisms, resulting from similarities of either spelling or pronunciation, are dealt with in pairs or trios. This method, whilst running the risk of infecting the reader's mind with a blight from which he was previously immune, is the only practicable way of showing confusing words operating in distinctive contexts. In addition, differences of pronunciation may be highlighted by placing the transcriptions side by side and saying them out loud.

The pronunciation guides, or transcriptions,

are in the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association, commonly known as I.P.A. (see p. xiv). They are used either to elucidate and distinguish similarities in the pronunciation of two or more words or to give guidance on how to say words which are commonly mispronounced. They also give guidance on words which, often due to their fairly recent adoption from another language, are more frequently read than spoken.

We hope that the Appendices will be of use to readers as well as writers. The list of abbreviations and foreign words and phrases is intended as a basic coverage of what is an ever-expanding category. Though we generally fight shy of including innumerable professional associations and clubs, we hope to have included the abbreviations and foreign borrowings which are most commonly found in non-specialist reading-matter. The list of American words and phrases has been compiled mainly to assist anyone reading American magazines or novels. The other appendices cover language uses which are often employed solely to impress, but, since they are sometimes used, it is as well that they should be used accurately.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following are among the books which have been consulted whilst compiling this work and they will be found useful for further reference:

All the Oxford English Dictionaries, of which the most recently revised is *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1969);

The Penguin English Dictionary (1965);

The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (1958);

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1960);

A Dictionary of Modern English Usage by H. W. Fowler (revised 1965 by Sir Ernest Gowers);

Modern American Usage by Wilson Follett (1966);

The Complete Plain Words by Sir Ernest Gowers (1952);

Modern Business Correspondence by L. Gartside (1963);

Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers at The University Press, Oxford (1967).

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET

A simplified version of I.P.A. is used in this book in order to give a broad idea of a word's pronunciation without having to take into account regional variations in speech. The reader should be able to make himself quickly acquainted with this method of transcribing pronunciation if he realises that each symbol represents one sound only. The consonant symbols p, b, t, d, k, m, n, l, r, f, v, s, z, h, w, represent the sounds they usually elicit from a reader when placed first in an English word, i.e. *pie, buy, tie, die, kite, my, nigh, lie, rye, fly, vie, sigh, Zion, high, why.*

The following consonant symbols may be unfamiliar, although the sounds they represent are almost as common in Standard English as those listed above:

g	<i>gay</i>	ð	<i>this</i>
tʃ	<i>chain</i>	ʃ	<i>shame</i>
dʒ	<i>jail</i>	ʒ	<i>pleasure</i>
ŋ	<i>ring</i>		<i>yearn</i>
θ	<i>thick</i>		

Vowels and diphthongs are represented by the following symbols. The sign : distinguishes a long vowel sound from a short one, representing a change in sound quality as well as quantity.

i:	<i>seat</i>	ə:	<i>nerve</i>
i	<i>sit</i>	ə	<i>butter</i>
e	<i>get</i>	ei	<i>say</i>
æ	<i>cat</i>	ou	<i>so</i>
a:	<i>farm</i>	ai	<i>fry</i>
ɔ	<i>cot</i>	au	<i>cow</i>
ɔ:	<i>caught</i>	ɔi	<i>toy</i>
u	<i>soot</i>	iə	<i>fear</i>
u:	<i>suit</i>	ɛə	<i>fair</i>
ʌ	<i>cup</i>	uə	<i>gourd</i>

Each word of more than one syllable has a stress mark (') denoting that the main stress in the word falls on the syllable following this mark. In monosyllabic words no stress is marked, e.g. *bluebell* ('blu:bel) but *blue bell* (blu: bel).

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DICTIONARY

Note: The grammatical labels attached to head-words of entries refer only to the part of speech which is discussed in the entry. For example, **advance** is followed only by the label *n.* and not by *v.* or *adj.*, since the entry treats of *advance* only in its noun function.

<i>adj.</i>	adjective
<i>adv.</i>	adverb
<i>cf.</i>	compare
<i>comp.</i>	comparative (of adjective or ad- verb)
<i>conj.</i>	conjunction
<i>e.g.</i>	for example
<i>interj.</i>	interjection
<i>n.</i>	noun
<i>past part.</i>	past participle (of verb)
<i>past t.</i>	past tense (of verb)
<i>phr.</i>	phrase
<i>prep.</i>	preposition
<i>pres. part.</i>	present participle (of verb)
<i>pro.</i>	pronoun
<i>q.v.</i>	see also
<i>v.</i>	verb

(see also the LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS)

INDEX OF USEFUL POINTS OF REFERENCE

FOREWORD	ix		
BIBLIOGRAPHY	xiii		
THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET	xiv		
ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DICTIONARY	xvi		
A, AN	I		
ADJECTIVE	8		
ADVERB	11		
ALL	18		
ALLITERATION	20		
ALSO	21		
AMBIGUITY	23		
American Usage	25		
ANACHRONISM	29		
AND	30		
APOSTROPHE	34		
AS	38		
BACK FORMATION	45		
BATHOS	48		
BETWEEN	52		
BUT	59		
CLAUSE	70		
CONJUNCTION	77		
DATES	84		
DO	92		
FEMININE FORMS	105		
		Foreign Words and Phrases	109
		HOMONYM	122
		IDIOM	126
		IRONY	135
		ITALICS	136
		Language Terms	142
		Letter-Writing and Forms of Address	149
		NEGATIVES	186
		NOUN	189
		NUMBER	190
		NUMERALS	192
		OBJECT	193
		OF	195
		PARAGRAPH	202
		PARTICIPLES	204
		PHRASE	212
		PREPOSITION	218
		PRONOUN	233

Punctuation and the use of Capital

Letters	236
SARCASM	261
SATIRE	261
SENTENCE	267
Spelling	275
SPLIT INFINITIVE	282
Style	287
SUBJECT	292
SUFFIX	294
SYNONYM	297
THAT	301
THE	301
TITLES	306
TOO	306
USED, USED TO	313
VERB	316
WHICH	326
WHO, WHOM	328
WILL, SHALL; WOULD, SHOULD	330

APPENDICES:

1. PROPER ADJECTIVES 339
2. AMERICAN WORDS AND PHRASES 352
3. ABBREVIATIONS AND FOREIGN WORDS AND PHRASES 363
4. WORDS WITH A STORY 465

A

a, an *indefinite article*

An is used instead of *a* before nouns and adjectives beginning with a vowel or silent *h*, e.g. *an egg*; *an hour*, except where the vowel is sounded as if it had a consonant before it, e.g. *a one*; *a utility*. *An hotel* is old-fashioned and survives from the days when *hotel* was pronounced in the French way with a silent *h*. *Hors d'œuvre*, still pronounced as in French, has *an*. Where the indefinite article is followed by an abbreviation in the form of letters, the form follows the sound of the letter rather than the word it represents, e.g. *an FBA*, but where the full word is usually spoken *a* is used, e.g. *a MS* (a 'mænʒuskript) rather than [*an MS*]. Though *a* and *an* usually come before the adjective in a sentence, they come after it in cases like *such a one*; *too hot a fire*; *how cold a night it is!*; *many a game we had together*. Where there is a sense of comparison the article is either put before the adjective or omitted, e.g. *I never saw a more vivid sunset*.

a-, an- *prefix*

This prefix means 'not' or 'without', e.g. *amoral*.

abbreviations see PUNCTUATION, FULL STOPS;
APPENDIX

abide *v.*

When it means 'stay', 'remain', *abide* has the past tense and past participle *abode*. *Abide by*, meaning 'remain true to', has the past tense *abided*, e.g. *He abided by his word*. Its negative form sometimes means 'endure', 'tolerate', e.g. *I cannot abide the place* (cf. *I cannot abide in the place*).

abjure, adjure *v.*

These verbs are sometimes confused. To *abjure* is to 'renounce an oath' or 'recant an opinion', e.g. *They will have to abjure Communism before they can join our party*. To *adjure* is to 'make a solemn appeal', e.g. *His friends adjured him to think carefully before taking this step*.

-able, -eable, -ible see SPELLING, ADJECTIVES

abolishment, abolition, abolitionist *n.*

The first two nouns describe the 'bringing to an end' of something especially a law or a state of affairs, e.g. *He did not live to see the abolition of capital punishment*. The second of these is more commonly used than the first. An *abolitionist* was a person who believed in or worked for the abolition of slavery.

aboriginal *adj. n.*

The adjective means 'native to a country' and

is used of its inhabitants, plants or animals. The noun denotes 'an original, pre-colonial inhabitant', e.g. *an Australian aboriginal*, and has the plural *aborigines*.

about SEE AROUND

absolutes

A term used to describe words like *almighty*, *unique*, *best*, *maximum*, *minimum*, which should not be qualified by an adverb. (see *so*)

abstract *adj. n. v.*

As an adjective pronounced ('æbstrækt), it means 'separated from practical reality', the opposite of *concrete*, e.g. *His plans were too abstract to be put into operation*. As a noun, it has the same pronunciation and means 'a summary' of a document or a situation, e.g. *He read through the papers and made an abstract of their contents*. The verb is pronounced (æb'strækt), and means 'withdraw', 'separate from', 'take out', e.g. *One can abstract iron filings from sand by passing a powerful magnet over the mixture*, or *His mind was wholly abstracted by thoughts of other things*.

academic, academical *adj.* **academical**, —**s**, **academician** *n.*

The adjective *academic*, meaning 'scholarly' or 'pertaining to a learned institution', can apply to learning (*an academic discipline*), the nature of an argument, or treatment of a

subject (*an academic approach to pop music*). It is also used in a derogatory sense to mean 'unpractical' or 'remote', e.g. *The question of freedom of speech is only an academic one under a dictatorship.*

In Scotland an *academical* is a past pupil at an *academy* or secondary school, whereas in England the term *academician* is used to denote a member of an elected body of distinguished practitioners of a certain art or science. The noun *academicals* means 'academic dress'.

access, accession n.

Access means 'the act or means of approach', 'the coming on or attack' of illness or rage; *Accession* means 'coming into office or power', 'increase or addition'. *Access to the throne* means 'a possibility of approaching the sovereign'; *Accession to the throne* means 'the act of becoming sovereign'. (see EXCESS with which *access* is sometimes confused)

accessary, accessory, adj. n.

As adjectives they mean 'contributing' or 'subsidiary'. *Accessory* is now the more general spelling; as a noun it means 'a person participating in a crime (usually in a minor capacity)' or 'a helper' in any act.

accompany v.

Meaning 'be with' or 'go with', this verb is used with *by* for persons, *with* for things, e.g.