



*Prentice Hall*  
**ENCYCLOPEDIA  
DICTIONARY  
of  
ENGLISH  
USAGE**

江苏工学院图书馆  
藏书章

**SECOND EDITION**

**N.H. MAGER • S.K. MAGER**

*Revised by John Domini*



**PRENTICE HALL**  
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*  
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*  
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*  
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*  
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*  
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*  
Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*  
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Mager, N. H. (Nathan H.), 1913–  
Prentice Hall encyclopedic dictionary of English usage / N.H.  
Mager and S.K. Mager. -- 2nd ed. / revised by John Domini.  
p. cm.  
Rev. ed. of: Encyclopedic dictionary of English usage.  
ISBN 0-13-276858-5 : \$27.95  
1. English language -- Usage. 2. English language -- Dictionaries.  
I. Mager, Sylvia K., 1916– II. Domini, John, 1951–  
III. Mager, N. H. (Nathan H.), 1913– Encyclopedic dictionary of  
English usage. IV. Title.  
PE1628.M23 1992  
428'.003--dc20

92-22944  
CIP

0-13-276858-5



**PRENTICE HALL**  
Business Information & Publishing Division  
Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632  
Simon & Schuster, A Paramount Communications Company

Printed in the United States of America

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nathan H. Mager was publisher of *The New York Column* newspaper, and manager of the *Civil Service Leader*, a New York State newspaper for public employees. An author, editor, and publisher for more than 40 years, Mr. Mager wrote numerous articles, and authored over 20 books (some with his wife) including THE OFFICE ENCYCLOPEDIA; THE COMPLETE LETTER WRITER; LEGAL, POLITICAL AND BUSINESS GUIDE; and HOT TO PASS COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS.

Sylvia K. Mager is a writer, editor, researcher, and newspaper and magazine columnist. A graduate of Hunter College, she is the author of COMPLETE GUIDE TO HOME SEWING and TODAY'S WOMAN BOOK FOR BRIDES.

John Domini has taught writing at Harvard, Lewis & Clark, and a number of other institutions. Currently, he's a member of the English Department at Linfield College in Oregon. He is the author of *Bedlam*, a book of short stories, and has published fiction and non-fiction in a wide variety of publications, among them the *New York Times* and *Sports Illustrated*.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This guide is intended as a single-volume ready reference for the educated professional who needs to write. It combines elements of a dictionary, a style manual, and a grammar guide—the most in-demand elements of each. This combination makes it unlike any other reference work, and more immediately useful.

In 1974 Prentice Hall published the original edition, by Nathan and Sylvia Mager. The book proved a perennial bestseller, and an essential resource book for a wide range of working people. The present, updated edition builds on the strengths of the first.

- Like the original, this edition is *comprehensive*. It distills the essence from a wide variety of texts. Our more important sources include the style manual for the Government Printing Office, the style manuals for *The New York Times* and the University of Chicago Press, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the *World Book Almanac*, and *Warriner's Complete English Grammar*. Of course a number of other compendiums and resources proved valuable as well. The editors express the sincerest appreciation to the innumerable compilers before them.
- Also like the original, this edition is in strict *alphabetical order*. Solutions can be found simply by looking under the name of the problem: either a specific word (for instance **adverse** or **averse**), or a subject heading (like **POSSESSIVES** or **SEXIST LANGUAGE**).

Besides following the overall system of the first edition, this update also has all the same features—outstanding for their usefulness and flexibility.

- The new guide has dozens of *subject headings*. These are listings in italicized capitals, and apply to an entire subject area. The general headings cover a wide range of issues, from technical topics such as bibliography and capi-

talization to more complex problems of usage, convention, and changes in language—see, for instance, the listing under **RACIST LANGUAGE**. Each listing under these headings is a miniature essay, with examples covering all the exceptions and special cases each issue raises.

- The book also lists *thousands of shorter entries*. These define and demonstrate usages for everything from irregular English verbs like **catch** and **wake** to new high-technology words like **fax** and **MTV**. The shorter entries also include troublesome expressions like **either . . . or, neither . . . nor**. Then there are capitalization rules for organizations, for instance a **court (of law)** or a **foundation**, rules of address for people like **naval officers** or an **instructor in a college or university**, and even the conventions for things like **brackets, dates** and **horse races**.
- The book once again offers hundreds of *place names*. Every nation listed in the current *World Almanac* appears here, from **Afghanistan** to **Zimbabwe**, including nations whose status remains uncertain as of 1992, such as **Armenia, Croatia, and Lithuania**. Also listed are the 50 American states, with their abbreviations and capitals, and all the Canadian provinces.
- In addition there is an extensive compendium of *names and references from history and literature*. These include historical figures like **Kemal Atatürk** or shapers of culture like **Euclid, Friedrich Nietzsche** and **Bob Dylan**. You will also find thumbnail definitions of cultural movements, like **Modernism**, and listing for significant artifacts of the human imagination, like **Aphrodite** and **Scaramouch**.
- Especially helpful with some of the name listings, the book offers a quick *pronunciation guide*. Pronunciation was in fact one of the principal criteria for these listings. Every word in this book poses some kind of problem—it is something a person of average (or better than average) education might need to look up or double-check. For many of the entries, the problem is simply how to say the word aloud. Indeed, in some cases, the problem is how to say the same word for different uses—like **affect** as a noun or verb. The code for this book's pronunciation guide is simple, and provided on page x.
- At the same time, there are *listings of measurements*. From **millimeter** to **mile**, from **avoirdupois** to **troy weight**, any sort of measurement that seems useful for an educated reader is here. In every case, the book provides a number of different equivalences, in a number of different numerical systems. It also provides all the appropriate abbreviations.
- Finally, the guide is carefully and thoroughly *cross-referenced*. Entries recur in different places, often more than once. Anyone wondering whether to use **Indian** or **Native American** can look in a number of places: under either of those terms, under **American** or **-American**, or under the subject heading **RACIST LANGUAGE**. The same applies to abbreviations, which in most cases are listed along with the word they represent (for example,

## How to Use This Book

there is an entry both for **kilowatt** and for **kw**); to perennial problems like **affect** and **effect**; and to names of places currently undergoing transition, like **Croatia**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, and **Yugoslavia**.

As that last point makes clear, the world has seen many changes since 1974, and this new edition has been revised and updated with an eye toward keeping it useful well into the next century. Changes are intended to emphasize flexibility and practicality.

- Words derived from **computers** and other contemporary technology are listed, along with their uses.
- New rules for words like **hopefully**, new conventions for possessives, and new suffixes like **-identify** have been added. All usage changes are listed and explained.
- New nations are listed, along with their pertinent details. This includes all the members of the old Soviet Union—the **Federated Commonwealth of Independent States**.
- Historical entries have been updated. Among the additions are women like **Frida Kahlo** and events like the **My Lai** massacre.
- New acronyms and abbreviations are listed. Also, a consistent system of punctuation has been instituted with abbreviations; see below.
- All cross-references are now indicated by the simple English word *see*, rather than the more academic *Cf.* Likewise, *for example* has replaced *e.g.*

The changes number in the thousands—clarifying, updating, and in general making the book more handy. Yet the goal remains the same as the Magers had in mind in 1974: “to create a tool with maximum usefulness.” Executives and students, businesspeople and letter-writers, professors and political workers and even crossword-puzzle enthusiasts should all find something in this book to make their task easier. Anyone wondering about a word should find the answer here.

### ABBREVIATIONS: A Note and a List

Abbreviations in this book take points (periods) except in special cases. The American Medical Association, for instance, is here abbreviated A.M.A., not AMA. This system of course cannot possibly apply for every organization, but for the purposes of the book it was important to be consistent.

The special cases are those abbreviations that are properly considered *acronyms*—that is, abbreviations in which points would interfere with the meaning. Examples include MTV, PG (the movie rating), and the U.S. state abbreviations: MA, for instance, stands for Massachusetts, while M.A. stands for Master of Arts.

Other than that, there are a number of standard abbreviations used throughout the text:



<i>abbreviation</i>	<i>meaning</i>
abbr.	abbreviation
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
angl.	anglicized
a/k/a	also known as
approx.	approximately
Br.	British
cap.	capitalize, for a word capital, for a nation
colloq.	colloquial (slang)
conj.	conjunction
esp.	especially
f.	female
fem.	feminine
fig.	figurative
Fr.	French
Ger.	German
It.	Italian
lit.	literal
m.	male
masc.	masculine
n.	noun
obs.	obsolete
org.	organization
orig.	originally
p.	past
pl.	plural
p.p.	past participle
pref.	preferred
pres. part.	present participle
pron.	pronunciation
Rus.	Russian
sing.	singular
sq.	square
usu.	usually
v.	verb

## PRONUNCIATION: A Guide

This edition uses the same pronunciation guide as found in the first edition. As before, "some subtleties have been eliminated." The purpose is to provide a system that can be quickly understood by anyone who knows basic English phonetics.

## How to Use This Book

### *Vowels*

#### *Sound*

#### *Expressed*

#### *By*

#### *Webster*

#### *Phonetic*

#### *a*

ae	=	ā	as in may, day delay
a	=	a	as in map, bad, pass
ai	=	ai	as in hair
ah	=	á	as in bother, father
aw	=	ó	as in saw, all, prawn

#### *e*

ee	=	e, é	as in meat, bleed, tree
eh	=	e, eú	as in bed, elk, operate
eu	=	ëu	as in few

#### *i*

ie	=	ī	as in why, side, buy
ih	=	i, í, ú	as in tip, wish, iln

#### *o*

oh	=	ō	as in woe, snow, toad
oi	=	oi	as in coin, employ, coy
oo	=	ū	as in rule, spittoon, truth
ou	=	óu	as in now, plow, denounce

#### *u*

u	=	ū	as in stood, soot, could
uh	=	ȳ	as in duchess, hurry

### *Consonants*

wh	as in what, when, whale
sh	as in shock, shun, dish
th	as in either, then, dipthong
zh	as in division, azure

# TYPICAL PROBLEMS THIS BOOK CAN SOLVE

## *How to pronounce*

acumen  
avoirdupois  
Beowulf  
bona fide  
Cairo, IL

Dachau  
hegira  
subpoena  
Szechwan  
viva voce

## *When to capitalize*

a.d.  
b.c.  
a.m.  
the bible  
heads of departments

Ho Chi Minh  
professor  
soviet  
state  
union

## *How to abbreviate*

avoirdupois  
California  
(and all American states)  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Food and Drug Administration

free alongside  
House concurrent resolution  
kilograms  
monsieur  
Spanish

## *Differentiate between (or among)*

Abyssinia, Ethiopia, Eritrea  
ante-, anti-  
cache, cachet, sachet  
Charlotte and Emily Bronte  
eminent, immanent

glasnost, perestroika  
hue, brilliance, color  
1 lb. avoirdupois and 1 lb. troy  
sensual, sensuous  
stock, common stock, preferred stock

## Typical Problems This Book Can Solve

### *Define, identify, or explain*

antonym  
Bahai  
dangling modifier  
downsize  
European Community

footnotes  
infidel  
the New Deal  
Postmodernism  
Eisaku Sato

### *Indicate which to write*

all right, alright, or alright  
caret, carat, or carrot  
different from or different than  
farther or further  
Jewish, Hebrew, Israeli

Miss, Mrs. or Ms.  
Native American or Indian  
NM or N.M. (for New Mexico)  
10 or ten (SEE Numbers)  
x ray, Xray, or X-ray

### *Provide measurements or dates for*

a byte  
a dekaliter  
Frankenstein  
one horsepower  
a knot

La Boheme  
naught  
an odd-lot  
progressive average  
Eleanor, Franklin, and Theodore  
Roosevelt

### *Provide correct spelling for*

accommodate  
Albuquerque  
Charles', Charles's  
cynosure, sinecure  
Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Guinea-Bissau  
kowtow  
Odysseus, the Odyssey, and Ulysses  
posthaste, postdoctoral  
snafu

*. . . and answer thousands of other questions of all kinds.*

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## A

**a** As an article, *a* should be used before all consonants except silent *h*: *a history, a humble proposal*. BUT *an Hispanic culture*. ALSO before a consonant sound in a vowel: *a union, a UFC station*. See also: **an**.

**a.** (abbr.) ampere; are (metric system); area.

**A.** (abbr.) altitude; atomic weight; area; absolute (temperature); angstrom.

**A-** bomb; A-frame. BUT: A flat; A sharp.

**A.A.** Alcoholics Anonymous; athletic association: *Boston A.A.*

**AAA** (abbr.) American Automobile Association; anti-aircraft artillery. Written without points (periods).

**Aaron** [AIR'n]

**A.B.** or **a.b.** (abbr.) able-bodied seaman.

**A.B.** (abbr.) Bachelor of Arts. See **B.A.** (abbr.), more common.

**abacus** calculating instrument. (pl.) abici or abacuses.

**abattoir** [ab-a-TWAR] (Fr.) slaughterhouse.

**abbé** [a-BAE] (Fr.) a secular ecclesiastic.

**Abbot (Catholic)** ADDRESS: His Excellency, The Right Reverend John

Jones, Abbot of Briarcliff. SALUTATION: Your Excellency.

**Abbot (Protestant)** ADDRESS: The Lord Abbot of Briarcliff; The Right Reverend Abbot Brown. SALUTATION: Dear Father Abbot; My Lord Abbot.

**abbreviation** a shortening of a word or phrase. Abbreviated: abbr. (v.)—ated, —ating. (adj.)—able.

ABRIDGMENT shortening by selection of most important portions.

**ABBREVIATIONS** abbreviated: abbr. In this text, nearly all abbreviations are printed with points (periods). The only exceptions are state abbreviations (such as AL for Alabama), in which the individual letters do not each stand for a word, and acronyms like MTV. MA means Massachusetts, but M.A. means Master of Arts.

MTV and abbreviations of that kind have evolved into common *acronyms*. They are then treated as words, points omitted: *NATO, co-op, etc.*

Although styles differ, the tendency is for abbreviations to lose their points as they increase in use. Thus Government Printing Office style drops the points on almost all federal and international agencies, *The New York Times* on some, and some publishers on only a few. When an abbreviation is made up of letters from one word, it generally

does not require a point, as in TV, but where two or more words are involved, *The New York Times* usually uses abbreviation points: R.F.D.

In most writings, abbreviations are to be avoided, but more extensive use is made of them in tabular material, headlines, indexes, and addresses. The chief factor in deciding when to use an abbreviation is reading facility—the readiness with which the reader can determine the meaning and the technical space limitations.

A number of words, particularly new ones, are so distracting to the eye or so difficult to pronounce that abbreviation is necessary. Such abbreviations are proper both in writing and in speech: AIDS, D.D.T., R.S.V.P., V.I.P., KLM for the Dutch airline (whose full name is Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschaapij voor Nederland en Koloniën).

The **abbreviation point** is a period, and is used with many abbreviations. When the point occurs at the end of a sentence, it is combined with a period into one dot. Before any other punctuation mark, the point remains. Customary usage eliminates the point for abbreviations of governmental organizations.

DO NOT use the abbreviation point after: (1) chemical symbols ( $H_2O$ ); (2) formal signs of books (*8vo*); (3) initial used as titles of technical publications or organizations in technical matter (*PAIS for Public Affairs Information Service*); (4) linguistic epochs (*IE for Indo-European*); (5) the word *per cent*; (6) contractions (*can't*); (7) shortened forms of names (*Sam*); (8) Roman numerals (*XIX*); (9) letters

not used as abbreviations (*A and B met and discussed the matter.*) BUT: If A and B are abbreviations for actual names, the abbreviation point is used.

**ABC's** the alphabet.

**abettor** This spelling is pref. to *abetter*, especially in law.

**abjure** forswear; renounce on oath; disavow.

ADJURE charge or command; entreat or appeal to.

—**able** When adding this suffix to a transitive verb, drop any final silent *e* or *ate* of polysyllabic words; *abominable*, *rebatable*, *accumulable*. —*ible* is an alternative established by custom for some forms.

The general rule: (1) When there is a corresponding noun that ends in —*tion* preceded by *a*, the adjective ending is —*able*: *quotation*, *quotable*; *presentation*, *presentable*. (2) When there is a corresponding noun ending in —*tion* or —*sion* not preceded by *a*, the adjective ending is —*ible*: *expansion*, *expansible*, *extension*, *extensible*; *admission*, *admissible*. Words formed from them by adding the prefixes *in-*, *un-*, *non-*, also have the —*ible* ending.

**able-bodied** (adj.) This word also appears without hyphen: *ablebodied*.

**abolition** abolishing or abolishment.

**aborigine** [AB-oh-RIHJ-ih-nee] (pl.) —*ines*. (adj.) —*inal*.

**about** This word is informal for *approximately*. In use, avoid implied re-

dundancy. NOT: *about forty to fifty*. NOT: *He estimated about 15,000 were present*. See also: **above**; **below**; **on**; **over**; **under**

### about-face

**above** In use, avoid old-fashioned style: *above listed*, *above-mentioned*. *The example above* is pref. to *the above example*, as is *the example given above*.

**abridgment** pref. to *abridgement*. *Abridged from*, *abridgement of*. (adj.) —eable. SEE ALSO **abbreviation**.

**abrogate** [AB-roh-gaet] to annul; abolish; repeal (adj.) —gable.

**abs.** (abbr.) absolute; abstract.

**abscess** [AB-sess] infection, esp. in gums.

**absence** Absentee: —teeism.

### absent-minded

**ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTION** (nominative absolute) A literary construction in which the participial phrase is not connected with the main clause. *The facts proven incontrovertible, he won his point*. See **DANGLING MODIFIER**

**absolve** [ab-S AHLV] free from an obligation, or from condemnation for sin. *He was absolved from sin after confessing*.

**absorb** [ab-SAWRB] to take into.

ADSORB [ad-SAWRB] to condense and hold by absorption, the

adhesion of a thin layer of molecules to the surface of a solid body.

**abstemious** [ab-STEE-mee-uhs] displaying habitual moderation in food and liquor.

ABSTINENT displaying forbearance from indulgence, (as in certain foods). *Total restraint, especially from intoxicating beverages, is total abstinence*.

**ABSTRACT NOUN** a noun that names a quality, state, or idea: *peace, freedom, whiteness*. It is also used to mean the general class (*fruit*) as opposed to the particular (*apple*). Lower-case except when a proper name is involved. In use, avoid overreliance on abstract nouns. Concrete nouns have greater impact: *snake* rather than *reptile*.

**abutting** touching, sometimes with a protruding portion.

**abysmal** [a-BIHZ-m-l] deep; bottomless; hence, wretched.

ABYSSAL: unfathomable (tech., water depth of 300 fathoms).

**abyss** bottomless or unmeasurable pit or space.

CHASM a deep, long, and narrow opening.

**Abyssinia** [ab-uh-SIHN-ih-uh] See **Ethiopia**.

A.C. (abbr.) athletic club.

a.c. (abbr.) alternating current.



**A.C.L.U.** (abbr.) American Civil Liberties Union.

**academic degrees and titles** John J. Poole, Doctor of Philosophy; John J. Poole, Ph.D. Professor Poole; Prof. John J. Poole, Ph.D. Degrees and titles are listed separately in this sequence; theological degrees, degrees earned in course, and honorary degrees in order of bestowal. *Reverend John J. Poole, Ph.D., LL.D.* Also correct without abbreviation point: *PhD*

**academic departments** Use lowercase: *department of philosophy; French department.*

**academy** Andover Academy or Merchant Marine Academy are each referred to as *the academy* (lowercase) on second use. Most styles capitalize a second reference to National Academy of Science, the Academy of Sciences, the French Academy, and the United States Military, Naval, and Air Force Academies, BUT NOT the service academies.

**Acadia** [uh-KAE-dih-uh] original name of Nova Scotia.

**a cappella** [ah-cah-PELL-ah] (It.) without instrumental accompaniment. Choral music is sometimes described this way.

**Acapulco** [ah-kah-POOL-ko] full name of Acapulco de Juárez [dae HWAH-raes]. S Mexican resort on Pacific.

**accede** [ak-SEED] to assume an office; assent to.

**EXCEED** to surpass.

**ACCENT** When the same multisyllabic word is both noun and adjective, the noun is usually accented on the first syllable, the adjective on the last syllable: (n.) *a legal AB-stract*; (adj.) *ab-STRACT idea*.

When the word is both a noun and a verb, the noun is usually accented on the first syllable, the verb on last syllable: *progress* (n.) [PRAHG-rehs], (v.) [proh-GREHS]. Sometimes the consonantal sound at the end is hard in the noun, soft in the verb: *use* (n.) [yoos], (v.) [yooz]; *excuse* (n.) [ex-KYOOOS], (v.) [ex-ICYOOZ].

There are no firm general rules regarding accent in American English, but new words tend to follow the accent patterns of similar older words. The tendency is toward recessive accents, and toward accenting the first syllable.

**accept** to receive willingly. *I accept your gift.*

**EXCEPT** leave out, exclude, *He gave a gift to everyone except me.*

**acceptance** approval. In general; an act of accepting.

**ACCEPTATION** the meaning of a word as it is generally understood.

**accepter** In law, *acceptor*.

**access** opportunity of admission.

**EXCESS** too much.

**accession** [ak-SESH-uhn] approach; adherence; something added; reaching an office or condition.

**accessory** [ak-SES-oh-ree] (adj.) aiding or assisting. (n.) that which (or