PAM PETERS

THE CAMBRIDGE GUIDE TO ENGLISH USAGE

- The new reference Guide for the 21st century
- Over 4000 entries
- International and corpus-based

The Cambridge Guide to

English Usage

PAM PETERS
Macquarie University

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The Cambridge Guide to English Usage

The Cambridge Guide to English Usage is an A–Z reference book, giving an up-to-date account of the debatable issues of English usage and written style. Its advice draws a wealth of recent research and data from very large corpora of American and British English – illuminating their many divergences and also points of convergence on which international English can be based. The book comprises more than 4000 points of word meaning, spelling, grammar, punctuation and larger issues of inclusive language, and effective writing and argument. It also provides guidance on grammatical terminology, and covers topics in electronic communication and the internet. The discussion notes the major dictionaries, grammars and usage books in the US, UK, Canada and Australia, allowing readers to calibrate their own practices as required. *CGEU* is descriptive rather than prescriptive, but offers a principled basis for implementing progressive or more conservative decisions on usage.

Consultants

JOHN ALGEO	University of Georgia
JOHN AYTO	University of Surrey
DAVID CRYSTAL	University of Wales, Bangor
SIDNEY LANDAU	Fellow of the Dictionary Society of North America
KATIE WALES	University of Leeds

Preface

The *Cambridge Guide to English Usage* is written for English-users in the twenty-first century. It takes a fresh look at thousands of questions of style and usage, embracing issues that are time-honored yet still current, as well as those newly arising as the language continues to evolve. Some of these come with electronic communication and online documentation, but there are numerous others among the more than 4000 headwords in the book.

At the threshold of the third millennium, English is more diverse than ever in all hemispheres. Research into "new Englishes" has flourished, supported by journals such as *English World-Wide, World Englishes* and *English Today*. At the same time, the quest for a single, international form for written communication becomes more pressing, among those aiming at a global readership. This book is designed to support both global and local communicators. It identifies regionalized elements of usage, grammar and style, with systematic attention to American and British English, and reference to Canadian, Australian and New Zealand English as well. It allows writers to choose styles and usage appropriate to their readership, according to how local or large it is. The local options help to establish and affirm regional identity within, say, North America or Great Britian. But communicating beyond those regions calls for reappraisal of the options, putting a premium on those with the widest distribution worldwide, ideally region-free. *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* identifies "international English selections" wherever they can be distilled out of the alternatives available, and implements them on its own pages. It empowers readers (as writers, editors, teachers, students) to choose and develop their own style, for their particular purposes.

Many kinds of resource have been brought to bear on the style and usage questions raised. *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* is the first of its kind to make regular use of large databases (corpora) of computerized texts as primary sources of current English. Numerous examples of British usage have come from the 100 million word British National Corpus (see **BNC**); and of American usage from a subset of 140 million words of American English from the Cambridge International Corpus (see **CCAE**). The corpora embody various kinds of written discourse as well as transcriptions of spoken discourse – enough to show patterns of divergence between the two. Negative attitudes to particular idioms or usage often turn on the fact that they are more familiar to the ear than the eye, and the constructions of formal writing are privileged thereby. Corpus data allow us to look more neutrally at the distributions of words and constructions, to view the range of styles across which they operate. On this basis we can see what is really "standard," i.e. usable in many kinds of discourse, as opposed to the formal or informal. References to "formal" and "informal" within the book presuppose that they lie above and below the broad band of everyday written communication, and together form a three-point stylistic scale.

The relative acceptability of a given usage can also be gauged by means of population surveys. This involves the use of questionnaires on doubtful or disputed usage in spelling, punctuation, the use of capital letters and certain points of grammar. A series of six questionnaires called the "Langscape survey" was published in *English Today* (1998–2001), with the support of the editor, Dr. Tom McArthur. Hundreds of questionnaires from around the world were returned by mail and fax, and through the Style Council website at Macquarie University, where they were analyzed in terms of regional and sociolinguistic trends. Results from Langscape are quoted in some of the book's entries for their insights into people's willingness to embrace particular spellings or usages. They are a litmus test of future directions.

Attitudes to usage often reflect what's said in the relevant language authorities, most notably the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition, 1989) for British English, and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (3rd edition, 1961, reprinted 1986) for American English. These unabridged dictionaries remain monuments to English language scholarship, to which we are all indebted. Though their latest editions are not so recent, their positions tend to be maintained in younger, abridged dictionaries, except where there are good reasons to diverge, e.g. on neologisms or previously unrecorded usage. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate* (2000) have been used to update the verdicts of the unabridged dictionaries, where relevant; and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998) and the *Macquarie Dictionary* (3rd edition 1997) are invoked for regional comparisons. Comparative reference is also made to regional usage books, including Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (1926; and later editions by Gowers, 1965, and Burchfield, 1996); to the excellent *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989), Garner's *Modern American Usage* (1999), and Fee and McAlpine's *Canadian English Usage* (1997). These secondary sources contribute to the diversity of views on changing usage, and articulate local reactions to worldwide innovations.

Issues of editorial style are also treated comparatively, to allow readers to position themselves relative to American or British style, as articulated in the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition 2003) and the *Oxford Guide to Style* (2002). Reference is also made to *Editing Canadian English* (2nd edition 2000) by the Editors' Association of Canada, to the Australian government *Style Manual* (6th edition 2002), and to the New Zealand style manual *Write, Edit, Print* (1997). Those resident in non-English-speaking countries can forge a synthesis of regional styles appropriate to their readerships.

Grammatical cruxes of usage are discussed with reference to modern grammars such as the *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985), the *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985; 1994) and especially the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999). The latter is explicitly corpus-based, using data from the Longman corpus of over 40 million words in six registers, to complement or extend the data derived from the BNC and CCAE, mentioned above. *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* aims to bridge the gap between traditional and modern grammar, and uses terminology from both (e.g. *mood* and *modality*) as entry points to discussing grammatical questions. Elements of discourse analysis are also discussed, for example *information focus* and sentence *topic*, as aids to writing and editing.

Apart from its large range of primary and secondary sources, *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* draws on the findings of numerous linguistic researchers, named within the text and in the bibliography. Their contributions to our understanding of the intricacies of the English language are legion. Many are corpus linguists associated with the ICAME group (International Computer Archive of Modern English), who have progressively developed the uses of corpora for linguistic description with each new generation of corpus. Other European and American linguists who have contributed greatly to this book are the distinguished consultants named on p. ii, whose careful reading of the MS has enhanced its relevance to different parts of the English-speaking world.

The Cambridge Guide to English Usage also owes much to undated and undatable discussions with colleagues and friends at Macquarie University, in the Linguistics department and associated with the *Macquarie Dictionary*. To Professor Arthur Delbridge, the foundation Professor of Linguistics and Editor-in-chief of the Dictionary who connected me with both, I owe a particular debt of gratitude. Others who provided invaluable support for the publication of the prototype *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (1995) were Dr. Robin Derricourt (formerly of Cambridge University Press, Australia), and Hon. Justice Michael Kirby (of the High Court of Australia). In the preparatory stages of *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage*, I was fortunate to be a visiting professor at the Englisches Seminar of the University of Zürich, which gave me access to their excellent BNC search tools and experience of teaching at a European university. Many thanks are due to those at Cambridge University Press (UK) who saw the project through from first to last: Adrian du Plessis, Kevin Taylor and Dr Kate Brett, and my copy-editor Leigh Mueller. Back home in Australia my warmest thanks go to my family, to Fliss, Greg, and especially to John, for his unfailing love and support.

Pam Peters

Overview of Contents and How to Access Them

The alphabetical list in this book contains two kinds of entries: those which deal with general topics of language, editing and writing, and those dealing with particular words, word sets or parts of words. An overview of many general entries is provided on the opposite page. The particular entries, focusing on issues of usage, spelling and word form, are too numerous to be shown there, and simply take their places in the alphabetical list. But for many questions, either general or particular entries would lead you to the answer you're seeking, and the book offers multiple access paths via crossreferences.

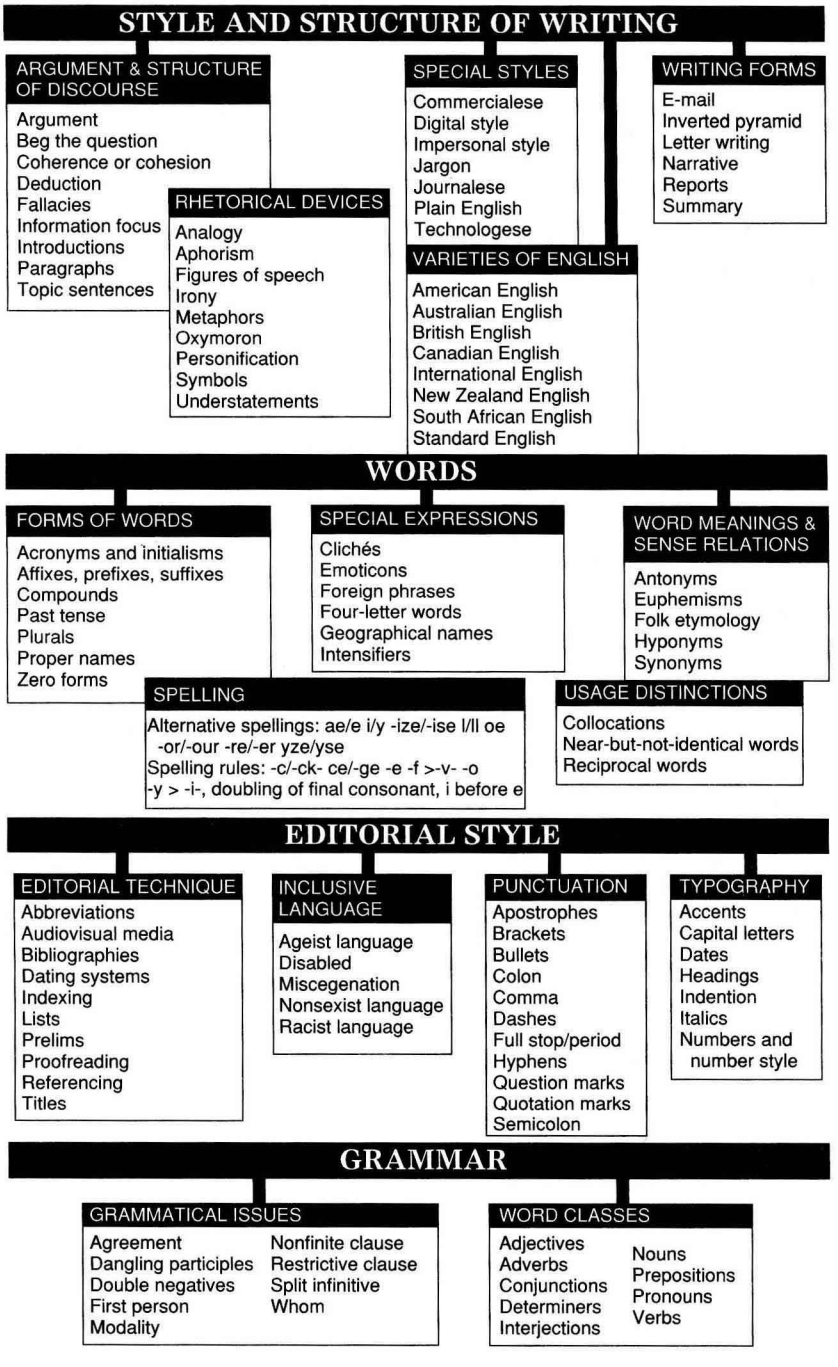
Let's say you are interested in where to put the full stop in relation to a final bracket or parenthesis. Any of those terms (full stop, bracket, parenthesis) would take you to the relevant discussion under **brackets**. In addition the general entry on **punctuation** presents a list of all the entries dealing with individual punctuation marks, for both words and sentences.

Questions of grammar are accessible through traditional terms such as **noun** and **verb**, **clause** and **phrase**, and traditional labels such as **dangling participle** or **split infinitive**... though the entries may lead you on to newer linguistic topics such as **information focus** and **modality**. Aspects of writing and argument (when is it OK to use **I**? what does it mean to **beg the question**?) are discussed under their particular headings, but can also be tracked down through more general ones such as **impersonal writing** and **argument**.

If your question is about current use of a word such as **hopefully**, or a pair such as **alternate** and **alternative**, or **gourmet** and **gourmand**, the discussion is to be found under those headwords. When it's a question of spelling, e.g. **convener** or **convenor**, the individual entry may answer it, and/or direct you on to another (**-er/-or**) where a whole set with the same variable part is dealt with. In the same way, the entry **-ize/-ise** discusses the alternative spellings of countless verbs like recognise/recognize, although there are too many to enter alphabetically. The key spelling entries are listed under **spelling** sections 2 and 3, in case you're unsure what heading to look under. Alternative plural forms can be located via the entry on **plurals**.

As in the text above, the use of boldface means that the word is entered as a headword, and it identifies all crossreferences at the end of entries. Within any entry, further instances of the headword(s) are often boldfaced to draw attention to strategic points about them. Words related to the headword(s) or derived from them are set in italics, as are all examples.

◊ Abbreviations used in the body of the text are explained at their alphabetical place.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A

@

This is a symbol in search of a name. English-speakers call @ the "*at* sign," which will do while it serves as the universal symbol of an e-mail address. Its shape is also used along with other *emoticons* to represent expressions of the human face (see **emoticons**). But its resemblance to animals emerges through ad hoc names in other languages. In Danish, it's seen as the "elephant's trunk," and in Chinese as "little mouse." Russian has it as "little dog," Swedish as "cat's foot," and Dutch as "monkey's tail." The best consensus is for "snail," which provides a name for @ in French, Italian, Hebrew and Korean.

◊ On quoting e-mail addresses, see under **URL**.

a or an

Which should it be?

a hotel	or	an hotel
a heroic effort	or	an heroic effort
a RAF training course	or	an RAF training course
a $8 ticket	or	an $8 ticket

A single rule resolves all such queries: **a** is used before words beginning with a consonant, and **an** before those beginning with a vowel. This is straightforwardly applied in *a doctor, a receptionist* and *an astronaut, an engineer*. But note that the rule depends on the sound not the spelling. We write *a union, a unique gift* and *a once-in-a-lifetime experience* because the words following the article actually begin with a consonant sound (the "y" sound in the first two cases, and the "w" sound in the third). The same principle makes it *an hour, an honor,* and *an honest man*. The word following the indefinite article begins with a vowel sound.

When writing abbreviations, the choice between **a** or **an** again depends on the pronunciation of the first letter. So *a US Marine* and *a Unesco project* are quite regular, as are *an MP* and *an HB pencil*. Any abbreviation beginning with F, L, H, M, N, R, S or X takes **an**, because of the way those letters are pronounced. The effect is exploited in advertising for a brand of beer, where the use of **A** (rather than **AN**) shows how to pronounce the ambiguous brandname:

I CAN FEEL A XXXX COMING ON AUSTRALIANS WOULDN'T GIVE A XXXX FOR ANYTHING ELSE

Preceded by **A**, the brandname must be read as "four ex" not as "exexexex." It nudges readers away from the unprintable or socially unacceptable interpretation of the word, while no doubt capitalizing on it.

Similar principles hold for writing sums of money. Pronounce them and they select **a** for *a £12 shirt* and **an** for *an $80m. loan,* taking the cue from the number (which is said first) rather than the currency symbol (which is written first).

Despite all that, certain words beginning with *h* are made exceptions by some writers and speakers. They would preface *hotel* and *heroic* with **an** rather than **a**, despite pronouncing the *h* at the start of those words. Other polysyllabic words beginning with *h* will be given the same treatment, especially if their first syllable is unstressed. In both American and British English the words *historic, historical* and *historian* are the most frequent of these exceptional cases, but the tendency goes further in Britain, by the evidence of matching databases (LOB and Brown corpora). They show that British writers use **an** to preface adjectives such as *habitual, hereditary, heroic, horrific, hypothetical, hysterical* (and their adverbs) as well as the noun *hotel*. There are far fewer examples in the American data, and the only distinctive case is *herb,* which is commonly pronounced without *h* in the US (though not in the UK or elsewhere). The King James bible (1611) records the use of **an** with other monosyllabic words, as in *an host* and *an house*, though they are supposed to go with *h*-less pronunciations, formerly much more common.

Over the centuries *h* has been an uncertain quantity at the beginnings of words in many European languages. Most words beginning with *h* lost it as they passed from Latin into French and Italian. The Latin word *hora* meaning "hour" became French *heure* (pronounced "err," with no *h* sound) and also the Italian *ora*, without an *h* even in the spelling. English retains an *h* in the spelling of *hour* but not in the pronunciation. The process also shows up in the contrasting pronunciations of *heir* (an early English loan from French) and *hereditary* (a Renaissance borrowing direct from Latin), which embody the same Latin stem. Spelling pronunciation has revived the *h* in some French loanwords like *heritage* and *historian* (those well used in English writing); while others such as *hour, heir, hono(u)r* are *h*-less, in keeping with French pronunciation. Classical loanwords (apart from *honorary, honorarium, honorific*) have settled on pronunciations with the *h* sounded; and they complement the many basic Anglo-Saxon words such as *here, how, him* and *hair, home, honey* in which *h* is pronounced. (See further under **h**.)

Nowadays the silent *h* persists in only a handful of French loanwords (*heir, honest, hono(u)r, hour* and their derivatives), and these need to be preceded by **an**. The *h* of other loans like *heroic, historical* and *hypothesis* may have been silent or varied in earlier times, leaving uncertainty as to whether **an** was required or not. But their pronunciation is no longer variable and provides no phonetic justification for **an**. Its use with them is a stylistic nicety, lending historical nuances to discourse in which tradition dies hard.

◊ For the grammar of **a** and **an**, see **articles**.

◊ For the presence/absence of **a/an** in (1) journalistic introductions, see **journalism and journalese**; and in (2) titles of books, periodicals, plays etc., see under **the**.

a-

The **a-** prefixed to ordinary English adjectives and adverbs comes from two different sources. In a few cases such as *afresh, akin* and *anew,* it represents the Old English preposition *of,* and so *anew* was once "of new." In many more cases it was the Old English preposition *on*, as in:

aback	*ablaze*	*abroad*	*afloat*	*afoot*
aglow	*ahead*	*ajar*	*alive*	*around*
ashore	*aside*	*asleep*	*astray*	

Thus *ashore* was literally "on shore."

In each set the two elements of the prepositional phrase have long since merged into one. But the past still shows through in the fact that as adjectives they are used only after the noun they qualify, either postpositively as in *the way ahead* or predicatively, i.e. as the complement of a verb, as in *Route 66 is ahead.* (See further under **adjectives**, section 1.) The adverbial functions of these words are also evident in collocations such as *taken aback, go astray* and *get ahold of* (see further at **ahold**). Others such as **around** are now both adverbs and prepositions.

Note the apparently similar *apart,* which consists of French elements (*à part*) rather than English ones. Its parity with *aside* is examined at **aside (from)**.

a-/an-

These are two forms of a negative prefix derived from Greek. In English its meaning is usually privative, i.e. "without" or "lacking." It appears as the first component in some academic and technical words, such as:

achromatic	*analgesic*
apathy, apathetic	*anarchy, anarchic*
aphasia, aphasic	*anhydrous*
atheism, atheist	*anorexia*

As the two lists show, the form **an-** occurs before vowels and *h*, and **a-** before all other consonants. In most cases the prefix combines with Greek stems which do not exist independently in English. In just a few, such as *amoral, asexual, atypical,* the **a-** combines with a Latin stem that is also an ordinary English word. In the case of *amoral,* the prefix makes the vital difference between *amoral* ("lacking in moral values") and *immoral* ("contrary to moral values," where *im-* is a negative).

◊ For more about negative prefixes, see **de-**, **in-/im-**, **non-** and **un-**. See also **dis-**, and other privative affixes such as **-free** and **-less**.

-a

This suffix is really several suffixes. They come into English with loanwords from other languages, including Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek, and may represent either singular or plural. In *gondola* (Italian), *siesta* (Spanish), *formula* (Latin) and *dogma* (Greek), the **-a** is a singular ending, whereas in *bacteria* (Latin) and *criteria* (Greek), it represents the plural.

Loanwords ending in singular **-a** are not to be taken for granted because their plurals may or may not go according to a foreign pattern, as discussed in the first section below. Loanwords which come with a plural **-a** ending pose other grammatical questions, to be dealt with in the second section.

1 Words with the singular -a mostly make their plurals in the usual English way, by adding an *s*. This is true for all the Italian and Spanish words, and many of the Latin ones. So *gondola* becomes *gondolas, siesta* becomes *siestas,* and *aroma* becomes *aromas*. The numerous Latin names for plants, for example *mimosa, ponderosa, protea, sequoia,* all take English plurals. However, Latin loanwords which are strongly associated with an academic field usually have Latin plurals as well, thus *formulae* along with *formulas, retinae* and *retinas* etc. So plurals with *-ae* prevail in writing intended for scientists and scholars everywhere, though the forms ending in *-as* are also available and used in nonspecialized writing and conversation.

The major dictionaries differ over which words can take English plurals. *Webster's Third* (1986) indicates an English plural for all the words listed below – either explicitly, as first or second alternative, or by the lack of reference to the plural (this being the dictionary convention for regular inflections). The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) allows either Latin or English plurals for those set in italics below, but Latin only plurals for those set in roman. Note also that while the *Oxford* presents the Latin plurals as ligatures, *Webster's* sets them as digraphs (see further under **ae/e**).

abscissa	*am(o)eba*	*antenna*	*aorta*
aura	*caesura*	*cicada*	*cornea*
echidna	*fibula*	*formula*	*hydra*
lacuna	lamina	larva	mora
nebula	nova	*patella*	*penumbra*
persona	*piscina*	*placenta*	pupa
retina	*stoa*	tibia	trachea
ulna	*urethra*	*vagina*	vertebra

An English plural is natural enough for those latinisms which are both common words and technical terms (e.g. *aura, cicada, cornea, retina*). For some (e.g. *aorta, urethra*), the occasions on which a plural might be needed are not very many, and, when it is, an ad hoc English plural is all the more likely. Note that for **antenna**, **patella** and **persona**, the two plurals are used in different fields (see under those headings). For the plural of *alumna,* see **alumni**.

Greek loanwords with singular **-a** can also have two plural forms. They bring with them their Greek plural suffix *-ta,* though they soon acquire English plurals with *s* as well. The Greek *-ta* plurals survive in scholarly, religious or scientific writing, while in other contexts the English *s* plurals are dominant. Compare the *traumas of everyday life* with the *traumata* which are the concerns of medicine and psychology. Other loanwords which use both English and Greek plurals are:

dogma lemma magma schema stigma

For both *dogma* and *stigma,* the Greek plural is strongly associated with Catholic orthodoxy (see **stigma**). The Greek plural of *miasma* (*miasmata*) seems to have lapsed in C21 English (see **miasma**).

2 Words with plural -a from Latin are often collective in meaning, for example *bacteria, data* and *media*. There's no need to pluralize them, nor do we often need their singular forms, though they do exist: *bacterium, datum* etc. (For more information, see **-um**.) The grammatical status of words like *media* (whether to construe them as singular or plural) is still unsettled. Those who know Latin are inclined to insist on plural agreement, on the grounds that *data* and *media* (not to mention *candelabra*) "are plural." Yet the argument depends on Latin rather than English grammar; and is undermined by other cases

such as *agenda* and *stamina,* which are also Latin plurals but now always used with singular verbs in English. The issues of singular/plural agreement are further discussed under **collective nouns** and **agreement** section 1; and at individual entries for **candelabra**, **data** and **media**.
◊ For Greek loanwords with a plural **-a**, such as *automata, criteria, ganglia, phenomena,* see **-on**.

a fortiori

This elliptical phrase, borrowed from Latin, means roughly "by way of something stronger." Far from being an oblique reference to fetching the whisky, it's used in formal discussion to mean "with yet stronger reason" and to introduce a second point which the speaker or writer feels will clinch the argument. Compare **a priori**.

à la

In contemporary English this versatile French tag is deployed on many of the frontiers of taste, apart from *haute cuisine.* It is still exploited on *à la carte* menus that offer you taste-tempting dishes *à la duchesse* or *à l'indienne;* and in countercuisine, it can be found in *fast foods à la McDonalds.* But beyond the restaurant business, *à la* can refer to a distinctive style in almost any domain, and the reference point is usually ad hoc, as in *makeup [used] to amuse, à la Mick Jagger,* or *an oversight committee à la New York in the 1970s.* As in those examples, the construction often turns on the proper names of persons or places, titles and institutions. It creates reference points in film – *à la "Casablanca"* – and fiction – *à la "Portnoy's Complaint"* – not to mention health management: *whether to quarantine people with AIDS à la TB.* Increasingly **à la** is found with common nouns as well, as in *law à la modem,* and *seats covered with vinyl à la taxicab,* among the examples from CCAE.

A la is a clipped form of the French *à la mode (de),* which explains the feminine form of the article (*la*). In English it works as a fixed phrase, rather like a compound preposition, and there's no suggestion of adapting its grammatical gender from **à la** to *au* when the following name is masculine (see the Mick Jagger example above).

The grave accent is still often printed on **à la** in English, especially British English, though it is by no means a recent borrowing (first recorded in 1589). No doubt its use is often prompted by a taste for the exotic; and the accent – and the fact that the phrase still tends to be italicized – help to emphasize its foreignness. The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) updates the entry on **à la** without registering the accentless form, whereas it appears as an alternative in *Webster's Third* (1986).

à la carte

This is one of the many French expressions borrowed into English to cover gastronomic needs. Literally it means "according to the card." At restaurants it gives you the freedom to choose from individually priced dishes – and the obligation to pay whatever the bill amounts to. The **à la carte** system contrasts with what has traditionally been known as *table d'hôte,* literally "the host's table." This implies partaking of whatever menu the restaurant has decided on, for a set price. The phrase goes back to earlier centuries, when the only public dining place for travelers was at the host's/landlord's table. But *table d'hôte* is what most of us partake of when traveling as tourist-class passengers on aircraft. In restaurants more transparent phrases are used to show when the menu and its price are predetermined: *fixed price menu* (in the UK and US), or *prix fixe* (in France and francophone Canada). In Italy it's *menu turistico.*

Though dictionaries such as *New Oxford* (1998) and *Merriam-Webster* (2000) continue to list **à la carte** and *table d'hôte* with their French accents, they are commonly seen without them in the English-speaking world.

a posteriori

Borrowed from Latin, this phrase means "by a later effect or instance." It refers to arguments which reason from the effect to the cause, or those which work from a specific instance back to a generalization. *A posteriori arguments* are concerned with using empirical observations and induction as the basis of reasoning. They contrast with *a priori arguments,* on which see next entry.

a priori

This phrase, borrowed from Latin, means "from the prior [assumption]." It identifies an argument which reasons from cause to a presumed effect, or which works deductively from a general principle to the specific case. Because such reasoning relies on theory or presumption rather than empirical observation, an *a priori argument* is often judged negatively. It seems to make assertions before analyzing the evidence. Compare **a posteriori**.

abacus

What if there's more than one of them? Technical uses of this word in classical architecture have no doubt helped to preserve its Latin plural *abaci.* This is the only plural recognized in the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989), and the one given priority in *Webster's Third* (1986). But *Webster's* also recognizes the English plural *abacuses,* which comes naturally when **abacus** the word refers to the low-tech, finger-powered calculator. See further under **-us**.

abbreviations

These are the standardized short forms of names or titles, and of certain common words and phrases. The term covers (i) *abbreviated words* such as *cont.* and *no.*, i.e. ones which are cut short or contracted in the middle; and (ii) *abbreviated phrases* such as *AIDS, RSI,* formed out of the first letters of words in a phrase. Both groups can be further divided (see under *contractions* section 1 for **abbreviations** v. *contractions*; and under *acronyms* for the distinction between *acronyms* and *initialisms*). The punctuation given to each group varies according to American and British style, and within them, as discussed below in section 2. However, there's a consensus that most types of symbol should be left unpunctuated (see section 1 below).

Abbreviations of all kinds are now accepted in many kinds of functional and informative writing, as neat and clear representations of the full name or title. Certain **abbreviations** such as *EFT* or *ftp* are in fact better known than their full forms (*electronic funds transfer, file transfer protocol*). The idea that they are unacceptable in formal writing seems to derive from writing in the humanities, where they are less often

needed. **Abbreviations** may indeed look strange in the text of a novel or short story. Yet who can imagine a letter which does not carry **abbreviations** somewhere in referring to people and places? Business and technical reports could hardly do without them.

Provided they are not obscure to the reader, **abbreviations** communicate more with fewer letters. Writers have only to ensure that the abbreviations they use are too well known to need any introduction, or that they are introduced and explained on their first appearance. Once the reader knows that in a particular document *CBC* equals the *Children's Book Council* or the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* or the *Carpet Bowls Club*, as the case may be, the short form can be used from then on.

1 Abbreviations which are never punctuated. Certain special categories of symbol never appear with a stop/period, anywhere in the world. They include:

- symbols for SI units: *kg, ml* etc. (See **SI units.**)
- compass points: *N, NE, SW* etc.
- chemical symbols: *Mn, Ni* etc.
- symbols for currencies: GB£, A$ etc. (See **Appendix ix.**)

One other group of **abbreviations** which never take stops are *acronyms* like *laser, scuba* (i.e. those which are pronounced like words and written in lower case: see **acronyms**).

2 Abbreviations which may or may not be punctuated, according to regional editorial practice (all other groups of **abbreviations**, of titles, institutions, placename elements and ordinary words and phrases). The various practices and their applications are illustrated below, followed by a discussion of each:

a) using stops with any kind of **abbreviation** (= traditional American style)

G.A.T.T. U.K. Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p.

b) using stops with **abbreviations** but not *contractions* (= traditional British style)

G.A.T.T. U.K. Mr Rev. mgr incl. a.s.a.p.

c) using stops for short forms with any lower case letters in them

i) *GATT UK Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p.* (all **abbreviations**)

ii) *GATT UK Mr Rev. mgr incl. a.s.a.p.* (excluding *contractions)*

d) using stops for short forms consisting entirely of lower case letters:

GATT UK Mr Rev mgr. incl. a.s.a.p.

***Option (a)** is the easiest to implement, and has been the traditional practice in the US, though the *Chicago Manual* (1993) noted its erosion amid the worldwide trend to use less punctuation. Familiar **abbreviations** can be left unstopped because the reader needs no reminder that they are shortened words or phrases.

***Option (b)** turns on the distinction between **abbreviations** and *contractions*, and gives punctuation to the first group but not the second. In theory a contraction like *mgr* ("manager") is not a "true" abbreviation, but a telescoped word with its first and last letters intact. Compare *incl.* which is clearly a clipped form of "including," and in which the stop marks where it has been abbreviated. This distinction developed in C20 British style (see **contractions**, section 1) but has never been fully standardized (Ritter 2002), and is varied in particular fields (e.g. law) and by publishing houses. It never was part of American style. Canadian editors note the distinction, though they call *contractions* "suspensions," in keeping with French editorial practice. However, the consistency of the traditional American style is appreciated when the two types of **abbreviation** are juxtaposed (*Editing Canadian English*, 2000). In New Zealand and Australia, the government *Style Manuals* (1997, 2002) have maintained the distinction, though the majority of Australian editors, writers and English teachers surveyed through Style Council in the 1990s (Peters, 1993c) begged to differ.

A particular conundrum for those who observe the distinction is what to do with pluralized abbreviations. Should the plural of *vol.* be *vols, vols.* or *vol.s?* Because the plural abbreviation preserves the final letter, there's an argument for treating it as a contraction and abandoning the stop, although it seems odd to have different punctuation for the singular and plural: *vol.* and *vols* respectively. The stopped alternatives are themselves anomalous. In *vol.s* the plural inflection is separated by a stop from the word it should be bound to; and in *vols.* the stop no longer marks the point at which the word has been clipped. *Vols.* is in fact the British choice (Butcher's *Copy-editing*, 1992, and Ritter, 2002) as well as the American, generally speaking. However, the *Chicago Manual* (1993) embeds the curiosity that Protestant scholars use *Pss.* for *Psalms*, where it's *Pss* for their Catholic counterparts in the *New American Bible.*

***Option (c)** According to this option, stops are dispensed with for abbreviations which consist of full capitals, but retained for those with just an initial capital, or consisting entirely of lower case. This is in line with style trends in many parts of the English-speaking world. Capitalized acronyms and initialisms like *OPEC, UNICEF, BBC* are normally left unstopped, as indeed they appear in the *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* (1981), and are now explicitly endorsed in the *Chicago Manual* (2003). This was the preferred practice of freelance editors in Canada (*Editing Canadian English*, 1987), and those surveyed in Australia via Style Council in 1992. Stopless acronyms/initialisms are normal in the world of computing, witness *ASCII, CD-ROM* etc. Standardized abbreviations for nation-states such as *NZ, SA, USA* usually appear without stops these days. They do contrast, however, with other national abbreviations such as *Can., Germ.* and *Mex.*, which are still to be punctuated, according to both British and American references. Within the US, the two-letter abbreviations used in revised zip codes are standardized without periods, whether they consist of one or two words. Compare *NY* and *WY* (*New York / Wyoming*); *RI* and *WI* (*Rhode Island / Wisconsin*). Despite this growing consensus on leaving stops out of capitalized acronyms and abbreviations, the distinction between abbreviations and contractions still divides British and American style on lower-cased short forms. Hence suboption (ii) involving contractions, which is British-preferred; and (i) the more fully regularized suboption, which accords with American traditional practice.

***Option (d)** builds on the trend described in (c). It takes its cue from the presence/absence of an initial capital letter, and applies stops only to those that begin with a lower case letter. The option brings abbreviations such as *Can* into line with *USA*, and

makes no attempt to distinguish between contractions and abbreviations in lower case. This gives it more appeal in America than Britain, because it would require stops to be put back in contractions such as *mgr,* which the British are accustomed to seeing in stopless form. For Americans it goes furthest in the direction of reducing the "fussiness" of word punctuation mentioned by the *Chicago Manual* (1993) – and is easily applied by printers and publishing technicians.

A fifth option, to use no stops in any kind of **abbreviation**, is not commonly seen on the printed page, but appears increasingly in digital style on the internet. It is easiest of all to implement, and would resolve the anomalies created by distinguishing contractions from **abbreviations** (options b, c (ii)). It would also break down the invisible barrier between **abbreviations** and symbols (section 1 above). Leaving all **abbreviations** unstopped is sometimes said to be a recipe for confusion between lower case abbreviations and ordinary words. Yet there are very few which could be mistaken. Those which are identical, such as *am, fig* and *no* are normally accompanied by numbers: *10 am, fig 13, no 2,* and there's no doubt as to what they are. The idea of leaving abbreviations totally without stops may seem too radical for the moment, but it would streamline the anomalies and divergences outlined in this entry.

International English selection: The third option (c (i)) for punctuating **abbreviations** – using periods/full stops for **abbreviations** containing one or more lower case letters – recommends itself as a reasonable compromise between American and British style. It is in keeping with the worldwide trend to reduce punctuation, without any commitment to different punctuation for *contractions* and **abbreviations,** and the anomalies that it creates. (That distinction is embedded in option c(ii), for those who wish to maintain it.)

3 Stopped abbreviations at the end of a sentence. When an **abbreviation** with a stop/period is the last word in a sentence, no further stop needs to be added:

> *Remember to acknowledge all contributors – the producer, director, screenplay writer, cameramen etc.*

In such cases, the "stronger" punctuation mark (the period / full stop that marks the end-of-sentence) covers for the lesser stop marking the **abbreviation**. This is in keeping with the normal convention (see **multiple punctuation**). By the same token, it masks the editorial decision as to whether the abbreviation should be stopped or not – which readers sometimes need to know. When necessary, it's best to remake the sentence so as to bring the abbreviation in from the end. This was done in discussing examples such as *vol* and *vols* in section (b) above.

◊ For the use of stops with the initials of a person's name, see under **names**.

◊ For the use of the stop/period in **Latin abbreviations**, see under that heading.

abide and abode

At the turn of the millennium, neither of these is much used. The verb **abide** appeared quite often in the King James bible, translating an array of Hebrew and Greek verbs meaning "dwell," "stay," "continue," "remain" and "endure" – senses which linger in the Victorian hymn "Abide with me," often sung at funeral services. Otherwise it survives mostly in the phrase *abide by (a decision),* and in the slightly colloquial idiom *can't/cannot abide* or *couldn't abide* [something or someone]. The participle *abiding* serves as adjective in combination with certain abstract ideals, for example *an abiding concern, his abiding faith in humanity;* and in the compound *law-abiding*. Yet shrinking usage overall leaves people unsure about the past tense. Is it the regular *abided* or **abode**, which was used consistently in the King James bible? The evidence of British and American dictionaries and corpora is that *abided* is preferred. As a noun, **abode** is mostly restricted to legal phrases such as *no fixed abode* and *right of abode*. Other uses, including the cliché *my humble abode,* and freely formed expressions such as *the abode of my forebears,* have an archaic ring to them.

-ability

This ending marks the conversion of adjectives with *-able* into abstract nouns, as when *respectable* becomes *respectability*. Adjectives with *-ible* are converted by the same process, so *flexible* becomes *flexibility*. The ending is not a simple suffix but a composite of:

- the conversion of *-ble* to a stressed syllable *-bil* and
- the addition of the suffix *-ity*. (See further under **-ity**.)

ablative

This grammatical case operates in Latin and some other languages, but not English. It marks a noun as having the meaning "by, with, or from" attached to it. For some Latin nouns, the **ablative** ending is *-o,* and so *ipso facto* means "by that fact." (See further under **cases**.)

The *ablative absolute* is a grammatical construction found in Latin which allows a phrase (all inflected in the ablative) to stand apart from the syntax of the clause or sentence in which it appears. The Latin tag *deo volente* ("God willing") is used in the same way in contemporary English.

able and able to

The use of *(be)* **able to** as a semi-auxiliary verb dates from C15, though it is not equally used in the US and the UK. The British make more of it, in the ratio of 3:2 according to the evidence of comparable C20 databases (**LOB** and **Brown**). It reflects the greater British use of modals and modalized verb phrases generally (see **modality**, and **auxiliary verbs**).

In both varieties of English, **able to** takes animate subjects much more often than inanimate ones, as in:

> *Thompson was able to smell a bargain a continent away.*

As in that example, **able to** normally combines with an active verb (see further under **voice**). This was the pattern in hundreds of corpus examples, the only counter example with a passive verb being *the chapel was still able to be used* (from LOB). **Able to** seems to insist on being construed with animate, active participants, as if it still draws on the energy of the adjective **able**, expressed in *an able politician* and *able-bodied citizens*. **Able** appears much less often as an adjective than as an auxiliary verb in both British

and American data: in the ratio of 1:11 in LOB and 1:12 in the Brown corpus. It occurs mostly in nonfiction genres of writing, perhaps because the approval expressed in it seems detached rather than engaged with the subject.

-able/-ible

Which of these endings to use is a challenge even for the successful speller. They sound the same, and the choice between them often seems arbitrary. In fact the choice is usually fixed by the word's origins. Unabridged British and American dictionaries – *Oxford* (1989) and *Webster's Third* (1986) – do allow that certain words may be spelled either way in contemporary English, although they diverge on which have the option, and only a handful of words are given alternative spellings in both:

collapsable/collapsible *collectable/collectible*
condensable/condensible *ignitable/ignitible*
preventable/preventible

Those apart, the following are independently credited with alternative spellings by *Oxford* and *Webster's*, marked *O* and *W* accordingly:

avertable/avertible (O)
confusable/confusible (O)
connectable/connectible (O)
contractable/contractible (O)
deductable/deductible (O)
detectable/detectible (O)
diffusable/diffusible (O)
discernable/discernible (W)
expressable/expressible (W)
extendable/extendible (W)
extractable/extractible (W)
impressable/impressible (W)
perfectable/perfectible (W)
suggestable/suggestible (O)
transfusable/transfusible (W)

Others such as *digestable/digestible* and *resistable/resistible* could probably be added to that list, but for the fact that *Oxford* presently marks their **-able** spellings as cutting out in C19.

The **-able** suffix is the more widely used of the two in English at large, partly because it combines with any Anglo-Saxon or French verb (*believable, enjoyable*), as well as neo-Latin ones, as in *retractable* or *contactable*. Fresh formations based on neo-Latin can provide alternatives to the well-established loan from Latin, as with *contractable/contractible*, where the first (in the sense "able to be contracted") is a modern word, whereas the second "able to contract" goes back to C16. Yet the opposite tendency is also to be found: *Oxford Dictionary* citations show that some start life with **-able**, as did *deductable* and *detectable*, and later acquired neo-Latin spellings with **-ible**. The forces of analogy compete with regular wordforming principles among these words, and because they are readily coined on the spur of the moment, the dictionary records are necessarily incomplete. Any word of this type not yet listed in the dictionary can legitimately be spelled **-able**, if it's based on a current English verb stem, simple or compound, e.g. *gazumpable, upgradable*. In fact the stem is often a useful clue for spelling the established words. Compare *dispens**able*** (whose stem is the same as the verb *dispense*) with *comprehens**ible***, for which there is no English verb "comprehens-." Most words with **-ible** embody Latin stems with no independent verb role in English. (This is also true of a very few **-able** words such as *educable* and *navigable*, derived from the Latin first conjugation, but with enough relatives in English such as *education, navigation*, to secure their spelling.) The **-ible** words often lack close relatives, and the rationale for the spelling is not obvious unless you know Latin conjugations. The table below lists the most important **-ible** words, though where there are both positive and negative forms (e.g *credible* as well as *incredible*), it gives just one of them.

accessible	*adducible*	*admissible*
audible	*combustible*	*compatible*
contemptible	*credible*	*deducible*
divisible	*edible*	*eligible*
feasible	*flexible*	*incomprehensible*
incontrovertible	*incorrigible*	*incorruptible*
indefensible	*indelible*	*indestructible*
infallible	*intelligible*	*invincible*
irascible	*irrepressible*	*irresistible*
legible	*negligible*	*ostensible*
perceptible	*permissible*	*persuasible*
plausible	*possible*	*reducible*
reprehensible	*responsible*	*submersible*
susceptible	*tangible*	*terrible*
transmissible	*visible*	

The stems of **-ible** words come straight from Latin paradigms and are not normally usable as English verbs (*access* and *flex* are exceptions in so far as they now serve as verbs). Most **-ible** words express rather abstract senses, unlike those ending in **-able**, which typically build in the active sense of the verb: compare *defensible* and *defendable*. Note also that words ending in **-ible** take the negative prefix *in-* (as in *indefensible*), whereas those with **-able** and based on English verbs are usually negated with *un-* (e.g. *undefendable*). See further under **in-/un-**.

◊ For the choice between *drivable* and *driveable*, *likable* and *likeable* etc., see **-eable or -able**.

abled

See under **disabled and disability**.

abolition or abolishment

Though both terms are current, the Latin-derived **abolition** holds sway in British as well as American English. In the UK **abolition** is effectively the only term, in data from the BNC, whereas **abolishment** plays a minor part in the US, appearing in the ratio of about 1:17, in data from CCAE. We might expect more of **abolishment**, which is just as old (dating from C16) and has more direct connections with the verb *abolish*. Yet legal and institutional uses of **abolition** give it strong social and political connotations, in the discontinuance of slavery and the death penalty. The productivity of the word is also reflected in derivatives such as *abolitionist*.

Aboriginal and Aborigine

Since around 1800 the term **aboriginal** has been used as a generic reference to native peoples encountered by colonialists in (for them) remoter parts of the world. The capitalized form **Aboriginal** still serves as a collective reference to indigenous groups within the population, especially in Australia, but also in Canada, where it complements the use of *First People / First Nation*. In the US the general term is *Native American* or *American Indian*, and *Indian* is used by the peoples themselves. Use of the term