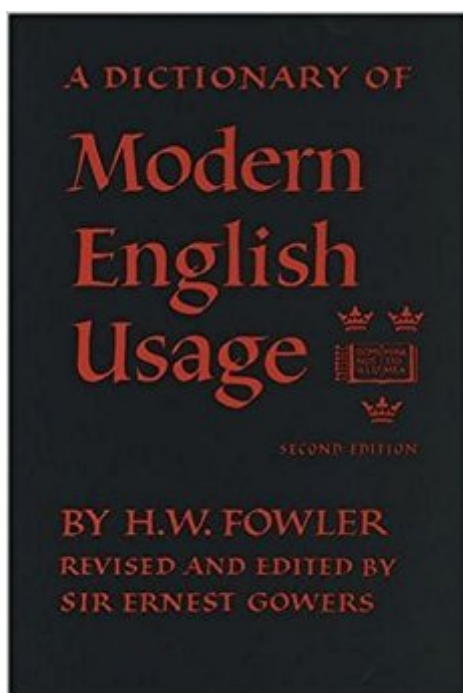


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Oxford Fowler's Modern English Usage Dictionary



Synopsis

This book is intended for general; students and teachers of English; anyone wanting guidance on the correct use of English.

Book Information

Series: Oxford Library of English Usage (Book 3)

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Customer Reviews

A guide to precise phrases, grammar, and pronunciation can be key; it can even be admired. But beloved? Yet from its first appearance in 1926, Fowler's was just that. Henry Watson Fowler initially aimed his Dictionary of Modern English Usage, as he wrote to his publishers in 1911, at "the half-educated Englishman of literary proclivities who wants to know Can I say so-&-so?" He was of course obsessed with, in Swift's phrase, "proper words in their proper places." But having been a schoolmaster, Fowler knew that liberal doses of style, wit, and caprice would keep his manual off the shelf and in writers' hands. He also felt that description must accompany prescription, and that advocating pedantic "superstitions" and "fetishes" would be to no one's advantage. Adepts will have their favorite inconsequential entries--from burgle to brood, truffle to turgid. Would that we could quote them all, but we can't resist a couple. Here Fowler lays into dedicated: He is that rara avis a dedicated boxer. The sporting correspondent who wrote this evidently does not see why the literary critics should have a monopoly of this favourite word of theirs, though he does not seem to think that it will be greatly needed in his branch of the business. Needless to say, later on rara avis is also smacked upside the head! And practically fares no better: "It is unfortunate that practically should have escaped from its true meaning into something like its opposite," Fowler begins. But our

linguistic hero also knew full well when to put a crimp on comedy. Some phrases and proper uses, it's clear, would always be worth fighting for, and the guide thus ranges from brief definitions to involved articles. Archaisms, for instance, he considered safe only in the hands of the experienced, and meaningless words, especially those used by the young, "are perhaps more suitable for the psychologist than for the philologist." Well, youth might respond, "Whatever!"--though only after examining the keen differences between that phrase and what ever. (One can only imagine what Fowler would have made of our late-20th-century abuses of like.) This is where Robert Burchfield's 1996 third edition comes in. Yes, Fowler lost the fight for one r in guerrilla and didn't fare too well when it came to quashing such vogue words as smear and seminal. But he knew--and makes us ever aware--that language is a living, breathing (and occasionally suffocating) thing, and we hope that he would have welcomed any and all revisions. Fowlerphiles will want to keep their first (if they're very lucky) or second editions at hand, but should look to Burchfield for new entries on such phrases as gay, iron curtain, and inchoate--not to mention girl. --Kerry Fried

I purchased "A Dictionary of Modern English Usage" by H.W. Fowler because of the acclaim it is given by other books on English style and usage. Fowler's first edition was published in 1926 followed by the second edition (with revisions by Sir Ernest Gowers) in 1965. Oxford University Press published a paperback in 1983 with reprints in 1984 and 1985. I have the second edition 1985. The print is small, almost like a footnote. I understand that dictionaries are like that. Publisher is trying to make them affordable, I suppose. But with such a small font, I am not sure either the compactness or bargain cost is worth it. That's about the book layout of this particular edition. Now for Fowler. I do not consider myself a scholar of English usage. I see myself as an everyday writer with below average intelligence. I was not sure what I was getting into when I bought Fowler. I should have been content with the wonderful books I do have on word usage that make occasional reference to Fowler. Yes, Fowler was first written in 1926. But I need help with using English as it is used today. Many helpful English usage books that are available. I appreciate them all for what they offer. The best of them use current examples of correct English usage. (Current meaning within the last 20 years. Not 1926.) I'll leave Fowler to the scholars of English. Give me the writer of English usage who writes for the everyday writer (who tells me whether it should be "everyday writer" or "every day writer").

The second edition is the best edition of this must have reference books on English Usage. Later and earlier editions are either anachronistic or fraught with problems. The second edition is perfect.

This is one of the older versions of Fowler's "Modern English Usage," and you have to be a devotee to enjoy it, which I do. I had one of these in the early 1980s when I was a technical editor in Amsterdam for Elsevier Science Publishers. Technical editors take a special interest in these types of things.

Truly a classic, to read around in, to enjoy with or without purpose. In fact I purchased two of these: one for a friend, one to have for myself, after all these years (although I have had the paper version for a decade). One came from PA, one from CA. Both honestly described, in great shape, well-wrapped, promptly sent and both booksellers will enjoy my patronage in future I am sure. It was hard to decide which to give to my friend, which to keep.

Fowler is a treat. He is a worthy forerunner to James Kilpatrick and has a similar sense of humour. Whether you agree with his take on usage or not, it is a delight to read. A must have for anyone who loves the magic of words and the often delightful, sometimes sublime, and occasionally absurd customs that govern their usage.

The idiomatic use of the English language needs a referee, and some referees are simply better than others. The "anything goes" motto of our times gives us uneven, illiterate, and occasionally brutal prose. This book helps block this inevitable slide into the lack of clarity and coherence. This second edition (cf., Third Edition) of "Modern English Usage" may strike some readers as arcane and archaic, because it is so restrictive in its prescriptions. Given the laxity of many our writers, the use of a strict disciplinarian in philology is a welcome resource.

Invaluable

Obsolete on many points, and available in newer, revised editions. Still has some good advice on general writing, but this is mainly of historical interest.

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