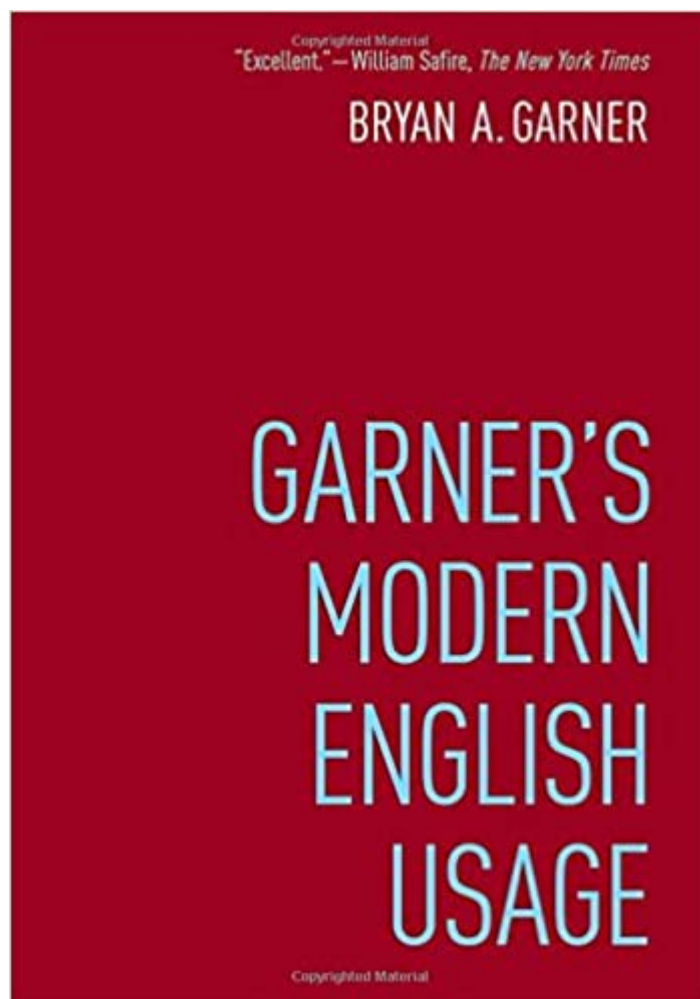


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# Garner's Modern English Usage



## Synopsis

With more than a thousand new entries and more than 2,300 word-frequency ratios, the magisterial fourth edition of this book—now renamed *Garner's Modern English Usage* (GMEU)—reflects usage lexicography at its finest. Garner explains the nuances of grammar and vocabulary with thoroughness, finesse, and wit. He discourages whatever is slovenly, pretentious, or pedantic. GMEU is the liveliest and most compulsively readable reference work for writers of our time. It delights while providing instruction on skillful, persuasive, and vivid writing. Garner liberates English from two extremes: both from the hidebound "purists" who mistakenly believe that split infinitives and sentence-ending prepositions are malfeasances and from the linguistic relativists who believe that whatever people say or write must necessarily be accepted. The judgments here are backed up not just by a lifetime of study but also by an empirical grounding in the largest linguistic corpus ever available. In this fourth edition, Garner has made extensive use of corpus linguistics to include ratios of standard terms as compared against variants in modern print sources. No other resource provides as comprehensive, reliable, and empirical a guide to current English usage. For all concerned with writing and editing, GMEU will prove invaluable as a desk reference. Garner illustrates with actual examples, cited with chapter and verse, all the linguistic blunders that modern writers and speakers are prone to, whether in word choice, syntax, phrasing, punctuation, or pronunciation. No matter how knowledgeable you may already be, you're sure to learn from every single page of this book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for previous editions: "Really, really good... Thorough and timely and solid... Bryan Garner is a genius." --David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster* "This is a thorough tour of the language-a major reference work-offering humane instruction in diction, idiom, sentence structure, and much else." --Wall Street Journal "Any writing guide published today must compete with the work of Bryan Garner, whose *Dictionary of Modern American Usage* set a new standard." --Los Angeles Times "Thorough, revered, authoritative, and altogether extraordinary." -Gary Lutz & Diane Stevenson, *The Writer's Digest Desk Reference* "Garner knows his stuff, and he's one of the least stuffy grammarians around." --Arizona Republic "Authoritative and indispensable." --John R. Trimble, *Writing with Style* "A magisterial work for language lovers." --Arthur Plotnik, *Spunk & Bite* "Garner, in this latest update, combines solid erudition, lucid explanations, and sharp, crisp, witty prose. It's a can't-do-without reference book. You can just pick it up, open to any page, and start reading for guiltless pleasure." --San Diego Union-Tribune "The one indispensable book on language published in 2016 is the fourth edition of Garner's *Modern English Usage*... Mr. Garner writes with zest and clarity, and although he is an excellent chronicler (how has the language been used?), he is a reliable counselor as well (how should it be used?). Mr. Garner's guide now exceeds 1,000 pages and includes arrays of real-life example sentences, all duly cited. It is in many ways an atlas of the English language." --The Wall Street Journal "The best qualities of Garner's book are the inclusion of empirical data, including the language-change index rankings and Google's ngram data. Also, the extensive use of quotations throughout the entries is especially helpful to illustrate his points." --  
Linguist List

Bryan A. Garner has been recognized as a pioneer across a wide range of fields, including English usage, grammar, jurisprudence, legal advocacy, legislative drafting, transactional drafting, legal ethics, and legal lexicography. He has written more than 25 books, many of them award-winning, including *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation*; *Garner on Language and Writing*; *Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts* and *Making Your Case: The Art of Persuading Judges* (both with Justice Antonin Scalia); *Garner's Dictionary of Legal Usage*; *Legal Writing in Plain English*; *The Elements of Legal Style*; *The Winning Brief*; and *Ethical Communications for Lawyers*. As editor in chief of *Black's Law Dictionary*, he has re-researched and rewritten that book over the past four editions while becoming one of the most widely cited legal writers in the world. He is Distinguished Research Professor of Law at Southern Methodist University and president of LawProse Inc.

This 2016 edition makes 'Garner's Modern' arguably the best usage dictionary of English ever published. It is notably expanded from the final 'Modern American Usage' edition of 2009, having an entire short book's worth of additional material. Given the difference in page and print size, probably the entirety of 'The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage' could fit within the material Garner added in his new edition. The changes include not only internationalization, but also evidence-based evaluations of changing usage. In this, the work is presently unique, as well as timely, as we enter the second Internet generation. It also features a near-perfect balance between descriptive linguistics and prescriptive advice, with the latter based on logic and the goal of clear communication. In this respect, it (like its earlier editions) happily parts ways from the majority of the heavily prescriptive works, which have a tendency to arbitrary proclamations based on authorial or institutional preference (often excessively nationalistic in ways that defy actual reality), and over-reliance on tradition to the point of ossification. Garner, a lawyer as well as a lexicographer, is no 20-something blogger who thinks making your text "pop" with "coolness" is more important than professional-quality prose that won't look ridiculous in 5 years when your precious buzzwords sound corny (for a good laugh in this vein, pick up a used copy of the once oh-so-hip 'Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age'). Garner is not afraid to lay down a rule as a best practice when one seems warranted, unlike some other 21st-century style guides, but he gives clear rationales. He is, however, careful about legitimate dialectal variance, and of the distinctions between different registers of formality. While I describe 'Garner's' as a usage dictionary (like 'Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage', 4th ed., 'The Associated Press Stylebook', 2015 ed., and 'New Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors', rev. ed.), It also has short essays on various topics of style and grammar included among the shorter entries, and a separate table of contents for them. Note: This book also supersedes 'The Oxford Dictionary of American Usage and Style', a compressed version of an earlier edition of 'Garner's Modern American Usage'. When Garner does get prescriptive, his tone can be a bit mock-harsh, and less coddling than some others' writing advice, but plenty of us would consider this a strength. Garner also has the lawyer's gift for weaving dry, isolated facts into a persuasive flow, making the book difficult to put down despite being mostly an alphabetical list of items that, taken individually, are trivia. The cross-referencing, consistency, and comprehensiveness of the work rapidly build up an unexpected level of synergy between entries after only a few page skimmings; in-depth reading is very rewarding, despite the entry-based format. This kind of writing is solidly grounded in the "plain English" principles advanced by Orwell and Gowers, being concise, clear, and certain in its purpose, without being terse or dull. It's not like reading a Webster's dictionary.

Perhaps the only real flaw in 'GMEU' is that Garner is a writer and editor and not an applied user of language more than a student of it and not an academic linguist, so his usage of certain linguistic terms can be a bit loose at times, both in this book and some of his other works. If you have limited bookshelf or desk space, the three references you most need for writing today, for a modern, world-wide audience, are 'The Chicago Manual of Style', 16th ed. (North American formal style); 'New Hart's Rules' (international formal style; use the 2005 edition, as the more recent "update" badly lost its sense of purpose, seeming afraid to actually recommend anything much of the time); and perhaps above all this new edition of 'Garner's Modern Usage'. Both 'Chicago' and 'New Hart's' are style manuals in the chapter-based sense, covering grammar, punctuation, capitalization, italics, citations, etc., in a more programmatic fashion than Garner's essays in the present volume, though he wrote the grammar chapter of 'Chicago', and a greatly expanded version of that material is forthcoming as of this writing, under the title 'The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation' (May 2016). It is no longer necessary to have a comprehensive paper dictionary around if you live or work in tight quarters, since the advent of OxfordDictionariesOnline.com, Dictionary.Cambridge.org, and (with entries from both Random House and Collins) Dictionary.com, all of which are freely available. If you have more room, also get the aforementioned other usage dictionaries. For one thing, the 'AP Stylebook' is essential for the North American variety of less formal journalism and marketing style (for British/Commonwealth news and PR writing, see the various online style guides maintained by 'The Guardian', 'The Economist', and other UK newspapers; there is no British equivalent of the monolithic 'AP Stylebook'). If you need to cover science and technology, add 'Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers', 8th ed. (a chaptered style manual, invaluable for its coverage of numbers and units, just for starters). Even if you are not much of a writer, 'Garner's' will be great subway/bus reading, though it is not a lightweight book. It will be of more benefit to the average person than any guide to business or student writing when it comes to usage. It certainly contains much more value than a dozen of the cutesy little advice books with funny names. If you need help with the basic mechanics of writing well – grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, good paragraph formation – see 'The Elements of Style', 4th ed. for the gist, or any of the various college and university textbooks on English composition (though be prepared to pay textbook prices). An affordable crash course, however, can be found in 'The McGraw-Hill Handbook of English Grammar and Usage', 2nd ed. But get 'Garner's', too. Because this new edition is actually tracking the trajectories of many aspects of language change (i.e., it's telling you the direction in which shifting usage is moving, how

fast, and how far), this may well be the only style guide available in 2016 that will still be useful in 2026.

I hesitated to purchase a kindle version of GMEU, but I did. After having examined it and looked up certain terms to resolve an issue, I can say that they did a good job with this edition. Now I am able to refer to this edition anywhere I go. If you want the convenience, do not hesitate. Also, the GMEU is an excellent resource: thoughtful and informative.

Snoots can rejoice with the release of Garner's Modern English Usage--the fourth edition of Garner's Modern American Usage, renamed to reflect its wider scope. I was looking forward to this new edition, and it's well worth it. Garner is a masterly lexicographer and his usage guides have always been authoritative, insightful, witty, and highly readable. This one is no exception. You'll find yourself looking up a word or phrase only to be sidetracked by other interesting entries that catch your eye along the way. The most notable new feature of the fourth edition is the inclusion of data from Google Ngrams, which are explained in the preface. Garner incorporates this big data into his entries, and provides ratios of the number of times recommended forms are used in the Ngram database with the number of times a particular variant form is used. This takes a lot of the guesswork and speculation out of the recommendations, and bolsters the credibility of the guide. If you already have the third edition of Garner's Modern American Usage, this edition is likely to be more a luxury than a necessity. But if you're looking for a usage guide and are unfamiliar with Garner's previous work, I strongly recommend Garner's Modern English Usage.

GARNER'S MODERN ENGLISH USAGE is an indispensable book for writers, editors, and those who give a damn about English. Along with *Steven Pinker*, *Amy Einsohn*, and *Carol Fisher Saller*, *Bryan Garner* is one of the world's foremost authorities on the English language. In a world that takes its syntactic cues from the idiotic rantings of media personalities, sportswriters, and (mostly) guys on TV competing to see who can construct the most tautologies during 30-second bursts of inanity, (formerly GARNER'S MODERN AMERICAN USAGE, and before that, GARNER'S MODERN ENGLISH USAGE) is a much-needed left hook aimed squarely at addled brains. I use this book literally every day (and by "literally," I mean that I actually do). It's easily the best of its breed, with Garner its shepherd. Often unjustly accused of being a strict prescriptivist [partly because a large swath of readers either (a) think all things must be 100% black or 100% white or (b) don't like looking things up or changing prose they consider "supercute" simply because it's

WRONG. Garner doesn't screw those readers who think otherwise], Garner offers perspective and advice both constructive and actionable. As for changes from the prior edition, the book includes over 1,000 new entries. Garner also procured rights to use Google Ngram charts and word-frequency ratios for many entries. He included a word-change index in the prior edition that numerically rated each word's status from verboten to fully accepted; the Ngram data add validity and more context for entries. Garner's measured wit is still readily evident, and usage examples continue to include plenty of published work by famous writers and famous people in general, which could be interpreted however one likes (I tend to interpret it to mean that many famous people are buffoons when they write, but I may be a little less charitable than most), but mostly they make for real examples in real settings, which is good for perspective at the very least. As for the apparent formatting difficulties with the Kindle version, the CSS should really have been styled with a global setting of "-epub-hyphens: none." Indexing is a labor-intensive exercise even with automated methods, but a reference book (especially an ebook) without an index is like a clown without a criminal record. Interesting but not very effective. So thanks go to those who've noted the deficiency. Anyway, my review is only for the print version. I'm glad I was able to write this review without undue snarkiness or sarcasm. I seem to have a habit of that from time to time.

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