



## Bryson's Dictionary for Writers and Editors

By Bill Bryson

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From one of America's most beloved and bestselling authors, a wonderfully useful and readable guide to the problems of the English language most commonly encountered by editors and writers.

What is the difference between “immanent” and “imminent”? What is the singular form of graffiti? What is the difference between “acute” and “chronic”? What is the former name of “Moldova”? What is the difference between a cardinal number and an ordinal number? One of the English language's most skilled writers answers these and many other questions and guides us all toward precise, mistake-free usage. Covering spelling, capitalization, plurals, hyphens, abbreviations, and foreign names and phrases, *Bryson's Dictionary for Writers and Editors* will be an indispensable companion for all who care enough about our language not to maul, misuse, or contort it.

This dictionary is an essential guide to the wonderfully disordered thing that is the English language. As Bill Bryson notes, it will provide you with “the answers to all those points of written usage that you kind of know or ought to know but can't quite remember.”

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### Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words*:

"One of the best guides to usage there is. I cannot imagine an English-speaking person [who] would not rejoice in [it]." —Katherine A. Powers, *Boston Globe*

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About the Author

BILL BRYSON's bestselling books include *A Walk in the Woods*, *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*, *In a Sunburned Country*, *Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words*, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (which earned him the 2004 Aventis Prize), and *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*. Bryson lives in England with his wife and children.

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**Aa**

**Aachen.** City in Germany; in French, Aix-la-Chapelle.

**a/an.** Errors involving the indefinite articles *a* and *an* are almost certainly more often a consequence of haste and carelessness than of ignorance. They are especially common when numbers are involved, as here: "Cox will contribute 10 percent of the equity needed to build a \$80 million cable system" or "He was assisted initially by two officers from the sheriff's department and a FBI agent." When the first letter of an abbreviation is pronounced as a vowel, as in "FBI," the preceding article should be *an*, not *a*.

**Aarhus.** City in Denmark; in Danish, erhus.

**abacus,** pl. abacuses.

**abaft.** Toward the stern, or rear, of a ship.

**abattoir.**

**Abbas, Mahmoud.** (1935-) President of Palestinian National Authority (2005-).

**ABC.** American Broadcasting Companies (note plural), though the full title is no longer spelled out. It is now part of the Walt Disney Company. The television network is ABC-TV.

**abdomen,** but **abdominal.**

**Abdulaziz International Airport, King,** Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

**Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem.** (1947-) American basketball player; born Lew Alcindor.

**aberrant, aberration.**

**abhorrent.**

**Abidjan.** Capital of Ivory Coast.

***ab incunabulis.*** (Lat.) "From the cradle."

**abiogenesis.** The concept that living matter can arise from nonliving matter; spontaneous generation.

**-able.** In adding this suffix to a verb, the general rule is to drop a silent *e* (*livable, lovable*) except after a soft *g* (*manageable*) or sibilant *c* (*peaceable*). When a verb ends with a consonant and a *y* (*justify, indemnify*) change the *y* to *i* before adding *-able* (*justifiable, indemnifiable*). Verbs ending in *-ate* drop that syllable before adding *-able* (*appreciable, demonstrable*).

**-able, -ible.** There are no reliable rules for knowing when a word ends in *-able* and when in *-ible*; see Appendix for a list of some of the more frequently confused spellings.

***ab origine.*** (Lat.) "From the beginning."

**abracadabra.**

**abridgment.**

**abrogate.** To abolish.

**Absalom.** In the Old Testament, third son of David.

***Absalom, Absalom!*** Novel by William Faulkner (1936).

**Absaroka Range,** Rocky Mountains.

**abscess.**

**absinth.**

**abstemious.**

**Abu Dhabi.** Capital city of and state in the United Arab Emirates.

**Abuja.** Capital of Nigeria.

**Abu Simbel,** Egypt; site of temples built by Ramses II.

**abyss, abyssal,** but **abysmal.**

**Abyssinia.** Former name of Ethiopia.

**acacia.**

**Académie française.** French literary society of forty members who act as guardians of the French language; in English contexts, Franeaise is usually capitalized.

**Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.** Institution responsible for the Oscars.

**a capella.** Singing without musical accompaniment.

**Acapulco,** Mexico. Officially, Acapulco de Juarez.

**Accademia della Crusca.** Italian literary academy.

**accelerator.**

**accessible.**

**accessory.**

**acciaccatura.** Grace note in music.

**accidentally.** Not *-tly*.

**accolade.**

**accommodate.** Very often misspelled: note *-cc-*, *-mm-*.

**accompanist.** Not *-iest*.

**accouterment.**

**Accra.** Capital of Ghana.

**Acheson, Dean.** (1893-1971) American diplomat and politician; secretary of state, 1949-53.

**Achilles.** King of the Myrmidons, most famous of the Greek heroes of the Trojan War.

**Achilles' heel.** (Apos.)

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