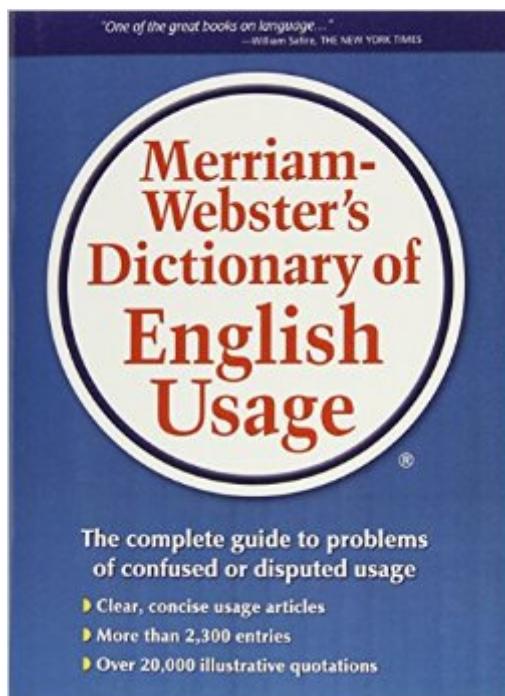


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# Merriam-Webster's Dictionary Of English Usage



## Synopsis

Objective and comprehensive, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage is a readable and entertaining guide to the complex history of some of the thorniest usage issues in the English language. The scholarship and authority of this indispensable work have earned it universal critical acclaim.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you want a useful, well-researched guide to the way English is actually used by real creative writers, past and present, buy this book. If you want to be entertained while reading about English grammar (not easily done!), buy this book. If you prefer to blindly follow rigid rules which, rather than reflecting the way the language is actually used, reflect the way some 18th or 19th century usage writers thought it ought to be used, maybe this isn't for you (though I still think you should read it, maybe you'll learn something). Don't be misled into thinking that this book is simply applying an "everything goes" philosophy. On the contrary, the editors clearly explain and illustrate the way words and phrases are commonly used by writers in Britain and America, and advise you to avoid what is not commonly accepted. They also cite numerous usage writers, whether they agree with them or not (though they quote one writer as saying that if usage writers read more, they would argue less -- an observation that could also apply to some of the reviewers on this page...). They also make clear distinctions between what is acceptable in formal and informal writing. Many of the things that they "permit" (read the entry on permissiveness, by the way) they still recommend be

avoided in formal writing. I don't think that the rules this book skewers represent "the accumulated wisdom of thousands of writers." More accurately, they represent the thinking of a few conservative usage writers (and there's a big difference between usage writers and creative writers -- who would you rather read, Bishop Loweth or Shakespeare?), given added weight by the herd mentality of many generations of grammar teachers.

In one of the earlier reviews of this book the entry for "at" was misrepresented. I thought I would take some time to set the record straight. The entry for "at" is on page 141. It notes that usage writers from Vizetelly in 1906 onward have written disapprovingly about the use of the preposition "at" somewhere in the vicinity of and especially after the adverb where. The entry goes on to say that this is evidently chiefly an Americanism (attested by the OED Supplement and entered in the Dictionary of American Regional English), but not entirely unknown in British dialects. Scholarly works such as the Oxford English Dictionary, and the Dictionary of American Regional English are cited as well as citations from the Merriam Webster files. The evidence shows the idiom to be nearly nonexistent in discursive prose, although it occurs in letters and transcriptions of speech and there citations given from and Joel Chandler Harris, Flannery O'Connor. The entry gives an analysis of current usage saying that "at" at the end of pronominal phrase beginning with where serves to provide a word at the end of the sentence that can be given stress. It tends to follow a noun or pronoun to which the verb has been elided, as in this utterance by an editor here at the dictionary factory: "Have any idea where Kathy's at?" Then the entry has some conclusions and recommendation "You will note that at cannot simply be omitted; the 's must be expanded to is to produce an idiomatic sentence if the at is to be avoided." Frankly, there is nothing controversial about this, and information provided is accurate, reliable and verifiable. At the end of article is a note to see the entry labeled "Where ...".

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