

# The Cambridge Guide to Australian English Usage

# The Cambridge Guide to Australian English Usage

PAM PETERS

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# Preface to *The Cambridge Guide to Australian English Usage*

Since the first publication of *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*, electronic communication has become almost universal, used in parallel to or instead of print. Wordprocessors are now the primary means for drafting documents, whether they are to appear in hard copy (i.e. on paper) or to be transmitted over the internet. The new medium impacts on numerous aspects of language and style which are reflected in updated entries in this new edition.

The internet itself provides access to great quantities of documents, through which linguists gain a broader picture of Australian style and usage than ever before. Data from Australian sources on the internet has been used to inform the *Cambridge Guide*, to indicate the relative frequencies of alternative forms of words. Additional corpus data comes from the Australian ICE corpus, containing both spoken and written usage and from other recent corpora (see entry on **English language databases**). The results of usage surveys conducted nationwide through *Australian Style* from 1992 on are also used to shed light on the sociolinguistic patterns of variation. Recently published research on Australian and other varieties of English has been invoked to expand the frame of reference.

References to Australian secondary sources, dictionaries such as the *Macquarie Dictionary* (2005) and style manuals (the *Australian Government Style Manual* 2002) have all been updated to the latest edition. Recent English grammars such as the *Longman Grammar* (1999) and the *Cambridge Grammar* (2002) have been cited on points of usage. The latest editions of American and British style manuals, such as the *Chicago Manual* (2003), *New Hart's Rules* (2005) and *Butcher's Copy-editing* (2006) have also been referred to in this book. But references to world dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed. 1989) and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (revised ed. 1986) still stand, as we await their new editions.

With all these resources, this fully updated and freshly titled edition of the *Cambridge Guide* keeps pace with changing elements of Australian English, and empowers its readers to make fully informed decisions about language and style. I am most grateful to Kate Indigo of Cambridge University Press (Melbourne) and to editor Lee White for their professional assistance with the MS. To my own family, John, Fliss and Greg, I owe the greatest thanks of all.

PAM PETERS, SYDNEY 2006

# Preface to *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*

If language stood still, there would be little need for new dictionaries or new guides to style and usage. But a living language needs to be accounted for at regular intervals as it responds to changing social, cultural and political circumstances.

Since World War II Australian English has emerged as a variety in its own right. Instead of simply taking its linguistic cues from Britain, it now absorbs language elements from North America as well and develops its own norms and standards. It embraces more alternatives than hitherto, and *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* aims to map this widened range of options in the 1990s—and to subject the older canons of English usage to fresh scrutiny in the light of modern linguistics.

The discipline of linguistics has added immensely to our understanding of the dynamics of language and of the patterning within it. It emphasises the need to look for evidence in assessing what is going on. *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* looks for primary and/or secondary sources of information on the current state of English wherever they are to be found, to ensure that the book represents the full spectrum of usage, not just the perspective of an individual author.

The compilation of large computerised databases of contemporary English provides us with new research tools for the study of usage. Statistics from the recently completed ACE corpus (Australian Corpus of English) can be directly compared with databases of American English (the Brown corpus) and British English (the LOB or Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus), to highlight divergences between the three varieties of English. Each corpus has extracts from 500 different publications in a variety of prose genres, and thus a broad sampling of style and usage (see **English language databases** in the body of the book). Corpus evidence takes up where the citation records of historical dictionaries, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Webster's Dictionary*, *Australian National Dictionary* and the *Macquarie Dictionary of New Words*, leave off.

Secondary sources of information on English usage undoubtedly wield influence on current language practices, and their preferences and judgements are also discussed in examining the status of each variant. Some of the authorities referred to in writing this book are large, up-to-date dictionaries such as the *Macquarie Dictionary*, *Random House Dictionary*, and the *Collins Dictionary*, recent books on usage such as the Reader's Digest *Right Word at the Right Time* and Murray-Smith's *Right Words*, new grammars of English such as Halliday's *Introduction to*

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*Functional Grammar*, Huddleston's *Introduction to the Grammar of English*, and the *Comprehensive Grammar of English* by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik. Because punctuation and the forms of words are affected by changing editorial practices, reference has also been made to the most recent accounts of editorial style, including the Australian Government *Style Manual* (4th ed.), *Copy-editing* (3rd ed.) by Butcher, *Hart's Rules* (39th ed.), and the *Chicago Manual of Style* (13th ed.). The full titles of these and all references mentioned in the book are to be found in Appendix X.

A third kind of information used in this book is that which comes direct from users of the language, by surveying their preferences and practices when faced with choices in usage and style. Elicitation tests conducted by researchers in Britain such as Mittins, and Collins in Australia, help to show how people deal with expressions whose status is ambivalent; and surveys of spelling preferences conducted in association with Style Council and other professional bodies yield information on how professional writers decide between alternatives.

With its broad range of sources, this book aims to provide a balanced and thoroughly informed account of Australian style and usage on the threshold of the twenty-first century. It steers a course between the extremes of prescription and description, invoking both linguistic principle and the usage evidence available when making recommendations. It sets itself apart from accounts of usage which enshrine conservative traditions without reference to language principle or practice, and it re-evaluates conventional notions of correctness case by case. Many traditional judgements on "correctness" reflect the prelinguistic conception of writing and literature as the only proper forms of language. A properly linguistic account of usage must take account of the various levels and different genres of language, written and spoken; and generic information from the ACE corpus and others is presented in association with the statistics of usage.

The interaction between colloquial and formal idiom provides rich stylistic resources for skilled writers to exploit. *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* draws attention to writing technique and to writing style in many of its entries. The book's title is deliberately ambiguous in this sense, because the book is concerned with both macro- and micro-aspects of style. Many entries begin with a small detail of word form or meaning or punctuation, but in the end this connects with broader issues of style, the tone in which the writer intends to communicate, or the stance which s/he wishes to adopt. Formal and conventional aspects of style are discussed, as in letter writing and reports, as well as more open-ended topics such as argumentation, figures of speech and the rhythm of prose.

Apart from serving the needs of those who write, the *Style Guide* pinpoints topics which are crucial to those who edit writing, whether for themselves or in a professional capacity. The use of wordprocessors means that more people than ever have to think about editorial matters and to decide on questions of style. The freedom to create one's own "house style" entails a need to know what the current

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options are, whether one is dominant, what principles underlie the selection of alternatives, and which would make for more consistent and easier implementation overall. Where there are options as with *traveller/traveler*, the less frequent word or word form may make good linguistic sense, and the fact that it is the “minor variant” does not invalidate its use here. The tendency to elevate one variant over others simply on the basis of tradition or strength of usage is stultifying, and to be resisted by anyone who cares about the life of the language. Yet editors do have to implement a single option in a given context, and editorial choices have been made for this book which are indicated between ruled lines at the end of certain entries. The choices made are not intended to disallow others however, and the book supplies material on which alternative decisions can be based.

*The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* is designed to support the work of anyone who engages with written language in Australia. Professional communicators, advertising copywriters and computer programmers all have to decide on the forms of words by which to transmit information. Teachers of English to native and nonnative students have to consider what they will present as the norms of the language, to equip their students with the essentials as well as ensure that their knowledge is robust enough to cope with the vagaries of actual usage. (The inclusion of both traditional and modern grammar terminology will enable teachers to locate and describe elements of English.) And those members of the community who reflect on language at their leisure should find stimulation in exploring the finer points of Australian English.

The book owes much to several distinguished consultants: Graham Grayston, formerly of the Australian Government Publishing Service, Alec Jones of the University of Sydney, Stephen Knight of Simon de Montfort University and formerly the University of Melbourne, and Colin Yallop of Macquarie University. It has benefited by countless discussions with colleagues and friends in linguistics, lexicography and the study of the English language: John Bernard, David Blair, Sue Butler, Peter Collins, Tony Cousins, Peter Fries, Rhondda Fahey, Peter Peterson, Diane Speed and Sue Spinks, among many. The support of Cambridge University Press and Robin Derricourt is gratefully acknowledged. Above all *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* owes its inspiration to Arthur Delbridge, emeritus professor at Macquarie University, and its successful completion to John Peters, my computer adviser and constant companion.

PAM PETERS

# Foreword to *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*

In both Australia and the United States of America, efforts to codify the national language gathered strength about 200 years after the first European settlement. The publication of *Webster's Dictionary* in the USA and the *Macquarie Dictionary* here—both of them comprehensive accounts of the standard regional variety of English—was at that stage of national development; and they opened the field for a florescence of dictionaries and other works on usage and style.

In Australia the shadow of Fowler (*Modern English Usage*, OUP 1926, 1965) has fallen benignly over the late Stephen Murray-Smith, whose *Right Words* (Viking 1987, 1989) offered genial and personal guidance on contemporary usage. At the other end of the personality scale is the *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 4th edition 1988) which is now addressed not just to government writers, as formerly, but “to all those who have occasion to write for a general audience”.

What then are the distinctive qualities of *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*? For me, as an interested outsider, there are several:

- Its author is not just an experienced writer, editor or publisher, expressing views that are the fruit of personal experience and judgement; she is a scholar well trained in the discipline of linguistics, who has done extensive research into the history of written English in its major varieties; she has excellent grounding and achievement in the languages that have contributed most to the history of English—Latin, Old Norse, French, German etc. So she writes with an authority that comes from a professional knowledge of language and languages.
- Her principles of style guidance are founded on descriptive accounts of actual language used in identifiable acts of written communication, in newspapers, magazines, books of fiction and nonfiction, all assembled in computerised databases here and elsewhere. Her guidance is not personal in origin, for the reader is first given the facts about a particular variant usage, then taken through the events that produced the variant, with grace, style and good humour in the telling; and in the end the reader may decide which of the possible variants is best for the work in hand.
- Australian English is not presented in a vacuum, but compared with and related to British, American and other varieties of English.

### Foreword to the First Edition

- The range of topics is exceptionally comprehensive, with ample cross-references to give easy access to some thousands of individual language questions and answers.

These things make it an altogether new type of style guide. Till now we have known only the Fowler type; from now on the benchmark will be the Peters type, here and (I suspect) internationally. So use it, enjoy it, and be proud of it!

ARTHUR DELBRIDGE AO 1994

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Dictionary Research Centre, Macquarie University

# 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 the general entries is provided on the following pages. Individual entries are too numerous to be shown there, but they take their place in the alphabetical listing (ordered word by word rather than letter by letter). 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 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.

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 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 **-ise/-ize** 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. Words related to the headword(s) or derived from them are set in italics, as are all examples.

Overview of Contents and How to Access Them

**Editorial style**

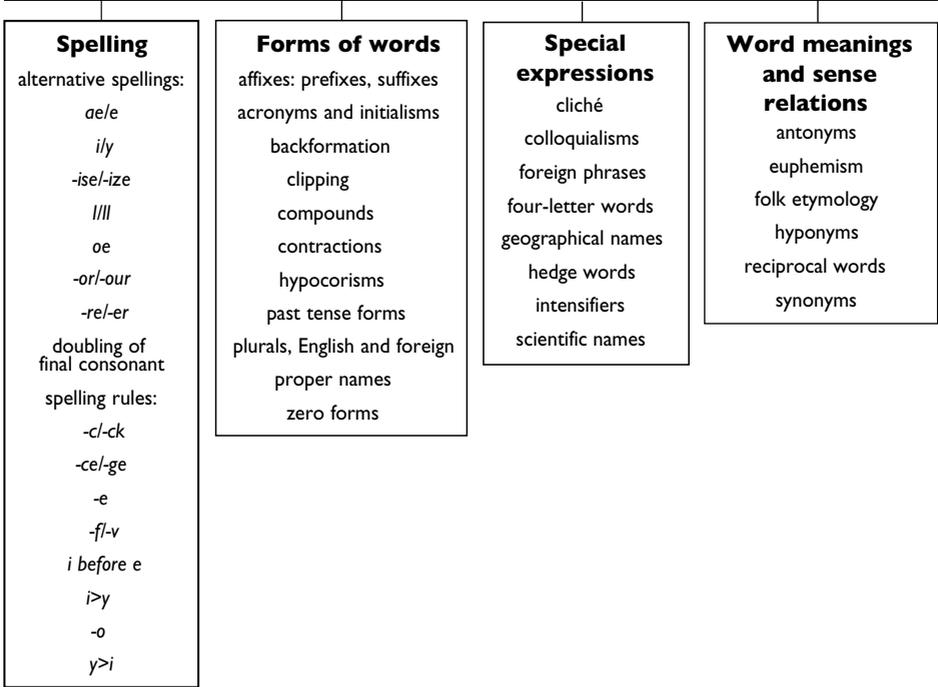
<p><b>Editorial technique</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>abbreviations</li> <li>audiovisual and electronic media</li> <li>bibliographies</li> <li>dating systems</li> <li>indexing</li> <li>lists</li> <li>prelims</li> <li>proofreading</li> <li>referencing</li> <li>titles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Inclusive language</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal or Aborigine</li> <li>disabled</li> <li>ethnic</li> <li>half-caste</li> <li>nonsexist language</li> <li>racist language</li> </ul>	<p><b>Punctuation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>apostrophe</li> <li>brackets</li> <li>bullet points</li> <li>colon</li> <li>comma</li> <li>dash</li> <li>full stop</li> <li>hyphen</li> <li>question mark</li> <li>quotation marks</li> <li>semicolon</li> </ul>	<p><b>Typography</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accents</li> <li>capital letters</li> <li>dates</li> <li>headings</li> <li>indentation</li> <li>italics</li> <li>lists</li> <li>numbers and number style</li> <li>URL</li> </ul>
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**Style and structure of writing**

<p><b>Argument and structure of discourse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>argument</li> <li>begging the question</li> <li>coherence and cohesion</li> <li>deduction</li> <li>fallacies</li> <li>heading structure</li> <li>introduction</li> <li>information focus</li> <li>paragraph</li> <li>topic sentence</li> </ul>	<p><b>Writing forms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inverted pyramid</li> <li>letter formats</li> <li>narrative</li> <li>online document structure</li> <li>reports</li> <li>summary</li> </ul>	<p><b>Special styles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>commercialese</li> <li>email style</li> <li>impersonal writing</li> <li>jargon</li> <li>journalese</li> <li>plain English</li> <li>technologese</li> </ul>	<p><b>Varieties of English</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian English</li> <li>American English</li> <li>British English</li> <li>Canadian English</li> <li>International English</li> <li>New Zealand English</li> <li>standard English</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rhetorical devices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analogy</li> <li>aphorism</li> <li>figures of speech</li> <li>irony</li> <li>metaphor</li> <li>oxymoron</li> <li>personification</li> <li>symbol</li> <li>understatement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Australian issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal words</li> <li>americanisation</li> <li>Commonwealth</li> <li>dialect</li> <li>flash language</li> <li>interstate differences</li> <li>time zones</li> <li>town names</li> </ul>		

Overview of Contents and How to Access Them

**Words**



**Grammar**

