

THE WRONG WORD DICTIONARY: 2,000 MOST COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS. DAVE DOWLING. OAK PARK, ILLINOIS: MARION STREET PRESS; 2005. 240 PAGES. SOFTCOVER. \$14.95. ISBN: 0-9729937-7-0.

The alliterate teacher installed no confidence in her students. Her Biblical illusion did not persuade them to read the poem farther, and she could care less, as she thought, “Its just a faze.”

There are eight misused words and phrases in the above paragraph, and Dave Dowling’s *The Wrong Word Dictionary: 2,000 Most Commonly Confused Words* offers help in avoiding such errors. His book covers the bases: words that sound alike and so may be confused (*device/devise, refrain/restrain*); words that are confused in meaning (*wane/wax, disinterested/uninterested*); words and expressions that are often misused (*we’re/were, lay/lie*); words for which either spelling is acceptable (*collectable/collectible, t-shirt/tee shirt*); and preferred words (*inward/inwards, northward/northwards*). The words in question appear in a pair or grouping in boldface, and the definitions follow. Each entry concludes with example sentences demonstrating correct usage. As a dictionary, the book is naturally arranged in alphabetical order and divided into chapters for each letter (with some letters omitted, such as X and Z).

Dowling draws from his experience as an instructor, editor, and writer, and in this he serves editors who have argued over the correct term to use (*comprise? compose?*) and writers who struggle silently over words and need a quick and handy reference (*its? it’s? does that apostrophe belong?*). Dowling uses an occasional cartoon to keep the mood light while offering information. “The **counsel** told the **consul** what to say to the city **council**”, with the terms highlighted in boldface, is an example of a cartoon used to entertain while reinforcing correct use of the terms.

The book is exact and clear. *Majority* is greater than 50%, whereas a *plurality* is “the most of something”, even if less than 50%. *To flaunt* means to brag, whereas *to flout* means to overlook the rules. Dowling reminds us of some basic uses of adjectives versus adverbs with such entries as *sure* and *surely* and *free* and *freely*. He notes that some words used in conversation or writing do not exist: *interpretate, equivocally,*

representated, and *somewheres* are just a few. Some phrases that might be common in everyday use are not correct, either. *With regard to* is the proper phrase, not *with regards to*. *Moreso*, although commonly used, is not a word; use *more so* instead. *Out loud* is colloquial, whereas *aloud* is standard. Use *plan to*, not *plan on*. *Recur* is preferred over *reoccur*, and *frantically* over *frantictly*. “**A lot** is not a word”, Dowling succinctly states in his example sentences. “**A lot** is always two words.” *One and the same* is correct, not *one in the same*. *Often* should be used instead of *oftentimes*. The nonstandard *irregardless* and *thusly* should be avoided. *On tenterhooks* is proper, not the more frequently heard *on tenderhooks*. *Cannot* is correct, not the often-seen *can not*.

Each chapter begins with a quotation from an author whose last name begins with the letter being discussed. For instance, the quotation for the E chapter comes from Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Every word was once a poem.” The N chapter begins with the reflection, “Those for whom words have lost their value are likely to find that ideas have also lost their value”, by Edwin Newman. The variety of authors—Francis Bacon, Charles Dickens, Robert Frost, John Irving, and Peter Roget, to name only a few—is designed to appeal to a wide audience, and the quotations range from the thought-provoking (“A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanging. It is the skin of living thought”, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr) to the inspirational (“By words the mind is excited and the spirit elated”, by Aristophanes) to the humorous (“Use the right word and not its second cousin”, by Mark Twain). All the quotations, no matter their tone, emphasize the importance of using language well, which reinforces the premise of Dowling’s book: to be effective, we have to use the right word, not the wrong one.

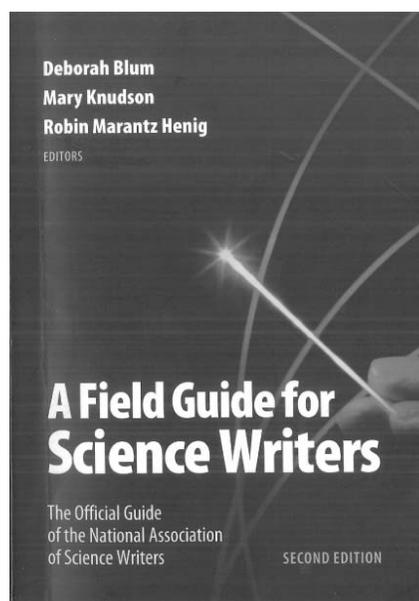
On some occasions, Dowling also tells us the history of a term or phrase. For instance, the entry for *champ at the bit* (not *chomp at the bit*) elaborates that the phrase is related to horses. *Cut and dried* (not *cut and dry*) is derived from the timber

industry. *Get my dander up* comes from the Dutch *op donderon*. *Down the pike* originated in entertainment at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair: "Fair goers would commonly say, *There's always something new coming down the Pike*." *Scapegoat* has its beginnings in the early Jewish practice of setting free one of two goats destined for sacrifice; that goat supposedly took the people's sins with it. The phrase was originally *escaped goat*, but it was abbreviated to *scapegoat*, which is the correct term to use today. *Fair to middling* has origins in different grades of cotton. A little history can go a long way in helping the audience to remember the correct word or phrase.

"One should not aim at being possible to understand, but at being impossible to misunderstand", states Quintillian at the beginning of the Q chapter. Dowling's book offers assistance in precision, accuracy, and clarity, and so we can write well: The illiterate teacher instilled no confidence in her students. Her Biblical allusion did not convince them to read the poem further, and she could not care less, as she thought, "It's just a phase."

Angie Macri

ANGIE MACRI worked as a scientific writer and editor before becoming the English Department chair at Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock, Arkansas.



A FIELD GUIDE FOR SCIENCE WRITERS: THE OFFICIAL GUIDE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCIENCE WRITERS, SECOND EDITION. EDITED BY DEBORAH BLUM, MARY KNUDSON, AND ROBIN MARANTZ HENIG. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2006. XIV + 321 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$54.50, SOFTCOVER \$18.95. ISBN 0-19-517498-4 (HARDCOVER), 0-19-517499-2 (SOFTCOVER).

Second editions of books rarely receive even a book note in *Science Editor*. The second edition of *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, however, is essentially a new book. Thus, although the first edition was reviewed in *CBE Views* (the forerunner of *Science Editor*) in 1997, the second edition—which, like its predecessor, contains much of merit—qualifies for review.

Like the first edition, the second is largely a primer in which science writers offer instruction in various aspects of writing about science for the public. Although the two editions cover many of the same topics, the second consists almost entirely of new chapters by new authors. The book also has been expanded from 31 to 42 chapters and now consists of six parts:

- "Learning the Craft" (with chapters on aspects of gathering, analyzing, and presenting information).
- "Choosing Your Market" (with chapters on covering science for various print and electronic media, including the World Wide Web).
- "Varying Your Writing Style" (with chapters on such topics as investigative reporting and "gee whiz" science writing).
- "Covering Stories in the Life Sciences" (with chapters on covering such realms as infectious diseases, mental health, and human genetics).

- "Covering Stories in the Physical and Environmental Sciences" (with chapters on covering, for example, space science, earth sciences, and climate).
- "Communicating Science from Institutions" (with chapters about, for example, working in science communication in the academic, government, and corporate sectors).

The book is informative and readable, providing much helpful guidance. Although much of the advice will, of course, be familiar to those experienced in science writing, some chapters contain many ideas and insights likely to enlighten even those relatively well versed in the field. Among chapters that stand out in that regard are "Finding a Voice and a Style" by David Everett, who teaches writing at Johns Hopkins University; the chapter on narrative writing by Jamie Shreeve, who has written a number of books; the chapter on writing about nutrition, by Sally Squires, of the *Washington Post*; and the chapter on science writing for museums, by Mary Miller, of the San Francisco Exploratorium.

Chapters that may especially interest science editors include "Reporting from Science Journals" by Tom Siegfried, who was science editor for 2 decades at the *Dallas Morning News*, and the chapter on covering science for trade and science journals

by Colin Norman, news editor at *Science*. In the chapter “Science Editing”, Mariette DiChristina, executive editor of *Scientific American*, provides an inside view of the work of an editor at a popular science magazine. Part of the chapter on writing about technology and engineering, by Kenneth Chang, of *The New York Times*, shows how interchanges with an editor improved an explanation.

One jarring note: Unlike other parts of the *Field Guide*, Part Six, “Communicating Science From Institutions”, is prefaced by a commentary by the three editors of the book. Titled “Taking a Different Path: Journalists and Public Information Officers”, this material in places seems somewhat hostile, or at least inhospitable, to the latter. Although journalists and public information officers sometimes do differ in point of view, such commentary seems out of place in a book from the National Association of Science Writers, which no longer relegates those working in public information to associate-member status. If a third edition of the *Field Guide* appears, I hope that at least one of its editors will come from public

information, an integral part of the science-writing field and a constituency from which the association draws a large proportion of its members.

Meanwhile, there are two good editions of *A Field Guide for Science Writers*. I hope that the first also stays in print, for many chapters in it still make distinctive contributions—for example, “Covering Science for Newspapers”, by Boyce Rensberger; “Writing Books on Science Topics”, by John Noble Wilford; “Scientists Who Write about Science for the Public”, by Meredith F Small; and “Critical Coverage of Public Health and Government”, by Abigail Trafford. Both editions have much to offer those hoping to write, or write better, for the public about science, and they contain fine reading for others seeking glimpses of this field.

Barbara Gastel

BARBARA GASTEL is the editor of *Science Editor* and a faculty member at Texas A&M University, where she teaches science journalism and related subjects.

Book Note

THE GRAIL BIRD: HOT ON THE TRAIL OF THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER. TIM GALLAGHER. NEW YORK: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN; 2005. 288 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$25.00. ISBN 0-618-45693-7. (SOFTCOVER EDITION: THE GRAIL BIRD: THE REDISCOVERY OF THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER. NEW YORK: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN; 2006. 304 PAGES. \$14.95. ISBN 0-618-70941-X.)

How many times does something have to be observed, and by whom, for its existence to become a fact?

Those are questions to keep in mind while reading *The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker*, by Tim Gallagher. Gallagher, editor-in-chief of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s publication *Living Bird*, describes the search for the ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird thought extinct that was spotted in an Arkansas swamp in 2004.

Maybe. Every reported ivory-bill sighting in recent decades has been greeted with skepticism, and this one is no exception. Gallagher met with people who reported earlier ivory-bill sightings—or, in some cases, their survivors. Some are people whose best credential is that they are long-time sports enthusiasts pursuing their hobbies in what happens to be suitable ivory-bill habitat. Others are enthusiastic amateurs who search for ivory-bills in their spare time. But only after a team from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology reported sightings was the rediscovery of the bird widely publicized. As one

birdwatcher not involved with the Cornell group is quoted as saying, publicizing a sighting risks dooming the bird, in that “idiots in boats” would overrun its habitat.

Gallagher is in the camp of the believers: he describes a sighting he made with another diehard searcher, Bobby Harrison. But the ivory-bill, if it is still present in Arkansas, has been a notably uncooperative research subject. The out-of-focus video that the Cornell group offers as proof of the bird’s existence has prompted controversy; when this book note went to press, the most recent peer-reviewed challenge to the video had been published in spring 2006. Gallagher’s recounting of the search for the ivory-bill is a thought-provoking look at the issues surrounding scientific observation in the field and the reporting of those observations.

Edith Paal

EDITH PAAL works in human-subjects research oversight at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.