



The King's English

Henry Watson Fowler, F.G. Fowler

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In this classic reference book the Fowler brothers illustrate by example all the commonly-made blunders of English usage and guide the reader to improved expression and style. If Dickens had owned a copy of The King's English for example, he would not have written "your great ability and trustfulness;" he would have recognized the malapropism and realized that the context demanded trustworthiness.

Written with the good sense and liveliness that is characteristic of the Fowlers, this work has given generations of students, scholars, and professional writers the solutions to problems of grammar and style. In print since its publication in 1906, this book is still an essential guide to written English and an ideal companion to Fowler's Modern English Usage.

The King's English Details

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Author : Henry Watson Fowler , F.G. Fowler

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From Reader Review The King's English for online ebook

John says

Unless I specifically inform you otherwise, I'm always currently reading *The King's English*.

Kat says

You'd have to be pretty serious to read this all the way through, but I find it fascinating to browse. I can only imagine having such a technical command of the English language, but then it occurs to me that if I did no one would probably notice, and they would probably think, "She sure talks funny!" I think the best part of this book are the examples of mistakes he gives from contemporary (for him) newspapers and writers.

Jeremy Thomas says

Fowler wasn't God you know. But by God, he was Fowler.

Maciek says

A true masterpiece in pedantic, almost mathematical, approach to syntax and diction of the English language. The Fowler brothers do not abstain from using trenchant sarcasm and ridicule to call out everything—from the small peccadilloes to most heinous of crimes—perpetrated against the English language by the likes of no other than Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë. Sifting the content of the chapters, the reader feels like a tyro Jedi warrior approaching unity with the Force, or, in this case, accuracy, precision, and meaning in written text. The section on syntax can be too abstruse to a reader not graced by a systematic education in grammar, but that can hardly be considered the fault of the authors. A perfect book for someone who has enjoyed the lessons and wit of “The Elements of Style,” but wants to delve deeper in erudition and, one day, truly reach linguistic nirvana.

James says

Another perfect book for the English language aficionado (or pedant). Fowler and Fowler present their definitive guide for the aspiring early-20th-century writer wanting to ensure the correctitude (or not) of their prose. *The King's English* is not a guide for learning how to write though, Fowler and Fowler don't spend much time explaining the correct usage at all, instead it's a list of examples of, and corrections for, mistakes – common and uncommon – in grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc. While Dickens and Charlotte Brontë come in for regular criticism, it seems that newspapers are generally held up as the worst examples of almost all faults.

The book is split into two parts. Part one contains chapters on misuse of vocabulary, syntax, airs and graces

(showing off), and punctuation. Each is treated thoroughly, and surprisingly wittily for a grammar book. Much of the advice is slightly dated now – the Kings referenced by the title are Edward the VII (for the first edition) and George V (for the third edition) – unsurprisingly, English as a language has moved on somewhat in those intervening years. The Fowlers are even keen to point this out themselves – unlike German and French, English is a loosely proscribed language, a hybrid language where only common usage is a requirement for it to change: "the only question about any particular word ... is whether the vox populi has yet declared for it; when it has, there is no more to be said; but when it has not, the process should be resisted as long as possible".

Most of the chapters I liked or loved. Only the chapter on syntax I found so impenetrable as to be unreadable. My Comprehensive education was anything but, and my lack of Grammar education leaves me with very little reference point for the grammar terms bandied about throughout that chapter. There was only so many times I could remind myself of what a subjunctive or a participle is before I just gave up and started skimming the chapter, hoping that the next one would be better. Equally, part two just feels rushed. In the introduction the Fowlers state that part two is mostly just lists of examples with little exposition, they claim due to lack of space. However, it seems to me that slightly fewer examples could have left room for more exposition, and failing that a second volume would have allowed them to really go to town. Perhaps they'd just become bored by this point, certainly part two mostly bored me.
