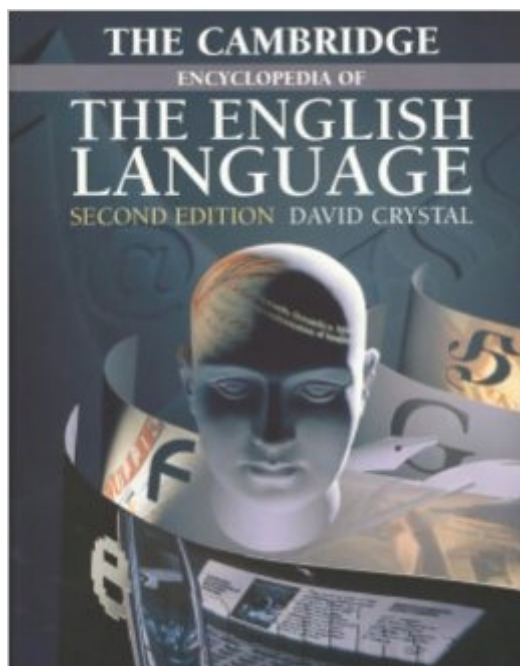


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The Cambridge Encyclopedia Of The English Language



Synopsis

Rarely has a book so packed with accurate and well researched factual information been so widely read and popularly acclaimed. This Second Edition of The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language has been fully revised for a new generation of language-lovers. The book is longer and includes extensive new material on world English and Internet English, in addition to completely updated statistics, further reading suggestions and other references. First Edition Hb (1995): 0-521-40179-8 First Edition Pb (1997): 0-521-59655-6 David Crystal is a leading authority on language, and author of many books, including most recently Shakespeare's Words (Penguin, 2002), Language and the Internet (Cambridge, 2001) and Language Death (Cambridge, 2000). An internationally renowned writer, journal editor, lecturer and broadcaster, he received an Order of the British Empire in 1995 for his services to the English language.

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Customer Reviews

This is essentially a "twofer" review - everything I say about this book also applies to Crystal's "Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language." I fell in love with language long ago, so pounced on this book when it first appeared on my horizon several years ago. Since then, I have learned to keep it close by - it migrates from the coffee table to my night table to the bathroom to the breakfast table - I need it handy. I refer to it constantly, and often find myself opening it at random and immediately being hooked by whatever subject comes up. It's a tremendous compendium of easily accessible information on all aspects of the English language, and there are nuggets of value throughout. It is well-written in a lively, non-pedantic style, and has plenty of illustrations to reinforce understanding

and make it more interesting. It's appropriate for most ages except very young children, and is a terrific way to introduce anyone to the wonders and mysteries of our language. The same remarks hold true for Crystal's "Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language." That work is presented in the same way, but with much a broader scope - it covers all aspects of human language. I like to browse in it and then get greater detail from the English Language book - they work very well together. I'm in awe of Crystal's ability to present such huge subjects so coherently and in such a comprehensive and fascinating way. I strongly recommend both books, for you or for anyone you care about.

David Crystal impresses me with his combination of elegant erudition, intellectual open-mindedness, and conciseness. In writing this book, he imposed a harsh constraint upon his writing: every topic had to fit into a two-page spread. The result is insidiously like potato chips: it's such an easy read, you can't help but reading "just one more spread". The breadth of knowledge that he brings to bear on the subject is astounding; his bibliography reads like a catalog of Western intellectual history. Time and again, I found myself marking a point with a note to delve into the matter more deeply. Intellectual integrity is another impressive component of his writing. He cheerfully acknowledges difficult issues and treats linguistic variation with respect, yet never descends into cover-your-ass academic frippery. The effect is to provoke deeper contemplation in the mind of the reader; language truly is endlessly complex! A confession is in order here: I did find the last few score pages rather tedious. Perhaps it was merely the fatigue arising from my breathless rush through the first 400 pages; more likely the subject matter does not suit my tastes. But in a grand parade of ideas of this size, I cannot complain if a few floats or marching bands fail to excite me; there's more than enough here to keep anybody dazzled. The greatest tribute to this book that I can offer is the revelation that I have been too reluctant to shelve this book in my library; it remains on my desk, bedstand, or next to the computer, ready for a quick re-read of some random topic. Betcha can't read just one spread!

I have truly enjoyed reading this book, and recommend it highly to anyone interested in learning about the English language. It is easy to read, clear, and authoritative. The only reason I don't give it 5 stars is that Mr. Crystal seems to hold the subtly snobbish attitude toward American literature and language still prevalent among the educated class in Britain. He gives due credit to Benjamin Franklin, Noah Webster, Edgar Allen Poe, and H.L. Mencken, but dismisses Mark Twain as being simply a humorist with vaguely racist tendencies, and fails to even mention Hawthorne, Melville, or Longfellow, the leaders of the 19th century American Renaissance, who succeeded in creating a

distinctive American literature, separate from the English tradition. He also fails to mention Stephen Crane and Ernest Hemingway, but includes Burton Raffles, Peter Sellers (twice), and John Le Carre. At the same time, I sometimes have the feeling that we Americans have merely borrowed the English language, and don't understand it, love it, and use it the way the English do. For us, English is a handy tool, but if something better came along we would abandon it without a second thought, whereas the English will always speak English. And Hawthorne, Melville, and Longfellow may be more widely read in the UK these days than they are in their own country. Mr. Crystal obviously loves the English language, and writes about it with lucidity and affection. So my complaint is a back-handed compliment, in a way, and I would not discourage anyone from buying and reading this book from cover to cover.

Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* is not really the type of book I would use for reference. There are much more appropriate books when I want to learn about the proper use of a gerund. This is, however, an absolutely fascinating and addictive book! It is the type of book I pick up to read and get so involved I lose track of time. It is also a beautiful book. The color, illustrations, and publishing quality are magnificent! The focus of this book is not American English. The flavor is cosmopolitan. Questions are answered like how the variations of English in New Zealand and the Caribbean affect road signs. If you ever wanted to know how morphological, lexical, syntactic, and discourse humor compare and contrast, this book is for you. This encyclopedia also features a brilliantly edited collection of poems interspersed in the pages. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* will remain one of my favorite books.

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