

## PREFACE

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Major additions influenced by teachers, students and professional mass communicators highlight the third edition. The goal of this book, however, remains the same: to provide simple explanations, practice examples and helpful suggestions for the writing and editing problems we encounter most frequently in our studies and in our work.

**New Features.** Because the first chapter, “25 Ways to Improve Writing Immediately,” is so popular with all audiences the book reaches, three complementary chapters have been added to Part 1. They are Chapter 2, “Are These Distinctions Worth Making?”; Chapter 3, “Language Lapses”; and Chapter 4, “It’s Nobody’s Guess.”

In the second chapter, we examine distinctions often ignored in such word pairs as *persuade/convince*, *disinterested/uninterested*, *since/because*, *healthy/healthful*, *lie/lay* and 15 other examples. In Chapter 3 we offer 20 examples of language lapses we make when our brains are idling in neutral. They include using **try and** when we mean **try to**, confusing the letter **O** with the number **zero**, saying we are sickening (nauseous) when we mean we are sick (nauseated), and indicating that someone **wishes** when that person simply **wants**.

In Chapter 4 we remove the guesswork from determining whether **anyone**, **anyway**, **sometimes** and similar examples are used as one or two words. We offer advice about when to place a comma between adjectives that modify the same noun or pronoun, and we identify which antecedent determines whether the relative pronoun subject **who** takes a singular or a plural verb.

**Test Yourself Exercises on the Web.** For the first time, “Test Yourself” exercises, suggested by reviewers of the second edition, will be offered on the web at [www.mhhe.com/arnold](http://www.mhhe.com/arnold). The questions, along with answers and explanations, will follow the reading of each related chapter. (The workbook, designed for classroom use by mass communications students, and the manual for teachers will continue to be produced in printed form.)

**Expansions.** Reference 1, “Words Frequently Confused,” which rivals “25 Ways to Improve Writing Immediately” as the readers’ favorite part of the book, has 35 additions to the 250 in the second edition. They include when to use **and** instead of **while**, **brief** instead of **short**, **guarantee** instead of **guaranty**, and **instead** in place of **rather**. More than 100 new examples join Reference 5, “When to Use a Hyphen, One Word or Two Words.”

Elsewhere, the table of contents and the appendix have expanded to make using the book even easier, and significant rewriting and refining strengthen the 27 chapters and the five reference sections.

**Usefulness.** The book is designed as a resource that students and professionals can place on their desks along with their dictionaries and stylebooks. It also makes a strong supplement to textbooks in writing and editing classes. Significantly, a growing number of mass communications professors are adopting *Media Writer's Handbook* as their textbook for required language skills courses being created to raise students' knowledge to a professional level.

**Quick Help and More.** Immediate help comes in the first four chapters, described previously. Writers and broadcasters can improve their language use noticeably with their first reading. The final section has five quick-reference guides for vocabulary, spelling, irregular verbs, wordiness and trite expressions, and words that may require a hyphen or may be used as one or two words. The reference sections are especially helpful to writers and editors working under deadline pressure because the material is placed in alphabetical order, and the examples are brief and can be understood quickly. Between the immediate help and the quick-reference sections are 23 chapters filled with detailed explanations, examples and advice on parts of speech, punctuation, sentence functions and structures, and syntax.

**Sensitivity in Language.** People who use language that discriminates against race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, marital status or physical and mental ability usually do so not from a mean spirit but because they are unaware or careless. The "Sensitivity in Language" chapter provides examples, insights and explanations that are easy to read and to understand.

**Building Skills.** Fortunately, journalists and other mass communicators can choose to overcome their language skills problems instead of living with a fear of being embarrassed by them. Little, if any, guesswork is involved in using language correctly. Rules cover virtually every writing challenge, and most are easy to understand and to apply. Also encouraging is the fact that each of us already knows a great deal about writing skillfully. All we have to do is build upon that knowledge.

**For Use as Needed.** The book does not have to be read from beginning to end. Although that approach is recommended for those with fundamental language skills problems, the organization permits "sampling" by writers and broadcasters who use the language well but are nagged by little uncertainties. By design, some sections provide more explanations and examples than many users will need. This arrangement gives everyone an opportunity to work through the book at his or her own pace without feeling either bogged down or inadequately informed.

**Acknowledgments.** The material has been put together over the past 30 years. Much comes from a collection of common errors college journalism and mass communications students have made in their writing and editing. Some comes from information gathered from reading, listening to or watching the work of professional mass communicators. Current and former students, colleagues, and professionals aware of the author's interest have made—and continue to make—valuable contributions and suggestions that have enriched the book. Their help is greatly appreciated, as are the suggestions made by those who reviewed either the manuscript, the first edition or the second edition.

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**Second Edition.** Rachele Kanigel, San Francisco State University; Robert Bohle, University of North Florida; Keith Terry, University of Nebraska at Kearney; Henry Wefing, Westfield State College; Deborah Menger, University of Texas at San Antonio; and Daniel T. Davis, Michigan State University. Special thanks to Norma Jane Bumgarner of the University of Oklahoma for her extraordinarily thorough review and detailed list of helpful suggestions.

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***The Challenge.*** As we either develop or refine our language skills, each of us—regardless of whether we are beginners or veteran mass communicators—can take comfort from the fact that no one knows everything about the language. And no one with a love for the language ever stops learning. The challenge is to learn enough to get to the point that we feel confident about our language skills. That's when real progress begins.

George T. Arnold, Ph.D.