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# The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language

*By David Crystal*



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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

Crystal, an author, lecturer, and BBC broadcaster on language, here approaches English with the same combination of scholarly seriousness and inviting visual presentation that made his Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (LJ 5/1/88) so successful. This large, lively, and lavishly illustrated volume is divided into six broad topics that cover the English language's history, vocabulary, grammar, writing and speech systems, usage, and acquisition. Within these major topics, the book is divided into logical subtopics and finally into the basic unit of the text-the two-page spread. Nearly every individual subject is treated without turning a page, and how these pages are packed! The clear and spirited text is stunning, enhanced with over 500 illustrations, making this a particularly rich reference work and a browser's dream. The history part consists of chronological chapters that trace the language's development. It offers a fascinating treatment of the growth of English during Shakespeare's time as well as its adaptation to the needs of international trade and late 20th-century technology. Crystal is attuned to the diversity of English usage around the world, providing a variety of wide-ranging quotations, photographs, newspaper clippings, poems, ads, and cartoons. The text treats controversial topics such as black English, word and place origins, regional English, dialect, the U.S. movement to make English the official language, politically correct language, and the future. The book's layout, three indexes, and glossary will make it useful both at the reference desk and in the circulating collection. Crystal has created an attractive and readable work for the lay reader as well as the specialist. For most academic, public, and school libraries.

*Paul D'Alessandro, Portland P.L., Me.*

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From [Booklist](#)

This attractive resource is organized thematically in segments covering the history of the English language (Old English, Middle English, Modern English, English in different parts of the world); English vocabulary (its nature, structure, sources, etymology, and the dimensions of the lexicon); English grammar (structure of words and sentences, definitions of the main branches of grammar); spoken and written English; English usage (varieties of discourse and regional, social, and personal usage variations); and how people learn English and new ways to study English. Appendixes include a glossary, a list of symbols and abbreviations, references and addresses, further readings, and indexes of names, items, and topics. Crystal, a linguist, is the compiler of many reference books published by Cambridge, for example, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (1987).

Throughout the book (which focuses on British English, not American English), readers will find liberal use of color in the many charts, illustrations, reprints of pages from historically significant works, maps, and photographs. The author does not shrink from exploring and delivering opinions on controversial topics such as the "opaque inspecific, or empty" language of politics and the dangers of "political correctness."

Each segment can be read as if it were the only section of the book, or, the work can be read cover to cover so that a cumulative effect is achieved. The only comparable resource that provides the same type of broad-ranging coverage in one volume is *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* [RBB O 15 92]. That work is arranged alphabetically within 22 themes (e.g., geography, history, media) and provides "an interim report on the nature and use of the English language" in all nations that speak English. The two works complement each other; *Cambridge* provides historical perspective and *Oxford* a snapshot of current English. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* lives up to the reputation of other resources published

under the Cambridge imprint and will make an excellent addition to the collections of large public libraries and all academic libraries.

#### Review

"...bedazzles you with an eye-popping presentation of the cluck-clucking of the mother tongue. If you like fireworks with your information, this is a worthwhile language book..." William Safire, The New York Times Magazine

"The Cambridge Encyclopedia of English Language (is) perhaps the most brilliant book of the past ten years..." Globe and Mail

"This is more than an encyclopedia; it is also a compendium of wonderful anecdotes and illustrations. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language should be at the top of the list for purchases in all library language/literature collections." Reference Book Review

"The clear and spirited text is stunning, enhanced with over 500 illustrations, making this a particularly rich reference work and a browser's dream...Crystal has created an attractive and readable work for the lay reader as well as the specialist." Library Journal

"...contains a monstrous amount of information on a fascinating topic arranged in a clear, concise, and, above all, entertaining manner--a dangerous combination indeed, and one that can only lead to uncontrollable reading binges lasting hours or perhaps days." Quill & Quire

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