

# Edition

The journal of the Editors' Association of Canada, Toronto branch

MARCH 2009

## Style Tips for Academic Authors and Their Editors

- Past program report
- Branch executive reports
- Freya Godard's Grammar food for thought: Sentence fragments
- Book review: *Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends* by David Wilton



# Edition

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## Editor's Note

AS I LOOK OUT MY WINDOW I CAN ACTUALLY SEE A SPOT OF green on the lawn across the way, heralding the approach of spring (Amen!). The Toronto branch has been very lively throughout the winter despite the frigid temperatures. Preparations for the 30th anniversary conference are in full swing, and volunteers from the branch are making their mark. *Edition* will join in the celebratory spirit in upcoming issues. *Edition's* dedicated volunteers are hard at work to make this possible. And in this issue, you will find edifying pages on editing-related topics, including Mary Anne Carswell's generous contribution of tips for those of us who traverse the rocky terrain of academic texts; her tips are also useful for anyone involved in non-fiction. Freya Godard is back with her wonderful grammar column; this time she is unpacking sentence fragments that tend to plague us (or is it just me?). Finally our book reviewer of the month, Deirdre Swain, provides a brief look at word myths and legends as discussed in a new book by David Wilton. Enjoy!

*Sara Promislow*

Newsletter chair

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*Instructors and members during the January meeting.*



## Past program report: Monday, January 26, 2009

By Grace Cherian, with photos by Sharon O'Brien

ENERGY LEVELS WERE HIGH AT THE January 2009 meeting as members and visitors clustered around EAC seminar instructors presenting brief overviews of the seminars they are teaching this winter. After twenty minutes, Nancy Foran, our program chair, pressed a buzzer, and participants moved on to the next seminar they wished to hear about, quickly gathering around the seminar instructor. We had enough time for only three edifying rounds, leaving everyone with a thirst for more.

Kathryn Dean presented *Copy Editing: A Hands-on Introduction* (during rounds one and two) and *Stylistic Editing* (round three).

Elizabeth d'Anjou gave an overview of *Taking the Plunge as a Freelance Editor* (rounds one and three) and *Developing a House Style* (round two).





Camilla Blakeley and new co-instructor Gary Blakeley gave a brief outline of *Editing Illustrative Materials*.



Jennie Worden and Sara Goodchild presented *Developmental Editing for the K–12 Market* (round one) and Jennie Worden also introduced the *Proofreading* seminar. ■■■



## EAC Toronto Executive



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 Hours: 9 AM to 1 PM Monday to Thursday

## ■ For your diary pages

### **Executive Meeting**

Tuesday, March 10, 2009  
6:30 PM  
EAC National Office,  
27 Carlton Street, Suite 505  
All members are welcome  
RSVP:  
[toronto\\_br\\_secretary@editors.ca](mailto:toronto_br_secretary@editors.ca)

### **General Meeting**

Monday, March 23, 2009  
7:00 PM New members Q & A  
7:30 PM Program: Tax clinic with Dimitris Stubos of  
Base Nine Financial

Members are heartily encouraged to send their questions in advance to the Program Chair ([toronto\\_br\\_program\\_chair@editors.ca](mailto:toronto_br_program_chair@editors.ca)), who will forward them to Dimitris to help him tailor his discussion to our needs.

The Women's Art Association of Canada  
23 Prince Arthur Avenue  
Members free/non-members \$10

## ■ Welcome new members!

As of February 1, 2009, the Toronto branch has 671 members: 339 voting (including 2 honorary life members), 279 qualifying, 41 student members, and 10 emeritus members. 4 members identified themselves as francophone. A total of 8 people have joined since January. The new members are:

Jasmine Black  
Julia Bolotina  
Deanna Borda  
Ingrid Dolan  
Valeria Frith

Nicole Laidler  
Anne Perdue  
Elizabeth Scott

Hotline Report	February 2009
Members registered	16
Hotline opportunities	1. PhD thesis, Law (2-day turnaround)

## Hotline Registration

Clients call to be matched with branch members who have registered with the Hotline for work.

When you register, please note these guidelines:

- If you are listed in the EAC Directory of Editors (print or online), note any changes to your listing.
- If you are not listed in the Directory and have not previously registered with the Hotline, send your resumé in Directory or Hotline style. You can find guidelines to the Directory format at [www.editors.ca/hire/ode/search\\_tips.html](http://www.editors.ca/hire/ode/search_tips.html). Hotline style follows the Directory format. However, you may include as many interests as you wish and write your profile in point form.
- Please limit your resumé to one page.
- If you have registered before, send your resumé only if it has changed.
- Hotline registration begins on the first of each month. Please contact the branch every month to be listed again.

Telephone: 416 975-5528 Fax: 416 975-5596  
[toronto@editors.ca](mailto:toronto@editors.ca) (.rtf attachment; subject: Hotline)

## Spring Seminars

SPRING IS THE SEASON OF FRESH STARTS, so why not freshen your editing skills or start learning a new one? Check out the EAC Toronto branch's spring seminar line up: Catherine Roberts ushers in March with the Kitchener offering of *Fact-Checking for Magazines* on Saturday, March 7. Kathryn Dean fills out the month with the popular two-day *Copy Editing: A Hands-on Introduction*, to be held in Toronto on Wednesday, March 11, and Wednesday, March 18.

April begins in Kitchener once again, with Jennie Worden's *Proofreading* seminar on Saturday, April 4. Catherine Roberts returns on Wednesday, April 8, with the Toronto offering of *Fact-Checking for Magazines*. Rounding out the month's offerings are Kathryn Dean's *Stylistic Editing* on Saturday, April 18, and Heather Ebbs' *Indexing A-Z* on Saturday, May 2, both in Toronto.

For more information or to register, go to [www.editors.ca/branches/toronto/seminars/](http://www.editors.ca/branches/toronto/seminars/) or call 416 975-5528. ■■■

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Emily Dockrill, Seminar chair  
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# Upcoming Conferences

**EDITORS'**  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES  
**RÉVISEURS**

**30** years/ans

Celebrating the Past  
Charting the Future  
The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference

Pour nos 30 ans  
célébrons le passé, dessinons l'avenir!  
Congrès anniversaire 2009

The Toronto Experience team for EAC's upcoming 30th anniversary conference needs your help! We're currently brainstorming possible leisure activities for conference delegates. We'd love any feedback to help direct our research. Please send your thoughts and suggestions to [sarahthetraveller@gmail.com](mailto:sarahthetraveller@gmail.com). Please insert "EAC Conference Survey" in the email's subject line.

**C**ELEBRATING THE PAST, Charting the Future: The 30th Anniversary Conference is set for June 5 to 7 in Toronto. We look forward to welcoming a record number of attendees to Toronto as we celebrate EAC's 30th anniversary.

Conference 2009 will take place at the 89 Chestnut Conference Centre in downtown Toronto. This conference centre is a unique venue that offers affordable hotel rooms on-site, as well as meeting facilities. Online registration is now open at [www.editors.ca/conference](http://www.editors.ca/conference). Catch the early-bird registration discounts while they last, and keep an eye on the conference Web site for details as they emerge.

Looking for more professional development and networking opportunities? From June 2 to 5, MagNet, Canada's Magazine Conference, will also be held at the 89 Chestnut Conference Centre. Magazines Canada has partnered with organizations such as the Canadian Authors Association and the Professional Writers Association of Canada to offer sessions for





writers and editors. What's more, EAC members will be able to register for MagNet seminars at a reduced rate. As well, the Indexing Society of Canada's conference will take place from June 3 to 4 at St. Michael's College on the University of Toronto campus—a short distance from 89 Chestnut. Visit [www.magazinescanada.ca](http://www.magazinescanada.ca) and [www.indexers.ca](http://www.indexers.ca) for more information. ■■■

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Jen Govier, Toronto branch, Public relations chair  
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 **EAC's 30th Anniversary Conference online registration**  
[www.editors.ca/conference](http://www.editors.ca/conference)

 **MagNet, Canada's Magazine Conference**  
[www.magazinescanada.ca](http://www.magazinescanada.ca)

 **Indexing Society of Canada's conference**  
[www.indexers.ca](http://www.indexers.ca)



# STYLE TIPS *for* ACADEMIC



## *and* THEIR EDITORS

By Mary Anne Carswell

I've written my share of academic pieces—including two master's theses—and for the last 10 years I've been helping academic authors polish their prose, whether in pursuit of a degree or for publication. Along the way, I've learned more than I ever wanted to know about APA Style and picked up useful information about how to write and edit within the tight bounds of academia. Here are some tips I give to my academic customers.

### **First Principle: *Make It Easy for the Reader***

Authors: Don't make the reader have to work to understand you. Readers have a little patience, but not a lot. If they have to stand back and interpret what they think you might be saying, they will soon give up, or they will misinterpret it altogether. Do everything in your power to clarify what you are saying. Spell it out for the reader.

### **Second Principle: *Show, Don't Tell***

Academic writing is such a difficult medium to enliven! It attempts to go in a linear, logical direction, and its statements need to be backed up by what other scholars

have said. Authors therefore often hedge their bets, fearful of sounding too certain of their opinions. Some take refuge in the templates academic media require (e.g., "scope and limitations," "literature review," "methodology") and many never come out from behind them. One way of working within the limitations of the academic form without losing the reader is to pay attention to the principles of *show, don't tell*, as in: "The sky looks blue to human eyes (Smith, 1990)," not "I am about to talk about what Smith (1990) said about the colour of the sky."

Tips for *show, don't tell*: Pay particular attention to verbs. Verbs are strong and





action oriented by nature. Let verbs lead the reader forward and do the linear work they are cut out to do. Delete the verb *to be*. Beware of “is ... that” constructions, as in the following sentence, from a paper in which social constructionism had already been defined:

“Social constructionism is a theoretical orientation that encourages critical appraisal of the perceptions, observations, and assumptions influencing an individual’s understanding of the world.” We already know that social constructionism is a theoretical orientation; delete those words. Then, personalize the concept, make it the subject of the sentence, and rephrase: “Social constructionism encourages a critical appraisal..”

### Active vs. Passive Voice

I will echo what all writing and editing manuals say:

Prefer the active voice to the passive voice. Failing that, prefer the passive voice of a verb (“How the findings may be applied to the problem”) to a noun (“The application of the findings to the problem”).

Putting  
quotation  
marks  
around it  
will not  
help the  
reader know  
what you  
mean.

### Quotation Marks and Italics

Many times, people use quotation marks when they are uncertain about how their ideas are going to be received. Authors: If you are using a word or phrase in a very particular way, then define the way you are using it. Putting quotation marks around it will not help the reader know what you mean. Removing quotation marks makes your work more definite and reassures the reader. If you want to highlight a word or phrase (a definition, for example), use italics, not quotation marks.

### Tenses in Academic Documents: Past, Present, and Future

Tenses in academic documents can create headaches for authors and editors. Sometimes authors want to distinguish between what a particular authority said in 1950 from what the same person said in 1970.





Sometimes authors want to give an historical overview of a certain idea, in order to accentuate the brilliance of their own version of that idea. Frequently in the social sciences, authors conduct surveys or do other original research, and then go on to analyze the research. How does one say with clarity what happened when, or who thought what and when? Here are some tips.

Describe the study or survey (the original research) in the past tense. This makes the findings more concrete—they apply to that particular group at that particular time. APA Style also prefers to phrase findings from the literature in the past tense, as in: “Benjamin (1998) *said* such-and-such,” not “Benjamin (1998) *says* such-and-such.”

One dissertation I edited dealt with four time periods: the time a certain class took place; the time

of the first interview about the class; the time of the second interview about the class; and the time of the analysis (the present time). Comments made in the second interview were measured against those made in the first interview, to see what, if any, learning had taken place. The choice of tenses was therefore complex, because the author needed the particular time of the particular comment to be clear.

This was the formula the author and I settled on: The author *is* analyzing (time of analysis; present tense) a comment the interviewee *made* in the second interview (past tense) about a comment she *had made* in the first interview (pluperfect tense), as in: “Liz said she had felt uncomfortable in that situation in class.” The only time the interviewee’s words appeared in the present tense was if they were

quoted directly, as in: “I feel really bad about when I said that racist thing.”

Beware: The thesis or dissertation will have a long shelf life. To say “everyone loves ABBA” may not make sense 20 years from now. Putting it into the past tense anchors it in a particular time: “They thought everyone would always love ABBA.”

### References Within the Text

Commonly, novice academics using APA Style put the cited author’s name up front and follow that with the idea, as in this example: “Healey (1996, 1999) argued that urban (environmental) planning can use deliberative governance efforts to help maintain or transform public discourses about the qualities of places.”

This practice interrupts the flow of the writer’s thoughts and interferes



with readability. It distracts and distances the reader. Putting someone else between the writer and the reader, it forces the reader to make the connections between what Healey said and what the writer is saying—it makes the reader have to work. Extra verbiage has to be added—“argued that” or “stated that” or some such formulation—that contributes nothing to the meaning of the sentence. A stylistically more effective way to express the idea would be: “Urban (environmental) planning can use deliberative governance efforts to help maintain or transform public discourses about the qualities of places (Healey, 1996, 1999).”

Alternatively: “Urban (environmental) planning can use deliberative

## Always pay attention to the basics.

governance efforts to help maintain or transform public discourses, building up what Healey (1996, 1999) called the *institutional capacity* of a place.”

Rewording in-text references this way does not change the meaning of the text, and satisfies academic injunctions against plagiarism—so why not do it?!

### **A Final Word**

When I attended the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE/UofT) in the late

1990s as an eager mature student, I attended a writing class for academics. As a first principle, the professor leading the class told us to spell-check our documents. The instruction made me feel that I was back in grade school again! But it taught me something: Always pay attention to the basics. One of the basics I pay attention to as an editor is my willingness to talk with my authors about their writing process. This can include basic principles of composition. (For instance, I recently had to explain the difference between active and passive voices to a doctoral student.) Academic editing is like any other kind of editing—it’s about the people as much as about the words. ■■■

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# Grammar food for thought

An editor's observations on grammar and usage

## Sentence Fragments

By Freya Godard

*It seems to me that I am encountering sentence fragments more often these days, both as a reader and as an editor. More and more I find myself asking an author, "Can you make this into a sentence?" or "The reason for the revision was to give the sentence a verb."*

In the spoken language, of course, sentence fragments are perfectly normal:

"What time is it?" "*Seven o'clock.*"

"Tea or coffee?" "*Tea, please.*"

"Are you going to be working on the weekend?" "*Not if I can help it.*"

"Which one is your son?" "*The one in the blue sweater.*"

"When did you move to Canada?" "*When I was ten.*"

"Ready to go?"

In written dialogue, sentence fragments like that are just as acceptable as they are in speaking, and it would be silly to turn them into sentences. But there is a good reason why sentence fragments like that can be understood, and that is the simplicity of the thought expressed and often a preceding sentence, which supplies the ideas missing from the fragment.

If sentence fragments in writing other than dialogue are to be acceptable, it must be obvious at a glance that the fragment is not a sentence: there is no excuse for making the reader start over again to look for a subject or verb. Moreover, the fragment must make sense even though it may have no subject or verb. It should also sound natural and idiomatic, and not deliberately ungrammatical.

One place where sentence fragments are ubiquitous is in advertising. So, for example, in a supermarket flyer, we see:



“*Too late for breakfast?*  
Have your cottage cheese  
to go. *Great for lunch boxes*  
*too.*”

There’s nothing wrong with sentence fragments like that, though I think that an *It’s* before “Great for lunch boxes too” would have sounded more natural. In more formal writing, however, sentence fragments, even if they are perfectly understandable, can easily give a careless, sloppy tone to the writing. The more formal the context, the more incongruous a fragment can sound, especially when juxtaposed with literary turns of phrase and bureaucratic or academic jargon, as is the case in the following excerpt from a newspaper column about investments:

“The Tax-Free Savings Account will also provide seniors with a tax-free savings vehicle to supplement ongoing savings needs. *Something they have only limited access to once they reach age 71 and*

*are required to begin taking retirement income from RRSP conversions.*”

Moreover, that fragment is so long that it might be mistaken for a sentence, especially since the first few words could well be the beginning of a full sentence.

The writer could have prevented the risk of confusion by adding *That’s* at the beginning, thus turning the fragment into a sentence and one that would sound more natural and less self-consciously informal. Some writers, though, like the author of a recent newspaper column that contained two sentence fragments, have a breezy style which can lend itself to the use of sentence fragments:

“What are you going to move on those repaved roads? *Stuff imported from abroad?*”

That is obviously a fragment; it’s perfectly understandable, and it’s effective. Besides, there is no way to make it into



a full sentence, except perhaps by joining it to the preceding sentence with a dash. But another fragment from the same column is not quite so successful:

“When unemployment insurance began...it was built on the idea of a right to work, like other basic rights, and not just a need to survive. *Also on the dignity of work.*”

Here, again, the reader can see at a glance that the fragment is not a full sentence, but the logical connection with the preceding sentence—that is, “built on”—has become a little remote and is somewhat obscured



by the intervening negative phrase “and not just a need to survive.”

The part of a manuscript where I see the most sentence fragments is the acknowledgements. Too many authors begin with something like “*My thanks to so-and-so,*” not perhaps realizing that they’ve omitted the subject and verb. In such cases I usually suggest the “sentence” be reworded to read “I am grateful to...” or “I wish to express my thanks to...” In later sentences the subject can be the person being thanked rather than the author, as in “So-and-so gave invaluable assistance by...”

I was a good deal more surprised to find a similar acknowledgements section in a well-written, though not particularly well-edited, book on a serious subject by an apparently reputable publisher. The acknowledgements went on for a page and a half with scarcely one complete sentence:

*“My thanks to...for his knowledge, advice and facts from his excellent book.... To [name] and [name] for their patience, expertise, time and interest. Likewise [name]. A thousand thanks to [name] for all the long hours and midnights of careful and tortuous work. To [name] and [name] for their unequalled expertise and dedication. To [name] for his professionalism and patience. As always my thanks to*

*“For reading and correcting the original text, as well as their time and knowledge:*

*“[long list of names] ....*

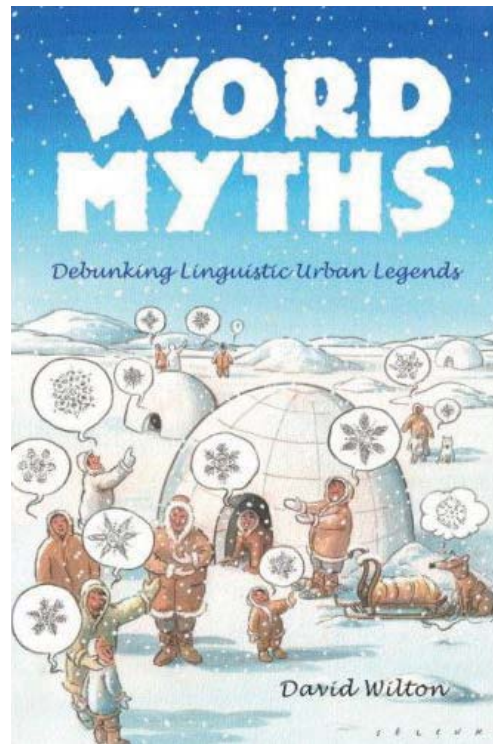
*“Also for [sic] the following publishers, authors and organizations....”*



It may be that the reason for this sentence-less style is to avoid having to say *I*, which in fact never does appear in those particular acknowledgements. But whatever the reason, this is too casual and off-hand a way for an author to thank the people who helped to make the book possible. It’s also a reminder that sentence fragments are a device that should be used in serious writing only for a good reason. ■■■

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© Freya Godard



## BOOK REVIEW

## WORD MYTHS

Debunking Linguistic  
Urban Legends

by David Wilton

Reviewed by Deirdre Swain

**U**RBAN LEGENDS ABOUT WORDS AND phrases are as common as those about, well, anything else. How often have you heard that KFC changed its name because its birds are so genetically modified they can't be classified as "chickens"? (This is false.) Probably about as

often as you've heard that "rule of thumb" was originally a law allowing for wife-beating, or that "Ring around the Rosie" is a rhyme about the Black Death.

David Wilton, a self-described "amateur logophile," has taken it upon himself to discredit these and other word-centered



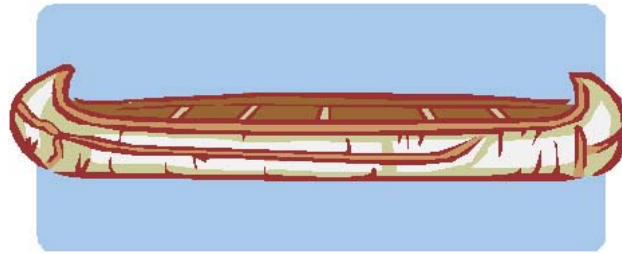
urban myths in *Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends*.

The book is organized thematically: one chapter focuses on false acronyms, for example; another

focuses on a tendency for linguistic myths to have military or naval origins. (The latter, amusingly, is titled “Canoe”, which itself is in this case an acronym for “Conspiracy to Attribute Nautical Origins to Everything.”)

Wilton begins by outlining his methodology and sources. Unsurprisingly, he relies on historical dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, and the *Dictionary of American Regional English* as well as standard dictionaries and etymological dictionaries. He warns, though, that even the venerable *OED* is still a secondary source, and recommends reading books, journals, and newspapers wherever possible, should you wish to do some myth-deflating of your own.

The first section of the book is devoted to “Debunking the Big Boys”, legends that have an amazing hold on the public imagination, including those two mentioned above about spousal abuse and the plague. Wilton points out that the plague known as the Black Death ended in the 14th century, and that the last great European Plague ended in 1665, but the earliest verifiable



publication date of the rhyme is 1881 (p. 25).

It’s not impossible that the rhyme should have been passed down orally for two to five

hundred years before someone finally wrote it down. (After all, as Wilton himself says, absence of evidence isn’t necessarily evidence of absence.) But it’s improbable. Wilton also lists several regional variations of the rhyme, each of which gets further and further away from being a likely analogy for diseased sores and burning corpses (pp. 26–27).

Similarly, a persistent legend exists that the “rule of thumb” referred to a law proscribing the size of stick with which a man was allowed to beat his wife. This rule is often said to have its origin in English common law. Wilton provides three examples where such a rule was cited in a legal decision, all of which are from American cases (pp. 41–42). None of these cases said that wife-beating was permissible, never mind what kind of rod was legal. He shows that in England, before the 17th century, a husband was legally allowed to “correct” his wife, but the



closest anyone has come to finding an English ruling on this issue is an opinion given by a judge in 1782, and Wilton says this was likely a stated opinion rather than a legal one (p. 42).

Neither the American rulings nor the English opinion uses the phrase “rule of thumb”, and the first published source to conflate the two—the supposed law and the phrase—doesn’t appear until 1976 (p. 43). These are just two of the myths Wilton takes pains to expose, but they give a fair idea of his methods, which are, appropriately, rigorously academic. However, there are some downsides to Wilton’s scholarly approach.

The first is that, for what is essentially a light-hearted book, it’s structurally stodgy, following the essay format of “I’ll tell you what I’m going to tell you; I’ll tell you; I’ll tell you what I’ve told you.” Wilton’s language is blessedly free of linguistic or other jargon, but too many chapters end with awkward summations such as “This is simply one of many linguistic legends with ethnic overtones. Others will be explored more fully in the next chapter.” (p. 153)

The second is that Wilton falls into a trap I believe is common to academics, journalists and other professionals: he distrusts the Internet. Throughout the book he provides examples of e-mailed chain letters that perpetuate urban legends, or comments on how quickly an untruth can be disseminated in the wired world.

But he fails to note that the Web can also be a valuable resource in uncovering all kinds of lies. Many of the myths Wilton mentions can also be

found marked “false” on Snopes.com or disproved in Wikipedia articles.

To be fair, in his introduction Wilton does say that Google searches can be useful when “you want to verify a juicy story” (p. 21). He is clearly not a Luddite. And he’s not wrong in asserting that Mark Twain’s dictum that a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes is nowadays, if anything, an understatement. Wilton might want to moderate his Internet-related comments just a tad.

Despite these drawbacks, Wilton has provided a readable weapon against those office bores who forward you e-mails about how “golf” stands for “Gentlemen Only, Ladies Forbidden” or your drunken friend who insists that Thomas Crapper’s toilet company is the source of one of our politer four-letter words. Any book that can stop endless and inaccurate pontificating is a boon to the world. ■■■

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