



How to Speak and Write Correctly

Joseph Devlin

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“Every person of intelligence should be able to use his mother tongue correctly. It only requires a little pains, a little care, a little study to enable one to do so, and the recompense is great.” The quote is from Joseph Devlin, the author of *How to Speak and Write Correctly*, one of the most enduring and useful guide books to effective communication. First published in 1910, it has been an unpretentious, valuable handbook for those who have neither the time nor the inclination for in-depth study of the elaborate intricacies of grammar and composition. Devlin covers the essentials in plain language with a focus on practical application for everyone. Topics include the three essentials of speech – purity, propriety and precision; the elements of grammar; analysis of sentence structure and rules for coherent sentence construction; proper punctuation and common punctuation errors; and the use of figurative language. The author gives significant space to the many idiomatic terms and expressions peculiar to the language and to the common errors made by even the finest writers and speakers. Many readers find the background material on the history of language interesting and instructive. Others find the tips on letter writing and sample letters helpful. Whether your involvement with speaking and writing is occasional or professional, the time spent with this accessible volume will yield insights and reminders that can’t help but improve your ability to communicate.

The author’s introduction... In the preparation of this little work the writer has kept one end in view, viz.: To make it serviceable for those for whom it is intended, that is, for those who have neither the time nor the opportunity, the learning nor the inclination, to peruse elaborate and abstruse treatises on Rhetoric, Grammar, and Composition. To them such works are as gold enclosed in chests of steel and locked beyond power of opening. This book has no pretension about it whatever,—it is neither a Manual of Rhetoric, expatiating on the dogmas of style, nor a Grammar full of arbitrary rules and exceptions. It is merely an effort to help ordinary, everyday people to express themselves in ordinary, everyday language, in a proper manner. Some broad rules are laid down, the observance of which will enable the reader to keep within the pale of propriety in oral and written language. Many idiomatic words and expressions, peculiar to the language, have been given, besides which a number of the common mistakes and pitfalls have been placed before the reader so that he may know and avoid them.

The writer has to acknowledge his indebtedness to no one in particular, but to all in general who have ever written on the subject.

The little book goes forth—a finger-post on the road of language pointing in the right direction. It is hoped that they who go according to its index will arrive at the goal of correct speaking and writing.

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