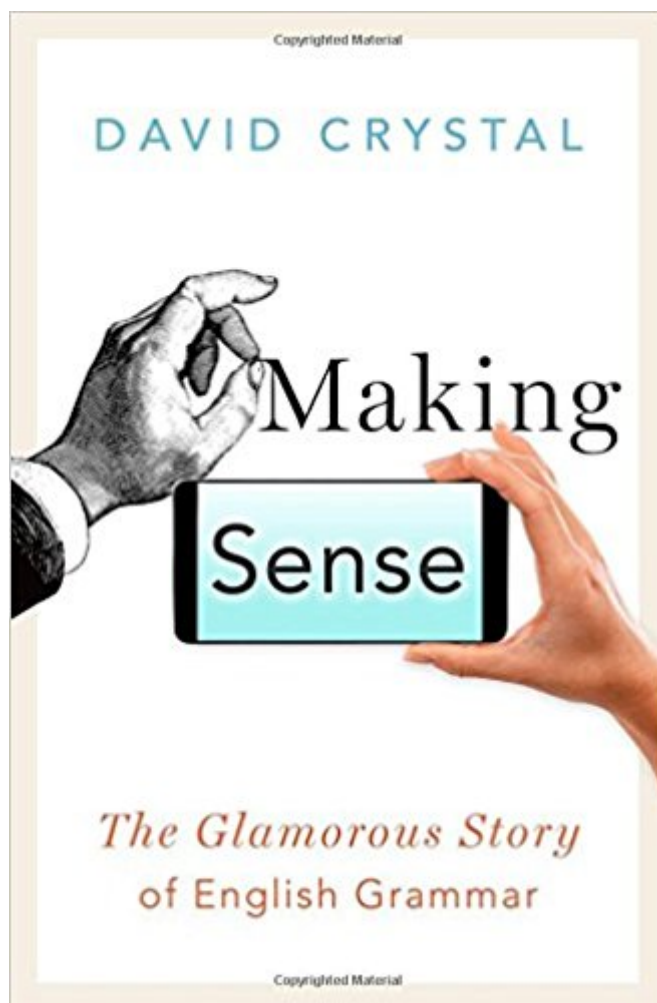


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Making Sense: The Glamorous Story Of English Grammar



Synopsis

In *Making Sense*, David Crystal confronts the foe of many: grammar. Once taught relentlessly to all students in the English-speaking world, grammar disappeared from most school curricula, so that terms such as "preposition" and "conjunction" now often confound children and adults alike.

Explaining the nuts and bolts of grammar presents a special challenge, because - far more than is the case with spelling and punctuation - the subject is burdened with a centuries-old history of educational practice that many will recall as anything but glamorous. One of the world's foremost authorities on the English language, Crystal sets out to rid grammar of its undeserved reputation as a dry and intimidating subject, pointing out how essential grammar is to clear and effective speech and writing. He moves briskly through the stages by which children acquire grammar, along the way demystifying grammar's rules and irregularities and showing us how to navigate its snares and pitfalls. He offers the fascinating history of grammar, explaining how it has evolved from the first grammarians in ancient Greece to our 21st century digital environment of blogging, emailing, and texting. Many find grammar to be a daunting subject, but in this breezy, entertaining book, Crystal proves that grammar doesn't need to make us uneasy-we can all make sense of how we make sense.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A celebrated historian of the English language takes us on an entertaining stroll through the history of our grammar--from the beginning to last week. Throughout, the author is a gifted, agile, and amusing teacher."--Kirkus "[David Crystal's] goal is not to flex his language knowledge, but to help

clean up all the mess that prescriptive grammar teaching has caused... Crystal is on point."--Popmatters "A surprisingly entertaining historical and scholarly tour of the mechanics of English... [Making Sense is a] masterly telling of why a living language's grammar, like its vocabulary, is not only unfinished, it is unfinishable. One could not have a more genial guide for such a tour."--New York Times Book Review

David Crystal is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor. He is the author of dozens of books on language, including The Oxford Dictionary of Original Shakespearean Pronunciation, The Story of English in 100 Words, Spell It Out: The Curious, Enthralling and Extraordinary Story of English Spelling, and Making a Point: The Persnickety Story of English Punctuation.

This book very effectively demolishes the traditional approach to English grammar, then replaces it with something less precise, and more difficult to grasp. That's unavoidable, since Crystal's emphasis is on the evolution of the study of grammar., which has changed radically over the last 50 years. He defines grammar as "the study of the way we bring words together in order to make sense". He traces the evolution of the study of grammar from the Greeks and Romans through the medieval period, up to the effort to codify English grammar in the early modern era. And here, Crystal argues, is where the study of English grammar went off track. The grammarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries based their analysis of English grammar on the workings of Latin grammar, and the two are very, very different. The result was a rules-based, highly artificial system which pulled against much of the underlying tendency of the language. In the 1960's and 1970's, this became clear, and the formal study of English grammar went out the window. Now, Crystal shows, it is coming back, but in a far less rigid and regular form. The book is far more down to earth, and readable, than this lightning tour would suggest. Crystal uses language acquisition in children (one child, to be precise, chatty little Suzie) to explore the structures of English grammar. He looks at the way grammar has been taught, and the wars between prescriptivists and descriptivists. He looks at how English functions in various contexts and various countries. It is all very interesting, at least to anyone who is interested in the way our language works. It does not leave the reader with a firm sense of where grammar stands at present, which is a bit of a disappointment to one who grew up in a rules-based grammatical world. But it does show the richness and subtlety of English grammar.

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