



How to Read a Word

Elizabeth Knowles

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Language is not fixed, but evolves over time, and exploring the routes taken by the words can lead us on fascinating journeys. *How to Read a Word*, written by the noted lexicographer Elizabeth Knowles, shows us how to explore the origins, associations, and evolution of words, focusing in particular on two points: what questions can be asked about a word? And how can they be answered?

How to Read a Word offers clear guidance on how to explore the various aspects of words, with chapters on pronunciation, spelling, date of first use, etymology, regional distribution, and meaning, all spiced with intriguing examples. For instance, Knowles offers a fascinating account of how the word "scientist" originated in a public debate in 1834, explains *The Economist's* jocular suggestion that "fish and chips" be spelled "ghoti and tchogs," and weighs in on the "nuclear-nuclear" controversy. Knowles also discusses the ever-expanding range of sources available to the curious word-hunter, from general and specialist dictionaries to websites devoted to areas of language, from Project Gutenberg and Google Book Search to various online newspaper archives. Knowles shows readers how to use this sometimes overwhelming mass of resources to get the best result, and how best to interpret the evidence retrieved. We learn, for example, how to use Google News to search the phrase "thin as a " as used today, uncovering hundreds of variants, from "thin as a supermodel" to "thin as a lizard."

Thought-provoking and practical, this guide provides readers with the essential tools to confidently interrogate the words by which we are surrounded. *How to Read a Word* is the perfect gift for anyone who is fascinated by the development and intricacies of the English language.

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