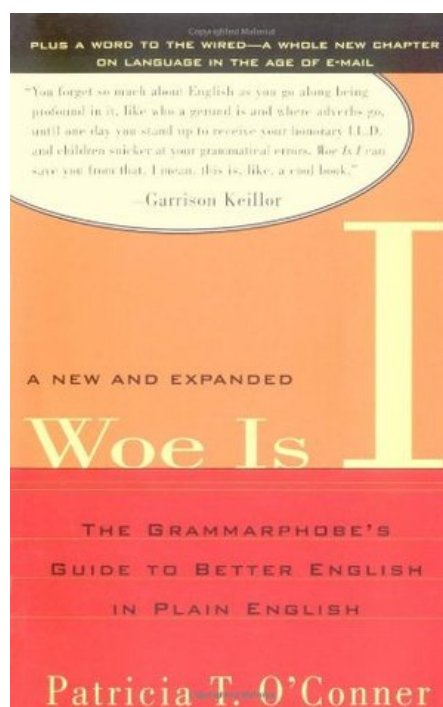




Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English

Patricia T. O'Conner

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English

Patricia T. O'Conner

Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English Patricia T. O'Conner

The bestselling grammar book has been updated and revised to include the latest and greatest on the basics and subtleties of English, and features a new chapter on the language of the Internet.

Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English Details

Date : Published June 29th 2004 by Riverhead Trade (first published 1996)

ISBN : 9781594480065

Author : Patricia T. O'Conner

Format : Paperback 240 pages

Genre : Language, Writing, Nonfiction, Reference, Humanities



[Download Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better Engli ...pdf](#)



[Read Online Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better Eng ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English Patricia T. O'Conner

From Reader Review Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English for online ebook

Hong Deng says

Woe Is I is an absolutely amazing and witty book that I would recommend to anyone who loves grammar or would like to better grasp grammar in an engaging way. After reading 3 of the numerous chapters in English class, I couldn't resist continue reading this book. The book is well written with 11 chapters that covered all the categories of grammar one could possibly perceive. After introducing its topic, each chapter proceeds with subtitles and paragraphs of explanations and special notes. I really enjoyed reading the examples that are given in the book; they cover all the prevalent mistakes that students and probably everyone make one time or the other. I have always been confused with topics such as when to use which and that and when to use me and I. The book offers very useful tricks: "If you find yourself automatically putting you and I after a preposition, try this: eliminate the other guy, leaving the tricky pronoun (I or me) all by itself." So if you are unsure whether it's "the odds were against you and I" or "the odds were against you and me", eliminate you. Thus, "the odds were against me" sounds more correct than "the odds were against I".

Ashley says

Not a fan. The author was off-putting - embracing some weird rules at times and then scoffing at others - and the book seemed to drag on f.o.r.e.v.e.r. I hate not finishing a book, so I pushed through. A lot of this book was on to correctly spell and use words, which while I guess it's technically considered grammar, felt more like reading a dictionary. I was so frustrated at some points, I wanted to use bad grammar and improper spellings just to spite the author.

If you want a better grammar-related book, I'd suggest you read "Eats Shoots and Leaves" because it actually is funny in some places (and I'm still a sucker for the panda joke).

Sally says

Time is not this book's friend. At the time of reading (2017-2018), many of the suggestions listed here are severely outdated. That aside, this book was heavily doused with the author's own opinions and interpretations of what the "correct" grammar should be. She also tried to present everything in a witty way, but it turned out to be more of a distraction. For example, she listed "passed away" as a cliché figure of speech that suggests the writer to be in denial of death, and to limit use of it. The entire book was disorganized and difficult to follow. That's why it was hard to get through. However, the last two chapters had some redeeming qualities as it provided some rules of writing that are still applicable today.

Andrew Blok says

I wish I had this book when I was teaching English. It's a simple and straightforward explanation of grammar: what you should keep, what you can pitch, and what's up for debate. While I didn't quite have the

level of grammarphobia the book is hoping to meet, it was an excellent reminder in a conversational tone. It even turned up some hidden gems: Did you know there's no n in restaurateur? Apparently it doesn't come from the word restaurant. Instead, both words share a root word. What a world!

My only complaint is that occasionally it dips its toes into the pedantry it's claiming to leave behind. It's only every once in a while, but it seemed it was there.

Dallas says

A fun, lighter version of Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style".

Ashley says

This book has been sitting on my TBR shelf for years—too many years, apparently, because in the meantime I've read all of this material a dozen different ways, and now I'm finding that there's nothing here beyond the very basics. Not that there's anything wrong with a good book on the basics if that's what you're looking for.

So in this case, go ahead and judge the book by its cover—or by the subtitle on its cover, to be more exact: "The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English." Now stop and ask yourself: Do I have a *fear* of grammar? Do I need to relearn the difference between *its* and *it's* or *which* and *that*? Do I confuse *affect* and *effect*? Do I need someone to explain to me why pronouns are helpful? (Really, I doubt anyone needs to read an entire paragraph of name repetition to grasp that pronouns are a good idea. We get it.)

Test #2: Consider this statement from the introduction: "Whatever your particular boo-boo, *Woe Is I* can help you fix it without hitting you over the head with a lot of technical jargon."

That sums up perfectly what you can expect from this book—no difficult grammatical terms and lots of attempts at clever wordplay, with varying degrees of success. (Typical chapter titles and subheads: "Whom Sweet Whom," "The Which Trials: That or Which?" and "Where There's a Will There's a Would" ... hmm. I did smile at "Metaphors Be With You," though—nice one.)

If you don't mind having your grammar mistakes described as boo-boos, this may very well be the book for you. Frankly, the content was far too basic and the approach way too "cute" for me.

rabbitprincess says

Bought this for my mum for Christmas, had to get up to free shipping and decided to buy a copy for myself! I read the second edition from the library last year, so here is my review for that one:

A very instructive book, in particular the chapter on word usage, which pointed out a couple of words that I myself use wrongly (or whose definitions I do not entirely understand). I shall make careful note of those when I come across them in my work.

The book as a whole is very good. The example sentences are fun, especially the ones that refer to characters

in literature. (Bertie and his aunts make a few appearances throughout the book.) I also liked the chapter on grammar rules that should just be allowed to die (e.g. not ending a sentence with a preposition, splitting infinitives).

One thing I did find grating at points was the tone. Sometimes the author came across as a bit condescending, or at least very vehement in defending her viewpoint, especially if she was discussing a grammar rule that could go either way, but SHE preferred one particular way. I can't remember any particular examples, but it was just in a couple of places and not really a widespread problem. I would still recommend this book for people who want to pick up some tricks regarding English grammar and usage.

Angela Blount says

Witty, sarcastic, whimsical, and shamelessly punny. I never imagined I could enjoy a walk through of proper grammar. It's a tedious trial for me to make myself ingest this subject, but a spoonful of sugar really does help the medicine go down.

While I was deeply annoyed to discover how little I was taught in high school English class, (and worse, what I was taught -incorrectly-) it was vindicating to re-learn principles in a light-handed and memorable way. I applaud the author for mercifully breaking down her chapters with clear examples, reasoning, and even the occasional rhyme to help things stick.

Lara Thompson says

I needed a quick study to formalize my grammar knowledge and this one was funny to boot. highly recommend

Theresa says

I was disappointed in this book. It doesn't begin to plumb the depths of language. I found the repeated parenthetical definitions of grammar basics annoying. The list of cliches to avoid was a cliché itself, and the commentary on each was useless.

I'll stick with Strunk & White for real help with grammar and style--It's a true staple of the writer's reference shelf.

If you want entertaining discussion on grammar, try Eats Shoots and Leaves instead.

Benjamin Rubenstein says

My writing instructor, Aaron Hamburger, would be so pissed to know that I, AFTER having earned my writing degree and thanks to this book, finally know what a comma splice is. Oh, woe is me.

Coryke says

There is an update to this post composed when I completed the book. Skip to the final paragraph for an engaging rant on her chapter on pronunciation.

Original Post:

I haven't finished this yet, but I find it to be subpar - even within the genre of popular grammar books.

In linguistics, there is a distinction pertaining to grammarians between prescriptivists (those who prescribe the rules) and descriptivists (self-explanatory). My BA is in linguistics and so I have a (perhaps) learned antipathy towards prescriptive grammar. Nevertheless, I have read several of these types of books - including, for instance, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. Consequently, I have several difficulties with this prescriptive grammar book, but probably not in the anticipated way.

The first difficulty I have with this book is the author's lack of explanation for several of these "rules". This takes two forms. 1) Where does the rule come from? Yes, I know I just ended a sentence with a preposition. Get over it. The point is that for some rules the origin goes a long way toward explaining how to properly use or flaunt the rule. And yes, I just split an infinitive. My, you're fussy with your attention to the grammar in a simple review. 2) The author has given several examples of the point she is trying to make, but there is no accompanying explanation of how the distinction works - just the two examples. I'm sure that this book's readers would appreciate the explanations. It seems that this would be one of the primary reasons for reading the book.

My second difficulty with this book is that the author seems to have an arbitrary set of criteria for determining whether an old rule remains in effect. Nothing more than personal preference seems to motivate her decision. I say this based on her lack of explicit explanation in many cases. So, for instance, split infinitives are now tolerable, but like "could've" remain off limits. This would be more tolerable if her explanation for this particular example were consistent with her other decisions. She is against "could've" because it could be confused with "could of" (obviously incorrect), but is not opposed to "who's" or "you're" which have sometimes easily misunderstood homonyms (whose and your, respectively). Perhaps the criterion here is one of established usage. But if that is the case, why is she opposed to "gonna", "wanna", "gotta", and "ain't". She labels these as "substandard", yet they are firmly established in colloquial usage. (I'm not suggesting that they should be used in an academic paper, but the author makes no such distinction, saying simply, "don't"). Another relevant example is her preaching that "they" and "their" are inappropriate gender-neutral singular pronouns. She insists that they must be reserved for plural antecedents. This seems to contradict the notion that these rules change - remember that split infinitives are now tolerable based in part on usage, but somehow "their" as a gender-neutral singular pronoun is not? What are the criteria?!? Your opinion? Oh how those prescriptivists pontificate! "They" and "their" have arisen as a response to the need to be sensitive to gender issues - rather than using "he" in most instances. The author seems to prefer a clumsy grammatical / lexical solution to an elegant repurposing of a pronoun for a new usage. In fact, as the author herself notes, "they" and "their" as a gender-neutral singular pronoun was used thus historically. The modern usage actually has precedent!

My final critique is harder to quantify (so to speak). There seems to be a sense that, "everybody should know" this, that, or the other, but it is reasonable if someone doesn't know the following thing. This perhaps is best exemplified by her technique of writing two sentences: one acceptable and the other not. She asks which "sounds right" and suggests that if you don't know, you have a tin ear. But in other places, she suggests that one should look up the difficulty in a dictionary (if appropriate for that problem), or should know that either is right depending on one's dialect. How she decides appears arbitrary.

The author's advice simply seems uneven at best and condescending at worst. It would also be more honest -

if that's the right conceptualization of the matter - if the author would not raise an issue, discuss it for half a page only to say that the full discussion comes later in the book. Why waste the half-page here then? This seems like a cheap way of making a longer book. If this is your goal, Paul Reiser had a much better technique. In *Couplehood*, Reiser writes something to the effect: let's begin on page 148 - I get credit for writing a longer book; you get credit for reading a longer book. Everybody wins. In the case of *Woe Is I*, only O'Conner wins. The reader is merely cheated.

UPDATE (31 July 2011)

Would that I could rate this lower. The only section that I found moderately decent was the section on "Verbal Abuse". The author goes through and helpfully offers several distinctions between word pairs that are often confusing. The rest of the book, however, lives up (or down) to the review I offered above.

The entire chapter titled "Spellbound" (chp. 6) was ridiculous. Much of the chapter listed a difficult word, only to list what was difficult about it. For example, of "appall" she writes, "Two p's, two l's." Really? Thank you. I couldn't tell by actually looking at the word immediately preceding your deft analysis. And exactly what are you bringing to the table beyond what I could find in any dictionary? There was no sense of why certain words are hard to spell or tips on how to group many of these words. She does offer a box on the "i before e" rule, but there is nothing in the box of any help to anyone who had ever heard the rule before.

Chapter 10, "Death Sentence: Do clichés deserve to die?", was much the same as chapter 6. Other than a pithy page and a half intro, this chapter comprised a listing of clichés with even pithier sentences that rarely explained the cliché. Usually, the comment was of no value. This chapter could not have taken long to write. This was clearly just an afternoon's worth of work tossing off whatever silly comment simply came into her head as she briefly passed over a list of clichés. This chapter felt like the author was too lazy to do any actual work.

Two more chapters deserve condemnation. Her chapter on grammatical rules, chapter 11, "The Living Dead: Let bygone rules be gone", was nearly offensive to me for many of the same reasons as I listed in the original portion of this review. I tend to agree that most of these rules need to be ignored. My problem with her explanations, however, is that she rarely offers one. Her reasoning is often just her opinion. For example, she condemns the rule which suggests that one should use "lighted" rather than "lit" as the past tense of "light". Her rationale for condemning this rule. "There's nothing wrong with using lit for the past tense of light." That's it? No explanation? No rationale? How about her condemnation of "I shall" over "I will"? Well, in this chapter, she refers her reader to page 69 (in this third edition). What does she explain on page 69? That there's more on page 217. This example may not be entirely fair as she does include some additional information on both of these referenced pages. Yet, so much of her book points elsewhere only to find a similarly slim explanation on the referenced page.

[Beginning of rant.]

The final chapter I acknowledge here is the most offensive of all. Her chapter titled "So to Speak: Talking points on pronunciation" (chp. 7), is disparaging of any other pronunciation other than her own. I actually took offense at many of her criticisms of pronunciation despite the fact that my own dialect usually calls for an identical pronunciation. I was offended not because she "corrected my pronunciation" but because she has the audacity to suggest that there is a "right way" and several "wrong ways" to pronounce English. I am not suggesting that there are no standards whatsoever, but her myopic view of English pronunciation also had a tinge of cultural-egocentrism. Her rant about how to pronounce "asked" flatly criticized the "axted" pronunciation. This is an acceptable pronunciation among many speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Are they not speaking English? Are they not speaking it correctly? That certainly was O'Conner's implication. Is it because they (whomever is comprised by this "they") do not in the same way that you do, Ms. O'Connor? I could go on and on about other issues here, but it seems pretty clear that O'Connor acknowledges acceptable variations only if they are used in the UK. Variations within the United States are unacceptable. She has the holy grail of dialect pronunciation. By the way, Ms. O'Connor - if your

dialect does, in fact, match my own - it's called "SWINE".* Be proud of that. I'd like to introduce Ms. O'Connor to the 21st century wherein there is a modicum of tolerance for "the other" - here including different pronunciations. Even while the differences between dialects may be collapsing due to TV, radio, the internet, etc, some regional differences remain. And we in the 21st century tend to enjoy them rather than condemn them. Oh, and one last thing, if you are going to describe a way of pronunciation for a series of words, it might be helpful to provide a guide to your pronunciation explanations because you clearly were not using the International Phonetic Alphabet. Is that "ee" pronounced /i/ as in "bee" or /e/ as in "bay"? I don't know because you thought your little system was sufficient. [End of rant.]

* SWINE refers to Standard White Inland Northern English. It's a particularly widespread dialect in the United States.

Jenna says

Woe is I is a simple, easy to read guide to understanding basic grammar. While it is not as concise as the (I think more popular) Elements of Style, you can read it like a novel. The book cites humorous examples and engages the reader without patronizing them. I put this in my log because I feel that this sort of book is important for the education of any college bound student. So many students show up in freshmen composition classes not understanding the difference between 'its' and 'it's.' If you are in college, you must understand how to correctly use a semicolon. Grammar adds and changes meanings to words. In the age of text messaging, the importance of grammar in the written word must be preserved. This book guides you through grammar rules in a concise and simple way.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

This book is delicious. Some books are just just delicious. You read this book and you fall in love once again with your second language, English, and know you really owe a lot to that language in shaping who you are today. I love this book. It has caused me to fall in love once again with English grammar and proper English usage. This is one book I would say it is a must-have for anybody who has respect for English as their own language, and indeed, I am. I have taken down lots of notes from the book. I might as well hand copy the whole book.

It is a good book that comes handy when one is wondering:

None of them is OR None of them are ?
Should I use "that" or "which" here?

The nice thing is, it is all done in such humour that makes you want to read more and more. Reading grammar with enjoyment. However, I never understood why people should "prioritize" but they still are not allowed to "permanentize". Shouldn't we "uniformize"? ?

Shannon says

Do you find yourself mixing up your it's and its? Do you know the difference between all ready and already? Do you ever blindly throw commas into sentences, hoping at least one will be correct?

Woe is I solves these grammar woes and more. Patricia O'Conner clears the jargon and mystery surrounding grammar. Using simple language, she reviews pronouns, numbers, possessives, verbs, punctuation, clichés, word usage, dangles, bygone rules, and e-mail etiquette. Her book is essentially a lengthy list of the dos and don'ts of grammar, covering the common mistakes almost everyone makes.

But that's also a negative of Woe is I. More experienced writers may tire of what seems blindingly obvious to them. O'Connor doesn't go over the technical details of grammar, such as the difference between gerunds and infinitives. People looking for a comprehensive grammar guide should perhaps look elsewhere. People looking for a light grammar guide are in the right spot.

I am a little dismayed, however, over one big mistake in the book. O'Conner repeatedly claims that apostrophes are used to form the plurals of years, abbreviations, and letters. The letters part is correct (as a way to distinguish between A's and the word As). But all the style guides (which set the standard in language usage) I've read state that letters are the only exception. Years and abbreviations need only an "s," not an apostrophe and an "s."

Other than that mistake, given the right audience, Woe is I is a good resource.

Carol. says

I'll admit it: I feel grammar and punctuation-challenged, so I didn't groan when I saw this was assigned for my composition class. However, after making my way through most of the book, I have to say I'm disappointed. "National Bestseller" claims my edition. Really?! *Really!*? This must be one of the those books that people who don't read very much buy and throw on the shelf to show how well-read they are (or wish they were).

While it covers grammar, punctuation and word choice, the tone is breezy, the format outline-friendly, and there are enough sidebars and lists to make a "Dummies" book blush, so it feels more like a 'safe' introduction than a truly helpful text. If you look for rules, they're hidden in chatty examples of just how tricky rules can be. If you look for examples of how to apply the rules, you only get three or four before it's on to the next one. Thus, I'm not sure it is truly helpful for the reader who wants to improve their grammar in a long-lasting way. Too much of the writing is cluttered with silly humor that distracts from the point. For instance, one aside in the section on verb tense states, "that odd crackling noise you hear is the sound of a sentence short-circuiting!" Well, either that or my temper.

I found the format annoying and unhelpful towards actual comprehension. There's a tendency towards long lists in each section. One section on spelling has a long list of hard-to-spell words, so that the reader doesn't get caught pants down by spell-check. Great, I guess. But if I actually want help, I won't get it because I memorized a list of tough words--it'll be from using a dictionary. And yawn for readability, no matter how chatty your definition of "recede" is ("Three e's, and none of them together. *Marc expects hemlines to **recede** next year (For hints about spelling "seedy" -sounding words, see above.)*

As O'Conner uses just a couple of examples (almost never more than three) to illustrate her point/rule, the pace is keep moving, but at the expense of greater comprehension. I wouldn't have minded a few exercises or "test your comprehension" questions at the end of each chapter.

The second half on word choices is even more mixed in terms of usefulness. One chapter on "Verbal Abuse" will help dictionary-adverse users better understand a number of common words and phrases that are used incorrectly, such as "decimate," "hopefully," "irony," "literally," "lay/lie," "assume/presume," etc. It's a section for those who feel unsure of the meaning of the words they use. There is a chapter on common clichés that should be avoided, called, "Death Sentence: Do Cliches Deserve to Die?" I admire the intention, but sometimes corporate-speak is that way for a reason, and changing it up too much risks the readers/listeners thinking you don't speak their language or aren't responding to their ideas. Likewise, the chapter with ten tips on "How to Say What You Mean," would work best for a beginning writer. In fact, I think many of the tips would be contraindicated for a fiction writer.

Surprisingly, most of the chapter on punctuation was familiar to me. Thanks, ninth grade English!

Overall, a useful book if you feel very unsure about your writing skills, need to write semi-articulate in your profession and don't want to bother with a lot of hard-core rules and practice. I doubt that it will be helpful to a lot of advanced writers who want to improve their grammar.

Pat W Coffey says

This book is for anyone who writes. I mean students, teachers, professionals, and above all writers. Everyone sings the praises of Strunk and White's Elements of Style as the writer's handbook. I have been a faithful user of Harcourt Brace Handbook of English, but this book written by Ms. O'Conner is the easiest yet. If you want to know what is the passive voice, what is the verb "to be," or how to use lie, lay, lain, laid. This is the book for you. If you want to know what is the current usage of a verb, adjective, and adverbs, this is a must read.

Writers this book should be next to you when you re-write. Students should never be without it. Anyone who enjoys the evolution of the American English Language will revel in it.

Thanks,

Patricia T. O'Conner for all the effort you put in to make language easier to understand.

Jerome Baladad says

After a certain period, writers have to seek out help to update themselves on the rules on grammar, changing conventions, metaphor formulation, correct spellings, plus tips and brief materials to make them the best word-smiths in the English language. This becomes a necessity as a lot of distractions are taking place that eat much of the span of attention of writers and readers in English. This book has provided that need (to be updated and be reminded gently) to me, certainly. I didn't feel like I'm being harassed nor intimidated by an insensitive editor who seems to take abnormal pleasure in correcting mistakes I commit every now and then. There were no direct nor subtle remarks about writers who use English as their second or third language whenever they write.

I've experienced being advised by editors or those who teach English as a second language about the usual faults or mistakes (they expect) I would make just because English is a second language to me (actually it's my third). I don't know why I sense these editors are just making things difficult for me. Or as I assume how things are: is it because I notice these editors are using English as a tool to dominate others (whom they think) are inferior to them (or perhaps for some other reason)? Or maybe they're ensuring that writers who use English as a second language won't get the bigger share of better-paid writing assignments from

publishers found all over the world?

In reading O'Conner's book, I didn't feel like she's talking to someone whom she feels is her inferior (at least in certain aspects, specifically on the English language). Mind you: a lot of those so-called English language native speakers have made it their petty business to police the use of correct form of English out there. In the process they intimidate and alienate those who prefer to learn, improve on their abilities, enjoy the fun of the language, and become among the best English-language users based outside of these countries who seem to perpetuate these strange notions on the 'English-native-speaker/s' who are thought to be using fault-free English.

Ms. O'Connor seems to like to sincerely help writers (who are patient enough to improve themselves). Refer to this book when you have questions on how-to-use English in writing, and take all the time to get reviewed on what works properly and appropriately about the English language in its written form. There's really no point in getting intimidated or even feel a little-bit anxious about being corrected when you are caught reading this book. Believe me, I've known a lot of other native born English speakers and writers who mangle the language at their convenience. For example: read the Bible and you'll find passages that are so-confounding and simply un-clearly written. I can only wish English-language users take all the time to re-learn and understand what this book is probably-all about (i.e., as a valuable tool in clarifying issues that come about whenever we engage in a very alive language such as English in our daily, becoming-more-and-more-complicated undertakings).

Hope says

Woe is I was written to help those who are intimidated by correct grammar usage.

Although the book is meant for novices, it was just as enjoyable to someone like me who knows quite a lot about English. Because I appreciate beautiful, precise language, I enjoy an occasional refresher course in how to use it. So I skimmed over the sections on rules I know well, and focused on the ones that give me problems.

I discovered I've been using parameter interchangeably with perimeter, which is not the same thing. Also, minuscule is spelled with a "u" and not an "i". I am always puzzled by the use of "graduated" without a pronoun, but O'Conner clears up that confusion on p. 110.

This helpful little book, which is written with plenty of tips and examples (and a good dose of dry humor), would be an excellent resource for beginning writers.

Dolly says

I never thought I'd be a fan of books about grammar, but I've really enjoyed them lately. Perhaps it's my own feelings of inadequacy regarding some of the more nuanced rules; perhaps it's my opportunity to relearn something I've forgotten along the way. But this is a good book, and it's a handy reference guide for your desktop.

Although it's not nearly as zealous, revolutionary, or funny as "Eats, Shoots & Leaves," this book is a witty and comprehensive review of the most common errors and questions in writing.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to improve her grammar. (I almost used 'their grammar' as usual, but then I got a teensy uneasy feeling and looked it up. Sheesh! The only drawback, I fear, is that now I will be more paranoid about my grammatical errors. Perhaps ignorance is bliss.... (or is that one of the overused cliches in chapter 8?!?)
