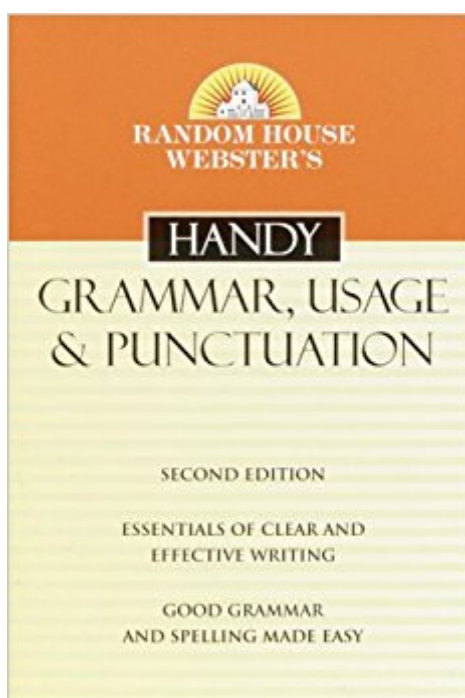


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I have reviewed several writing, grammar, style and usage guides while preparing guidelines for a magazine I edit. This may become my first choice reference."Handy Grammar, Usage and Punctuation" is quite comparable to Merriam Webster's "Guide to Punctuation and Style." They are similar in size and price and cover similar material. The differences that I expect between the two

publishers' reference works are stronger here than in other competing titles: M-W is stilted and more detailed, RH more casual and readable. I'll use them both. M-W's punctuation rules are more detailed, more formal and generally more complete. Random House's are briefer and clearer. This, from RH about the exclamation point, is not suggested in M-W: "Avoid overusing exclamation points in writing. They are effective only when used sparingly." M-W devotes more than a page to the exclamation point and notes things that RH does not in its one-third page. Random House includes an excellent review of basic grammar which will probably prove to be more useful than the well regarded grammar book that I bought. "Handy Grammar" also includes spelling rules and lists of prefixes, suffixes and roots, and commonly misspelled words. M-W does not address spelling. One of the most helpful sections will be the eleven-page section on avoiding insensitive and offensive language. We of the geriatric set may not agree with all of it, but we'd best not ignore it. M-W does not address it. The section is not as complete as that in American Heritage's "Book of English Usage" (one of the finest language references that I own.) The usage section fits nicely between Bernstein's "Careful Writer" and M-W's "Concise Dictionary of English Usage." Bernstein distinguishes "can" and "may" in one sentence while "Concise Dictionary" has an essay of perhaps 200 or 300 words. Random House wraps it up nicely in a brief paragraph. I expect that, more often than not, I will reach for this book before going for M-W's "Guide to Punctuation and Style," Bernstein, Fowler, Strunk & White, American Heritage's "Book of English Usage" or other references that I keep nearby. But I may reach for something else as well. How about a larger and more comprehensive version, Randy?

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