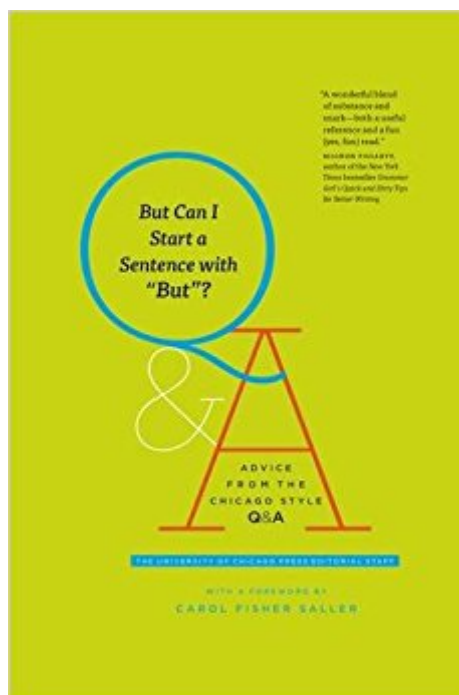




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# But Can I Start A Sentence With "But"?: Advice From The Chicago Style Q&A (Chicago Guides To Writing, Editing, And Publishing)



## Synopsis

Q. Is it “happy medium” or “happy median”? My author writes: “We would all be much better served as stewards of finite public funds if we could find that happy median where trust reigns supreme.” Thanks! A. The idiom is “happy medium,” but I like the image of commuters taking refuge from road rage on the happy median. Q. How do I write a title of a song in the body of the work (caps, bold, underline, italics, etc.)? Example: The Zombies “She’s Not There” looped in his head. A. Noooo! Now that song is looping in my head (“but it’s too late to say you’re sorry.”). Use quotation marks. Thanks a lot. Every month, tens of thousands of self-declared word nerds converge upon a single site: The Chicago Manual of Style Online’s Q&A. There the Manual’s editors open the mailbag and tackle readers’ questions on topics ranging from abbreviation to word division to how to reform that coworker who still insists on two spaces between sentences. Champions of common sense, the editors offer smart, direct, and occasionally tongue-in-cheek responses that have guided writers and settled arguments for more than fifteen years. But Can I Start a Sentence with “But”? brings together the best of the Chicago Style Q&A. Curated from years of entries, it features some of the most popular and hotly debated rulings and also recovers old favorites long buried in the archives. Questions touch on myriad matters of editorial style—capitalization, punctuation, alphabetizing, special characters—as well as grammar, usage, and beyond (“How do I spell out the sound of a scream?”). A foreword by Carol Fisher Saller, the Q&A’s longtime editor, takes readers through the history of the Q&A and addresses its reputation for mischief. (“It’s not that we set out to be cheeky,” she writes.) Taken together, the questions and answers offer insights into some of the most common issues that face anyone who works with words. They’re also a comforting reminder that even the best writer or editor needs a little help—and humor—sometimes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A wonderful blend of substance and snark—both a useful reference and a fun (yes, fun) read." (Mignon Fogarty, author of the New York Times bestseller *Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing*) "What impresses more than the witty replies is the blessed sanity throughout the answers. Many conventions of publishing are described in the 1,026 pages of the 16th edition, but the editors recognize that no manual, however comprehensive, can supply answers to every conceivable situation. So Saller and her colleagues advise: Don't hogtie yourself in some intricate and complicated procedure; try to extrapolate from an existing convention; arrive at something clear and reasonable; carry it out consistently through the text." (John E. McIntyre, *Baltimore Sun*) "These are solid maxims of the editing trade, yet they are unknown to some professionals who assume there is always a Right Way and who sacrifice sense and compromise clarity to avoid deviating from a rule, however trivial. So it's reassuring and constructive to see editorial flexibility upheld and indeed stressed by so august an arbiter." (Sentence First)

Carol Fisher Saller is editor of the *Chicago Manual of Style Online's* Q&A and writes the Editor's Corner for the *Chicago Manual of Style's* Shop Talk blog. She occasionally writes about language and writing in academe for *Lingua Franca* at the Chronicle of Higher Education and is the author of several books for children, most recently the young adult novel *Eddie's War*.

"Would you set your hair on fire if CMOS said you should?" That concluding rhetorical question in answer to a query aptly exemplifies what this book is all about: style. The CMOS is not some inflexible mandate, slavishly imposing its rules upon users. Seemingly not-so-common common sense is the rule of the day. As one who has just barely *survived*—and with great difficulty, I

should add "But" to overcome the fact that a preposition must not necessarily be in pre-position (Really?! But the word literally means . . . ), this book is a refreshing bucket of cold water over the head in the winter. Well, maybe not THAT refreshing. In any case, as one with no formal education in copyediting or journalism, and one who constantly self-edits, this book ably provides guidance with succinctness and wit. The index provides a handy subject reference. And I found myself laughing out loud a number of times; my favorite answer is to the question on pages 30-31. For those reading this review, critique is welcome. Did I use en dashes inappropriately? Too often? (Oh wait; those are hyphens.) How about the em dashes? Did I use ellipses improperly? Is it wrong to use a question mark and an exclamation point (even in a parenthetical remark) in a book review of a book on queries regarding the CMOS? Anything else? I'm not sure if I've fully digested the material in this book . . .

I'm a book editor who knows Chicago style intimately. It's refreshing to read questions from other editors (and answers from the real pros in this field). Just reinforces that I'm doing a lot of things right.

Bought as gift - daughter loves it.

a must read

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