

The Describer's Dictionary
Author: David Grambs
Publisher: W.W. Norton & Company
409 pages
Reference/Writers

Review for Writers ©:

A series of reviews of writers aids and critiques of book that will help writers with their craft

Indispensible! A Book That Can't Be Replaced by Online Searches

Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, multi award-winning novelist, poet and author of the HowToDoItFrugally series of books for writers.

Roget's Thesaurus and I never much got along. When I am sure there is a better word for something than the one in my head, it never agrees. When I can't think of the word I want or one even close, it isn't any help at all. So I didn't hold out much hope for *The Describer's Dictionary*, when my fellow author, JayCe Crawford recommended it.

The reason I like this reference so much is that if I don't find exactly what I'm looking for, I may very well find something I like better. Further, this is the kind of reference you can actually read. Open this book to any chapter (segment) on, say, "hair." You'll find several quotes about "hair" that are entertaining and may stir your own creative juices before you even get to the part that lists adjectives for all kinds of—ahem—tresses, locks, strands, shocks, hanks, coils, tendrils, curls, ringlets or swirls.

My favorite quotation was this:

“The skinny girl with fiery, chopped-off red hair swaggered inside, and stopped dead still, her hands cocked on her hips. Her face was flat, and rather impertinent...”

Truman Capote, *Other voices, Other Rooms*

As you can see, this offering gives an author an idea of how the best might have handled the same problem she faces. Many are mightily amusing.

So, if you don't just keep reading instead of handling the problem at hand with the first word you fall in love with, you might eventually find adjectives for some 96 possible “hair situations” and one of them may be even better.

Grambs also usually divides several each segment so you'll get substitute nouns but also possible adjectives. So for “oiled hair” you will find, “greased, slicked, slick, pomaded, brilliantined, plastered, pasted.”

Choose one. Or let one speak to you so you can come up with a simile or metaphor.

When I get into a writing snit, it's often this book to my rescue. And, by the way, I've found no free article with an online search—absolutely nothing—that can replace the inspiration and wisdom in this book.

(Carolyn Howard-Johnson is an award-winning writers. Her credits include the Pasadena Star News, Home Décor Buyer , the Glendale News-Press and Good Housekeeping Magazine. Her novel, "This Is The Place," is about a young writer who uses her skill to find the courage she needs to follow her own true North. She is also the author of a series of help books for writers including *The Frugal Editor* (www.budurl.com/TheFrugalEditor).