

English, varieties of

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Written English includes two broad categories: standard and nonstandard. Standard English is used in business, industry, government, education, and all professions. It has rigorous and precise criteria for capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and usage. Nonstandard English does not conform to such criteria; it is often regional in origin, or it reflects the special usages of a particular ethnic or social group. As a result, although nonstandard English may be vigorous and colorful, its usefulness as a means of communication is limited to certain contexts and to people already familiar and comfortable with it in those contexts. It rarely appears in printed material except for special effect. Nonstandard English is characterized by inexact or inconsistent **capitalization**, **punctuation**, **spelling**, diction, and **usage** choices.

Colloquial English

Colloquial English is spoken English or writing that uses words and expressions common to casual conversation. (“We need to get him up to speed.”) Colloquial English is appropriate to some kinds of writing (personal letters, notes, some **e-mail**) but not to most workplace writing.

Dialectal English

Dialectal English is a social or regional variety of the language that is comprehensible to people of that social group or region but may be incomprehensible to outsiders. Dialect, which is usually nonstandard English, involves distinct **word choice**, grammatical forms, and pronunciations. For example, residents of southern Louisiana who descended from French colonists speak a dialect often referred to as Cajun.

Localisms

A localism is a regional wording or phrasing. For example, a large sandwich on a long split roll is known in various regions of the United States as a *sub*, *hero*, *hoagie*, *grinder*, *poor boy*, and *torpedo*. Localisms normally should be avoided in workplace writing, unless the writer is confident that all readers will be familiar with a term.

Slang

Slang is an informal vocabulary composed of **figures of speech** and colorful words used in humorous or extravagant ways. There is no objective test for slang, and many standard words are given slang applications. For