

GRAMMAR

British and American English: expressions

LEVEL

Intermediate (B2)

NUMBER

EN_B2_3032G

LANGUAGE

English



Learning outcomes

- I can identify differences between British and American English.
- I can use a variety of British English and American expressions accurately in speech and in writing.



Warm-up

Read the American English words below. **Complete** the activity in the yellow box.
Option: complete this activity **in breakout rooms** and **compare** answers afterwards.



1 sweater

6 trash

2 pants

7 French fries

3 apartment

8 first floor

4 elevator

9 fall

5 sidewalk

10 cookie

1. Do you know what these words are in **British English**?
2. Do you know any other things that have different words in **BrE** and **AmE**?



Complete the sentences

Choose the correct word in each sentence, using the given variety of English.

- 1 I'm starving. Could I have a (biscuit / cookie) please? - **BrE**
- 2 Why don't you put your suitcase in the (boot / trunk) of the car? - **BrE**
- 3 People (queue / stand in line) on the platform while waiting for the train. - **AmE**
- 4 Please do not leave your candy wrappers on the desk. Put them in the (dustbin / trashcan). - **AmE**
- 5 My sister forgot to send our (mum / mom) a birthday card so she had to phone her instead. - **AmE**

BrE vs AmE: could vs can

Read the statements. **Complete** the red boxes.

1

“

Could I please have a cup of
coffee?
(BrE)

2

“

Can I get a coffee?
(AmE)

Could is **more/less**
formal and polite
than *can*.

American
expressions tend to
be **more/less** direct
than British ones.

What do such
differences in
expressions suggest
about British and
American culture?





BrE vs AmE: the verb get

- In BrE the three forms are: **get** → **got** → **got**.
 - In BrE it's common to use **have** + **got** in the present tense instead of **to have**. This is more informal.
- In AmE the three forms of the verb are: **get** → **got** → **gotten**

BrE
have + got

Static situation (necessity/possession)

She's **got** a lot of work to do this evening.

I've **got** three younger siblings.

AmE
gotten (past participle)

Dynamic situation (becoming/acquiring)

The weather **has gotten** warmer this week.

I've **gotten** a new laptop.

AmE or BrE?

Answer the questions, using the given variation of English. Where there is an option, choose one. **Use** the examples to help you.

*Do you have
change for a
hundred?*
- **AmE**

*Are you free
this evening?*
- **BrE**

Sorry, I only have...

*What can I get
you today?
/
What would
you like?*
- **AmE / BrE**

*Have you
gotten any
more tattoos?*
- **AmE**

Well, I've got a few things to do, but...

Can I get...

BrE vs AmE: the verb get

Read the example sentences. Complete the blue box.

Did you **get to see** your favourite singer at the concert?

I **got to see** a lot of wild boars when I went camping with my family last weekend.

- **get + to-infinitive** is commonly used in **AmE** to refer to achievements, meaning *manage to* or *be able to*.
- This usage is less common in **BrE**.
- **Write a sentence** into the chat, using *get + to-infinitive*.



American or British English?



Ok, I think I'm pretty much all set. Have you got the tickets?

Yes, I've got them here. **Shall we?**

What's the **context** of this exchange?
What does the highlighted phrase mean?

Is it more **formal** or **informal**, here?

Is it **AmE** or **BrE**?

BrE vs AmE: the present perfect

American English speakers use the **present perfect tense** (*has/have + past participle*) far less than British English speakers. In American English, it's common to use the **past simple tense** as an alternative in situations when the present perfect would usually be used in British English.

BrE	AmE
John feels nauseous because he has eaten too much.	John feels nauseous because he ate too much.
I can't find my phone. Have you seen it anywhere?	I can't find my phone. Did you see it anywhere?
It's already 10 o'clock. Have you done your homework?	It's already 10 o'clock. Did you do your homework?

BrE vs AmE: the present perfect

In **BrE**, the **present perfect tense** is used predominantly with adverbs such as **yet, already, just, today** and **recently**. The same adverbs are used with the **past simple tense** in **AmE**.

Have you finished your project **yet**?



Did you finish your project **yet**?

Oh wait, have I **already** asked that?



Oh wait, did I **already** ask that?

I've **just** submitted the application.



I **just** submitted the application.

Have you bought a house **recently**?



Did you buy a house **recently**?



Complete the sentences

Complete the sentences using the words in brackets.

1 **AmE:** _____ (you, finish) that new series yet?

2 **BrE:** How many cars _____ (you, have)?

3 **AmE:** So, did you _____ (get, see) any sights while you were on the business trip?

4 **BrE:** _____ (you, find) a new place already! Great to hear.

5 **AmE:** The weather _____ (get) very cold in the last few days.

BrE: use of auxiliaries and modals



Lucy

Are you coming to the party with us?

I **might do**, but I doubt it...



Graham

- In BrE, when **replying to questions**, the auxiliary **do** is often used as a substitute for a lexical verb after the modal verb.



AmE: use of auxiliaries and modals



Sarah

Are you coming to the party with us?

I **might**, but I doubt it.



James

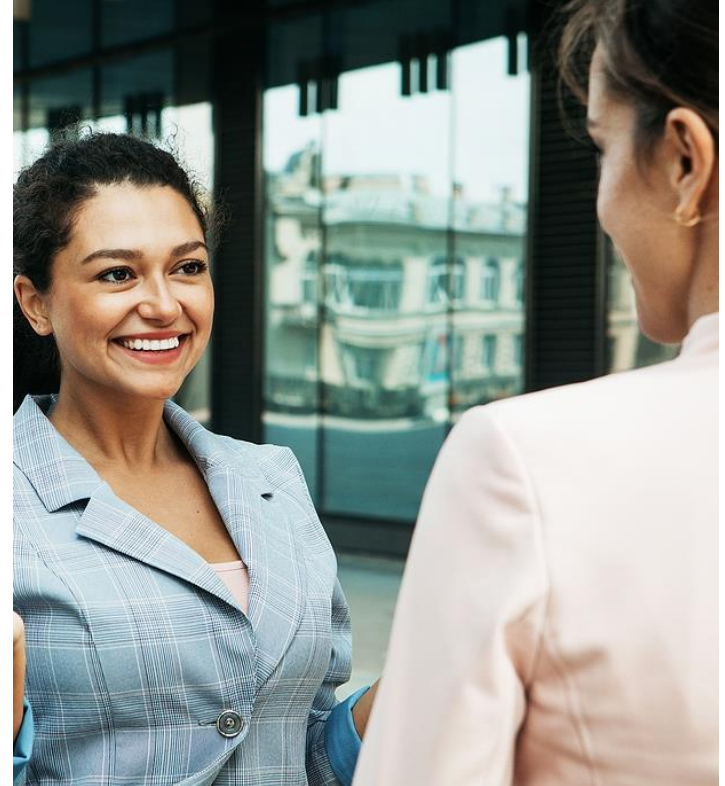
- In AmE, we **leave out** the auxiliary **do** after the modal verb in responses to questions.



BrE vs AmE: use of auxiliaries and modals

Answer these questions in a British way, with the auxiliary *do*.

- 1 Do you want to go swimming with us at 5 am tomorrow?
- 2 Are you drinking with us on this beautiful Sunday evening?
- 3 Are you going to drive over the speed limit if you are late?
- 4 Will you empty the bin in my room?
- 5 Are you joining us for the farewell party of my best friend?





End of the lesson

Idiom

Smooth sailing

Meaning: We can use this expression when something goes well, or to wish somebody well.

Example: The worst of the journey is over – it should be smooth sailing from here.



Additional practice



Match the corresponding idioms

The main difference between **British** and **American idioms** stems from the use of a particular key word in a given phrase that is more common to one culture or the other.

Match the corresponding idioms. **Guess** which column is AmE and which column is BrE.

1 Sweep under the carpet

2 See the wood for the trees

3 Put a spanner in the works

4 A drop in the ocean

5 Lie of the land

a A drop in the bucket/A spit in the ocean

b Throw a monkey wrench (into a situation)

c Lay of the land

d See the forest for the trees

e Sweep under the rug



Sometimes an idiom says it best

Complete the writing activity below.

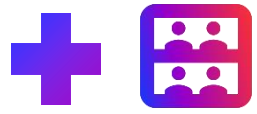
Your teacher will assign each of you an idiom from the previous slide.

Use it as the **title of a short text** about a personal experience.

Share your text with the class.



What are idioms?



An idiom is a group of words. Each of the words means one thing when used separately (literal meaning) and something else when the words are all put together (figurative meaning).

it takes two to
tango

a penny for
your thoughts

every cloud has
a silver lining

burn the
midnight oil

cry over spilt
milk

raining cats
and dogs

Above are some commonly used idioms. Do you know the **meaning** of them?

Option: complete this activity **in breakout rooms**. How many did your group guess correctly?



Answer key

P.3: 1. jumper 2. trousers 3. flat 4. lift 5. pavement 6. rubbish 7. chips 8. ground floor 9. autumn 10. biscuit

P.4: 1. biscuit 2. boot 3. stand in line 4. trashcan 5. mom

P.5: Could is more polite and formal than can; American expressions tend to be more direct than British ones

P.12: 1. Did you finish 2. Have you got 3. Did you get to see 4. You've found 5. The weather has gotten

P.19: AmE: right-hand column BrE: left-hand column



Summary

The verb *to get*:

- In BrE the three forms are: get; got; got. It's common to use *have* + *got* in the present tense instead of *to have*. This is more informal. It indicates a static situation: *I've got three younger siblings.*
- In AmE the three forms of the verb are: get; got; gotten. It indicates a dynamic situation: *The weather has gotten warmer this week.*

The verb *to get*:

- **get** + **to-infinitive** is commonly used in **AmE** to refer to achievements, meaning *manage to* or *be able to*.
- This usage is less common in **BrE**.
- *Did you get to see your favourite singer at the concert?*

The present perfect:

- **American English speakers** use the **present perfect tense** (*has/have* + *past participle*) far less than British English speakers. In AmE, it's common to use the **past simple tense** as an alternative in situations when the present perfect would usually be used in BrE.
- BrE: *He feels nauseous because he's eaten too much.* AmE: *He feels nauseous because he ate too much.*

The present perfect:

- In **BrE**, the **present perfect tense** is used predominantly with adverbs such as **yet**, **already**, **just**, **today** and **recently**. The same adverbs are used with the **past simple tense** in **AmE**.
- BrE: *Have you finished your project yet?* AmE: *did you finish your project yet?*



Summary

Auxiliaries and modals:

- In BrE, when **replying to questions**, the auxiliary **do** is often used as a substitute for a lexical verb after the modal verb. *Are you coming tonight? – I **might do**.*
- In AmE, we **leave out** the auxiliary **do** after the modal verb in responses to questions. *Are you coming tonight? – I might, but I doubt it.*



Vocabulary

sidewalk

boot

dustbin

all set

Shall we?

