

GRAMMAR

American and British English: spelling

LEVEL

Upper-Intermediate
(B2)

NUMBER

EN_B2_2042G

LANGUAGE

English

Learning outcomes

- I can identify some key differences in spelling between American and British English.
- I can apply this knowledge to spell a range of words accurately in both variations.



Warm-up

Answer the questions below.

Even though they are the same language, British English and American English are different in many ways. Which English are you more familiar with?

Do you know which English Lingoda lessons are based on?





Brainstorm

Do you know the difference between British English and American English?

1. In breakout rooms or together as a class, take **3 minutes** to **write** down as many different words that you know in British and American English, such as *flat* vs. *apartment*.
2. **Share** your words with the rest of the class!





BrE vs. AmE

- Depending on where you study English, your pronunciation, spelling, and word choices can be different. **BrE** is an abbreviation for *British English* and **AmE** is for *American English*.



I went to the theatre last night.

I went to the theater last night.





Categorise

Categorise the words into one of the two blue boxes.

1

colour

2

realize

3

center

4

apologise

5

analyze

BrE

AmE

BrE vs. AmE: *-our* vs. *-or* and *-ise* vs. *-ize*

1. **Read** the words.
2. **Review** the information in the blue boxes.

favourite



favorite

to realise



to realize

- In **British English**, words ending in **-our** are preferred while the **u** is dropped from the word in **American English**.

- **American English** uses the **-ize** spelling at the end of words while those same words are spelt with the **-ise** ending in **British English**.



Transform the word

Transform the words spelt in British English to American English.

1 to analyse



to analyze

2 humour



3 to utilise



4 rumour



5 to apologise



6 neighbour



-re vs. -er and ending in a vowel with *double l*

- Words that end in **-re** in **British English** often have those letters **reversed** when spelt in **American English**.
- In **American English**, the **double l** is dropped when adding suffixes to verbs that end in the letter **l**.
 - There is an exception to this rule. The following words are spelt with **double l** in **AmE** and not in **BrE**: ***skillful, willful, installment, enrollment***.

BrE	AmE
centre	center
litre	liter
travelling	traveling
cancelled	canceled



Categorise

1. **Read** the words.
2. **Categorise** them into one of the two pink boxes.



1

counselor

2

fuelled

3

installment

4

fibre

5

theater

6

skillful

7

metre

8

meager

BrE

AmE

-ce vs. -se

- While the **British** use the **-ce** ending nouns, **Americans** generally prefer **-se**.
- The spelling depends on whether the word is a **noun** or a **verb**.

BrE		AmE
licence (n)	→	license
license (v)	→	license
offence	→	offense
practice (n)	→	practice
practise (v)	→	practice



American English *dropped e*

Review the information below.

- There are **three cases** when **Americans** will **drop an e** and the **British** will keep it.

Case	BrE	AmE
verb + <i>-ment</i>	judgement	judgment
adjective with <i>-able</i>	sizeable	sizable
gerund	ageing	aging



How would Americans spell these words?

Transform the BrE spellings to AmE spellings.

1 abridgement



abridgment

2 pretence



3 defence



4 blameable



5 likeable



6 acknowledgement





I've **got** a headache.
I've **gotten** a
headache.

I **learnt** a lot.
I **learned** a lot.

In British English, the past participle of **get** is **got**. In American English, it is **gotten**.

In British English, it is more common to end some past tense verbs with '**t**'. In American English, it is more common to end these same verbs in '**ed**'.



Transform the words

Transform the words below into the **past tense**. **Write** them in BrE or AmE.

Note: these are *alternative* past tense and past participle endings in both AmE and BrE.

1 dream (BrE)



dreamt

2 leap (BrE)



3 dwell (AmE)



4 burn (BrE)



5 creep (AmE)



6 smell (AmE)





Discuss

Answer the questions below.

Does your country have language differences between regions?



Do you prefer British English or American English? Why?



End of the lesson

Idiom

to get someone's drift

Meaning: to understand what someone has said

Example: I didn't get her drift—does she want to stay or not?



Additional practice



Transform the words

Transform the AmE words on the left to BrE.

1 analyze



analyse

2 practice (n.)



3 practice (v.)



4 skillful



5 liter



6 color





Writing

1. **Read** the words below.
2. Are they **AmE** or **BrE**? How do you know?
3. Take **5** minutes to **write** down sentences using as many of the words as possible.

realise

travelled

favourite

likeable





Discuss

Answer the questions below.

**British English or
American English—which
do you have a more
difficult time
understanding?**



**Where does your Lingoda
teacher come from?
Where have most of your
English teachers come
from?**



Answer key

P.6: *BrE:* 1, 4

AmE: 2, 3, 5

P.8:

2.) humor

3.) utilize

4.) rumor

5.) apologize

6.) neighbor

P.10: *BrE:* 2, 4, 7

AmE: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8

P.13: 2.) pretense

3.) defense

4.) blamable

5.) likable

6.) acknowledgment

P.15: 2.) leapt 3.) dwelled 4.) burnt 5.) crept 6.) smelled



Answer key

P.20: 2.) practice 3.) practise 4.) skilful 5.) litre 6.) colour



Summary

-our vs. -or and -ise vs. -ize

- In **British English**, words ending in **-our** are preferred while the **u** is dropped from the word in **American English**, e.g. *favourite* – *favorite*
- **American English** uses the **-ize** spelling at the end of words while those same words are spelt with the **-ise** ending in **British English**, e.g. *to realise* – *to realize*

-re vs. -er and ending in a vowel with double l

- Words that end in **-re** in British English often have those letters reversed in American English, e.g. *centre* – *center*
- In American English, the **double l** is dropped when adding suffixes to verbs that end in the letter **l**, e.g. *travelling* – *traveling*

-ce vs. -se and dropped e

- While the **British** use the **-ce** ending nouns, **Americans** generally prefer **-se**. The spelling depends on whether the word is a **noun** or a **verb**, e.g. *licence* – *license*
- There are **three cases** when **Americans** will **drop an e** and the **British** will keep it: verb + *ment*, e.g. *judgement* – *judgment*, adjective with *able*, e.g. *sizeable* – *sizable*, gerund, e.g. *ageing* – *aging*

Verb differences

- In British English, the past participle of **get** is **got**. In American English, it is **gotten**.
- In British English, it is more common to end some past tense verbs with **'t'**. In American English, it is more common to end these same verbs in **'ed'**, e.g. *learnt* – *learned*



Vocabulary

to utilise

meagre

sizeable

abridgement

blameable



Notes

