

British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) are the two most prominent varieties of the English language. Although they are mutually intelligible, they have distinct differences in spelling, vocabulary, pronunciation, and, to a lesser extent, grammar. These variations are the result of centuries of separate development after the British colonization of North America began in the 17th century.

Spelling

The most noticeable differences between BrE and AmE are in spelling. These variations were largely standardized in the U.S. by Noah Webster, who aimed to simplify spellings and create a distinct American identity.

- **-our vs. -or:** BrE words often end in "-our," while AmE simplifies this to "-or."
 - **BrE:** colour, favour, labour
 - **AmE:** color, favor, labor
- **-re vs. -er:** BrE often uses "-re" at the end of words derived from French, while AmE reverses this to "-er."
 - **BrE:** centre, theatre, metre
 - **AmE:** center, theater, meter
- **-ise vs. -ize:** While both are accepted in BrE (especially in academic contexts), AmE exclusively uses "-ize."
 - **BrE:** organise, apologise, realise
 - **AmE:** organize, apologize, realize
- **Doubled Consonants:** BrE often doubles the final consonant of a verb before adding a suffix, while AmE does not.
 - **BrE:** travelling, cancelled, modelled
 - **AmE:** traveling, canceled, modeled

Vocabulary

There are thousands of words that are different between the two varieties, especially for everyday objects and concepts.

British English American English Meaning

flat	apartment	A residential unit in a building.
lift	elevator	A mechanical device for moving between floors.
lorry	truck	A large vehicle for transporting goods.
chips	French fries	Sliced, deep-fried potatoes.
crisps	potato chips	Thinly sliced, fried potato snacks.
trousers	pants	A garment covering the legs.
jumper	sweater	A knitted garment worn on the upper body.
pavement	sidewalk	A path for pedestrians beside a road.
boot	trunk	The storage compartment in a car.
petrol	gasoline	Fuel for a car's engine.

Pronunciation

The most significant differences in pronunciation are related to accent and are often a key part of national identity.

- **Rhoticity:** This is a major distinction. Most American accents are **rhotic**, meaning the "r" sound is pronounced after a vowel (as in *car* or *hard*). Standard British English (Received Pronunciation) is **non-rhotic**, meaning the "r" sound is dropped in this position.
- **Vowel Sounds:** There are numerous differences in vowel sounds, such as the vowel in words like "*dance*" or "*path*." In BrE, these are often pronounced with a long 'ah' sound, while in AmE they use a flat 'a' sound.
- **Stress:** The stress pattern of some words can differ. For example, "*advertisement*" is typically pronounced "ad-VER-tise-ment" in BrE and "AD-ver-tise-ment" in AmE.

Grammar

Grammatical differences are less frequent but are still notable.

- **Past Tense Verbs:** BrE often uses irregular past participles (e.g., *learnt*, *burnt*, *dreamt*), while AmE prefers the regular "-ed" endings (e.g., *learned*, *burned*, *dreamed*).
- **Collective Nouns:** In BrE, collective nouns (e.g., *team*, *government*) can be treated as either singular or plural.
 - **BrE:** "The team **are** winning." or "The team **is** winning."
 - **AmE:** "The team **is** winning." (exclusively singular)
- **Prepositions:** There are subtle but consistent differences in the use of prepositions.
 - **BrE:** "at the weekend," "write to a friend"
 - **AmE:** "on the weekend," "write a friend"
- **Present Perfect vs. Simple Past:** BrE tends to use the present perfect tense for recent actions (e.g., "I've just eaten"), while AmE often uses the simple past (e.g., "I just ate").

In summary, while the core of the language remains the same, these variations reflect two distinct linguistic traditions that have evolved independently over centuries