

- While there are certainly many more varieties of English, American and British English are the two varieties that are taught in most ESL/EFL programs. Generally, it is agreed that no one version is "correct" however, there are certainly preferences in use
- If you decide that you want to use American English spellings then be consistent in your spelling.

Some differences...

- **Use of the Present Perfect**
- In British English the present perfect is used to express an action that has occurred in the recent past that has an effect on the present moment. For example:
 - I've lost my key. Can you help me look for it?
- In American English the following is also possible:
 - I lost my key. Can you help me look for it?
- In British English the above would be considered incorrect. However, both forms are generally accepted in standard American English. Other differences involving the use of the present perfect in British English and simple past in American English include **already, just and yet**.
- British English:
 - I've just had lunch
 - I've already seen that film
 - Have you finished your homework yet?
- American English:
 - I just had lunch OR I've just had lunch
 - I've already seen that film OR I already saw that film.
 - Have your finished your homework yet? OR Did you finish your homework yet?

- **Possession**

- There are two forms to express possession in English.
Have or Have got
- Do you have a car?
Have you got a car?
He hasn't got any friends.
He doesn't have any friends.
She has a beautiful new home.
She's got a beautiful new home.
- While both forms are correct (and accepted in both British and American English), **have got (have you got, he hasn't got, etc.)** is generally the preferred form in **British English** while most speakers of American English employ the have (do you have, he doesn't have etc.)

- **The Verb to Get**
- The past participle of the verb get is **gotten** in American English.
- Example He's gotten much better at playing tennis.
- British English - He's got much better at playing tennis.

- **Vocabulary**
- Probably the major differences between British and American English lies in the choice of vocabulary. Some words mean different things in the two varieties for example:
- Mean: (American English - angry, bad humored, British English - not generous)
- Rubber: (American English - condom, British English - tool used to erase pencil markings)
- There are many more examples. If there is a difference in usage, your dictionary will note the different meanings in its definition of the term. Many vocabulary items are also used in one form and not in the other.
- American English - hood
British English - bonnet
- American English – truck (camion/autocarro)
British English - lorry

- **BRITISH ENGLISH**

- **Buildings in General**

- flat
- ground floor
- lift

- **AMERICAN ENGLISH**

- **Buildings in General**

- apartment
- first floor
- elevator

- **Household Furniture**

- Cupboard (armadio)
- curtains
- dresser (for plates, dishes) (credenza)
- roller blind (tendina avvolgibile)

- **Household Furniture**

- Closet
- drapes
- Hutch (mentre in British E. significa “gabbia/capanna/cass
a”)
- shade

- **In the Kitchen**

- baking tray (Teglia per dolci)
- bread bin
- clothes peg (molletta)
- Cooker (fornello)
- Hoover
- napkin / serviette
- tea towel (strofinaccio)
- tin opener (apriscatole)
- wash up
- waste bin (cestino)

- **In the Kitchen**

- cookie sheet
- bread box
- clothes pin
- stove
- vacuum cleaner
- napkin
- dish towel
- can opener
- do the dishes
- waste basket

- **Fruits and vegetables**
- aubergine
- Beetroot
(barbabietola)
- courgette
- **Meat**
- minced meat
(macinato/ragù)

- **Fruits and vegetables**
- eggplant
- beet
- zucchini
- **Meat**
- ground meat
(hamburger)

- **Snacks**
- biscuits
- chips
- sweets
- sweetshop

- **Snacks**
- cookies
- French fries
- candies
- candy store

- **Near Roads**

- car park
- Crossroads (incrocio)
- cycle path
- Diversion (deviazione)
- lay by
- Motorway (autostrada)
- pavement
- pedestrian / zebra crossing (strisce pedonali)
- Roundabout (rotonda)
- slip road (bretella/raccordo autostradale)
- Subway (sottopassaggio)
- Underground (metropolitana)

- **Shops / Stores**

- bookshop
- chemist's (farmacia)
- fishmonger's (pescivendolo)
- greengrocer's
- grocer's (alimentari)
- jeweller's
- newsagent's

- **Near Roads**

- parking lot
- intersection
- bicycle route
- detour
- rest area
- freeway / highway
- sidewalk
- crosswalk
- traffic circle
- on ramp
- underpass
- subway

- **Shops / Stores**

- bookstore
- drugstore / pharmacy
- fishstore
- fruit and vegetable stand
- grocery store
- jewelry store
- news dealer

- **Clothes**
- Braces (bretelle)
- dinner jacket (smoking)
- dressing gown (vestaglia)
- Jumper (pullover/maglione)
- trousers
- Vest (canottiera)
- Waistcoat (gilet)
- **Shoes**
- Thongs (infradito)
- football boots (scarpette da calcio)
- Plimsolls (scarpe da ginnastica in tela)
- Trainers (scarpe da ginnastica)

- **Clothes**
- suspenders
- tuxedo
- robe
- sweater
- pants
- undershirt
- vest
- **Shoes**
- flip flops
- soccer shoes
- sneakers
- sneakers / tennis shoes

- **Miscellaneous**

- autumn
- fortnight / two weeks
- high street
- holiday
- interval
- petrol
- petrol / filling station
- polling day
- postbox / letterbox
- postman
- postcode
- queue
- rubber
- Rubbish (spazzatura)
- secondary school
- term
- university
- wardrobe

- **Miscellaneous**

- fall
- two weeks
- main street
- vacation
- intermission
- gas
- gas station
- election day
- mailbox
- mailman
- zip code
- line
- eraser
- garbage
- high school
- semester
- university / college
- closet

- **Prepositions**

- There are also a few differences in preposition use including the following:
- American English - on the weekend
British English - at the weekend
- American English - on a team
British English - in a team
- American English - please write me soon
British English - please write **to** me soon

- **Past Simple/Past Participles**

- The following verbs have two acceptable forms of the past simple/past participle in both American and British English, however, the irregular form is generally more common in British English (the first form of the two) and the regular form is more common to American English.

- Burn
Burnt OR burned

- Dream
dreamt OR dreamed

- Lean
leant OR leaned

- Learn
learnt OR learned

- Smell
smelt OR smelled

- Spell

- In general, where there are differences between British English (BE) and American English (AE) spelling, it can be said that American English has the more economical and phonetic spelling. Unnecessary letters are left out and words are spelled how they sound.
- An obvious example is the omission in AE of the letter **u** in words such as **color**, **neighbor**, **honor** etc. Compare also the AE words **traveling**, **jewelry** and **program** with their BE counterparts **travelling**, **jewellery** and **programme**. However, this rule does not always apply. For example, you would expect **skilful** to be the AE spelling and **skillful** the BE spelling, but unfortunately you would be wrong!

Spelling differences (1)

Here are some general differences between British and American spellings:

- Words ending in -or (American) -our (British) color, colour/ humor, humour, flavor, flavour/ neighbor/neighbour, Harbor/ Harbour, etc.
- Words ending in -ize (American) -ise (British) recognize/recognise, patronize/patronise, realize/realise, organization/organisation, emphasize/emphasise etc.
- Americans generally change -re endings to -er : Theatre / Theater, metre/meter, centre/center

Spelling differences (2)

- **The double letter versus single letter difference:** "-ll-" in the Commonwealth is replaced with a single "-l-" in the USA. Same with t.

Ex: Travelling/traveling, targetting, targeting

- **The "further" vs. "farther" difference**
- Americans use the word *farther* when describing distance, e.g. "Let's not drive any farther today". Whereas when describing a process, the word *further* is used, e.g. "Let's not take this matter any further today". In the Commonwealth, only the word *further* is used in all instances.

Spelling (3)

- **Ae vs e**

Certain scientific words are spelled with an "ae" in British English but only an "e" in American English.

Ex: Archaeology/Archeology, Gynaecology/Gynecology, Haematology/Hematology, Paediatric/Pediatric, Anaesthesia/Anesthesia

Spelling (4)

- **The "no reason at all" differences**

Then there are many words that are just spelled differently for no discernible reason!

Ex: Br. Grey Am. Gray

Br. Gaol Am. Jail

Br. Programme Am. Program

Br. Tyre(pneumatico) Am. Tire

So, what's the rule?

The best way to make sure that you are being consistent in your spelling is to use the spell check on your word processor (if you are using the computer of course) and choose which variety of English you would like. As you can see, there are really very few differences between standard British English and standard American English. However, the largest difference is probably that of the choice of vocabulary and pronunciation.

Pronunciation

- The way words are pronounced in America differs quite substantially from the Commonwealth. This goes to accents, of course, which differ vastly even WITHIN America AND within individual Commonwealth countries. However, there are some common elements that definitely distinguish Americans from Commonwealthers

Pronunciation (2)

- **The Rounded A**
- People in the Commonwealth pronounce many of their **A** in a rounded way. That is, their mouths have a rounded shape. American's pronounce some **A** this way, such as "park" and "car", but most a's have a flatter sound, like the a in "hat".
- Example: the "a" in the word "ask" is pronounced like the a in "hat" in America but in the Commonwealth the "a" in "ask" is pronounced more like the "a" in "car" or "park".

Pron. (3)

- **T's versus D's**
- Commonwealthers pronounce their t sounds with precision. **Americans tend to either drop their t completely, or replace them with a d.** Here are some examples:
 - Mountain/Moun'in
 - Daughter/Dawder,
 - Letter/ledder
 - Norton/Nor'in

Pron. (4)

- **The “ing” form**
- **Americans do not pronounce the "g" in many words ending "ing".**

Examples "Running/Runnin’

Walking/Walkin’

Riding/Ridin’

Driving/ Drivin’

- **Emphasis**

- Where the emphasis in words is placed varies between Americans and Commonwealthers as well. Americans tend to place the emphasis in most words on the first syllable. In the Commonwealth, more often it is on the second syllable. This can make the word sound VERY differently.
- USA: **CON**-troversy/ Br. Con-**TROV**-ersy
- **USA: A**-ddress/ Br.**A-DDRESS**
- **USA: IS**-sue/Br. Is-**SUE**

Stress

- Americans and Britons agree in most cases on where a word is stressed. For example, everyone says **pencil** and **relax**, **cinema** and **consider**, but the following words from the table are stressed differently in the two dialects:
 - **ballet** - BE : **ballet** - AE
 - **address** - BE : **ad**dress * - AE
 - **garage** - BE : **garage** - AE
 - **ad**vertisement - BE : **ad**vertisement - AE

Zero and numbers

- **Zero** itself is a much more common word in AE than in BE, where **nought** is more widespread. Americans are likely to say the number 453 as *four hundred fifty three*, whereas in Britain it would almost always be said *four hundred **and** fifty three*

Some examples...

- AE - I'll try and visit you **on the weekend**.
BE - I'll try to visit you **at the weekend**.
- AE - Please **write me** when you arrive.
BE - Please **write to me** when you arrive.
- AE - **Call me** as soon as you get there.
BE - **Ring me (phone me)** as soon as you get there.
- AE - Most everyone has a telephone and a **refrigerator** these days.
BE - Almost everyone has a telephone and a **fridge** these days.
- AE - The soccer team won **two to nothing** (2-0).
BE - The soccer team won **two-nil (2-0)**.
- AE - The secretary said, "Mr. Clinton will see you soon."
BE - The secretary said: "Mr Clinton will see you soon."The difference in the last sentence is in the

Dates

- **British English**
- In British English the **day is usually put before the month**. If you wish, you can add the ending of the ordinal number. The preposition **of** before the month is usually dropped. You can put a comma before the year, but this is not common anymore in British English.
- Example: **5(th) (of) October(,) 2004**

- **American English**
- In American English **the month is usually put before the day.** If you wish, you can put the definite article before the day. **It is common to write a comma before the year.**
- Example: October (the) 5(th), 2004

Months and Days of the Week

- The months and days of the week are always capitalised. If you don't want to write the whole words, you can use the abbreviations. In British English, abbreviations are usually written without full stops (Apr), full stops are normal, however, in American English (Apr.).

- Note, however, that 5/10/04 usually means 5 October 2004 in British English and May 10, 2004 in American English. To avoid any possible confusion, you should spell out the month or use the abbreviation.

Exercise 1

- 1) English is my favourite subject at school.
British English
American English
- 2) Have you seen Dick's new truck?
British English
American English
- 3) The park is in the center of our town.
British English
American English
- 4) Mr Barnes, our caretaker, found my key.
British English
American English
- 5) I like French fries, they're very crispy.
British English
American English
- 6) Have you seen the latest movie?
British English
American English
- 7) I've passed this test. So I'll get my driving licence very soon.
British English
American English
- 8) The accident happened because the blue car didn't stop at the traffic lights.
British English
American English
- 9) Tom told me to get off the Underground at Tower Hill.
British English
American English
- 10) They have moved into a semi-detached house.
British English
American English

- **American English** is spoken in the USA, Canada and many Pacific countries where America has exerted an influence.
- **British English** is spoken throughout the British Commonwealth of 54 countries, some of the most notable being the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, with Canada being the exception. Although part of the Commonwealth, Canadians tend to speak a mixture of American and British English due to that country's proximity to the USA (although they spell the British way).

Famous differences

- Legal driving age: 16 (USA), 18 (17 in Britain)
- Legal drinking age: 21 (USA), 18 (Commonwealth)
- Road distance measured in : Miles (USA), Kilometers (Commonwealth)
- Distance measured in: Feet, yards (USA), Meters (Comm.)
- Liquid measured in: Pints, gallons, Fluid Oz (a fluid ounce- The fluid ounce is distinct from the ounce, which measures mass) (USA), Liters (Comm.).
- Temperature measured in : Fahrenheit (USA), Celsius (Comm)
- Driving on the: right (USA), Left (Comm)
- Most popular Winter sports: Football, hockey (USA), Soccer, Rugby (Comm)
- Most popular Summer sports: Baseball (USA), Cricket (Comm)