

British and American English

American English differs from British English not only in pronunciation but also in vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

Pronunciation

- When there is a specific American pronunciation it is labelled *NAmE* and given after the British pronunciation. For example, as there is no /ɒ/ vowel in American English, **dog** is shown as /dɒg; NAmE dɔːg/.
- While represented by the same symbols in the dictionary, some vowels and diphthongs differ in quality between British and American English.
- The three British English diphthongs /tə eə ʊə/ are described in American English as a simple vowel followed by /r/—so *near* is /nɪr/, *hair* is /her/ and *pure* is /pjʊr/.
- In American English an *r* in the spelling of a word is always accompanied by an /r/ in the pronunciation. In British English an /r/ is only pronounced before a vowel.
- The learner should pay particular attention to the widespread tapping of /t/ between vowels in American English, as described on page R31.

Vocabulary

The dictionary tells you which words are used only in American English or have different meanings in British and American English, for example **cookie**, **elevator**, **trunk**.

Spelling

The dictionary shows different spellings in British and American English. The following differences are particularly common:

- In verbs that end in *-l* and are not stressed on the final syllable, in American English the *l* is not doubled in the *-ing* form and the past participle: **cancelling**; (US) **canceling**.
- Words that end in *-tre* are spelt *-ter* in American English: **centre**; (US) **center**.
- Words that end in *-our* are usually spelt *-or* in American English: **colour**; (US) **color**.
- Words that end in *-ogue* are often spelt *-og* in American English: **dialogue**; (US) **dialog**.
- In British English many verbs can be spelt with either *-ize* or *-ise*. In American English only the spelling with *-ize* is possible: **realize**, **-ise**; (US) **realize**.

Grammar

Present perfect/Simple past

In British English **just** is usually used with the present perfect. In American English the simple past is usually used.

- *I've just seen her.* (BrE)
- *I just saw her.* (NAmE)

In American English the simple past can also be used with **already** and **yet**, although the present perfect is often preferred:

- *Have you heard the news yet?* (BrE and NAmE)
- *Did you hear the news yet?* (NAmE)

Have/have got

In British English it is possible to use **have got** or **have** to express the idea of possession. In American English only **have** can be used in questions and negative sentences:

- *They have/have got two computers.* (BrE and NAmE)
- *Have you got a computer? Yes, I have.* (BrE)
- *Do you have a computer? Yes, I do.* (BrE and NAmE)

Get/gotten

In American English the past participle of **get** is **gotten**:

- *Your English has got better.* (BrE)
- *Your English has gotten better.* (NAmE)

Prepositions and adverbs

Some prepositions and adverbs are used differently in British and American English, for example **stay at home** (BrE); **stay home** (NAmE).

Form of the adverb

In informal American English the adverb form ending in *-ly* is often not used:

- *He looked at me really strangely.* (BrE)
- *He looked at me really strange.* (NAmE)

Shall

Shall is not used instead of **will** in American English for the first person singular of the future:

- *I shall/will be here tomorrow.* (BrE)
- *I will be here tomorrow.* (NAmE)

Nor is it used in polite offers:

- *Shall I open the window?* (BrE)
- *Should I open the window?* (NAmE)

Irregular verbs

In British English the past simple and past participle of many verbs can be formed with *-ed* or *-t*, for example **burned/burnt**. In American English the forms ending in *-ed* are usually used:

- *They burned/burnt the documents.* (BrE)
- *They burned the documents.* (NAmE)

When the past participle is used as an adjective, British English prefers the *-t* form, whereas in American English the *-ed* form is preferred, with the exception of **burnt**:

- *a spoilt child* (BrE)
- *a spoiled child* (NAmE)
- *burnt toast* (BrE and NAmE)

Go/Come and...

In these expressions **and** is often omitted in American English:

- *Go and take a look outside.* (BrE)
- *Go take a look outside.* (NAmE)

On the phone

- *Hello, is that David?* (BrE)
- *Hello, is this David?* (NAmE)