



## MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the distinctions and similarities between American and British English, highlighting their historical development, grammatical variations, and lexical differences. While both forms share a common linguistic heritage, American English has evolved significantly due to the influence of diverse immigrant groups and cultural factors, resulting in unique vocabulary and usage patterns. The article examines key contrasts in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, including the treatment of collective nouns, the use of tenses, and informal speech patterns. Despite these variations, both American and British English are mutually intelligible and regarded as correct within their respective educational systems. This analysis underscores the importance of understanding these differences for learners and educators, emphasizing that both forms of English enrich global communication and cultural exchange.*

### INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that American English (variously abbreviated AmE, AE, Am Eng and US Eng) is the most wide-spread variation of the English language and serves as an official language in countries like the USA, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and even South Africa. It encompasses various dialects, making it crucial for learners of the language. The history of American English dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries when a wave of immigrants arrived in America, including the French, Spaniards, Germans, Dutch, Norwegians, and even Russians. However, the majority came from England and the British Isles, including Scotland and Wales, where they spoke English. Even at that time, English was not uniform across different social classes; there were significant variations in the speech of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the peasants.

The new population of America needed a common way to communicate, and they chose the language spoken by the majority—English. However, it wasn't the aristocratic or royal English; it was the language of the bourgeoisie and peasants, who often lacked formal education. Over time, Americans had different goals and experiences compared to people in

England, living in a distinct natural environment that influenced their language. As a result, American English evolved, developing alongside British English and other variations of the language [1].

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

In general, the majority of words in British and American English convey the same meanings. For instance, the words "apple" and "chair" denote the same objects in both versions of the language. Typically, speakers of American English and British English can communicate effectively and understand each other's vocabulary without significant difficulty. However, there are numerous instances where the same object or concept is identified by different terms depending on whether one is using American or British English. A well-known example of this distinction is that British English uses the term "football" to describe the sport that is referred to as "soccer" in the United States. Conversely, the sport that Americans call "football" is referred to by the British as "American football." This situation is not unique; there are many other examples where different words are employed to describe the same thing. Here are just a few more examples of two different words being used to refer to the same thing:

- **French fries/fries** (American) vs. **chips** (British)
- **Cotton candy** (American) vs. **candyfloss** (British)
- **Apartment** (American) vs. **flat** (British)
- **Garbage** (American) vs. **rubbish** (British)
- **Cookie** (American) vs. **biscuit** (British)
- **Green thumb** (American) vs. **green fingers** (British)
- **Parking lot** (American) vs. **car park** (British)
- **Pants** (American) vs. **trousers** (British)
- **Windshield** (American) vs. **windscreen** (British)

The spelling systems of American and British English have many similarities, but there are also notable differences. Below is a summary of some of the main contrasts:

#### 1. -ize vs. -ise endings:

- American English typically opts for the "-ize" ending in words like "realize," "organize."
- British English often favors the "-ise" ending, seen in "realise," "organise."

#### 2. -or vs. -our endings:

- American English uses "-or" in words like "color," "favor."
- British English employs "-our," resulting in "colour," "favour."

#### 3. Compounds:

- American English often compounds words (e.g., "railroad").
- British English sometimes maintains separate words or uses hyphens (e.g., "rail way").

#### 4. Double consonants in verbs:

- American English doesn't double the consonant in verbs like "travel," "cancel" when adding suffixes (e.g., "traveled," "canceled").
- British English often doubles the consonant in such cases: "travelled," "cancelled."

#### 5. Doubling of final consonants:

- American English tends to avoid doubling final consonants when adding suffixes (e.g., "traveler").
- British English may double final consonants: "traveller."

**6. Words with different vowel spellings:**

- American English: "center," "fiber," "theater."
- British English: "centre," "fibre," "theatre."

**7. -ogue vs. -og endings:**

- American English uses "catalog," "dialog."
- British English prefers "catalogue," "dialogue."

**8. Silent letters:**

- British English retains silent letters in words like "centre," "plough," which may be dropped in American English ("center," "plow").

**9. Hyphenation:**

- American English tends to use hyphens less frequently than British English, especially in compound words like "cooperate," "re-elect."

**10. -er vs. -re endings:**

- American English: "meter," "center," "theater."
- British English: "metre," "centre," "theatre."

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Most people are unaware of the significant distinctions between the American and British forms of English when they are learning or using it. Even though the original "correct" grammar originated in old British English, grammar is always evolving, and American influence in the media and online is bringing many new grammatical usages from across the pond.

Although the rules for the American and British educational systems differ based on the type of English being taught, both forms of language structure can be regarded as correct. Spelling and punctuation variations abound, but they have less of an impact on spoken language than variations in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation do.

**Tense**

In British English, the present perfect tense is used a lot more than in American English. Present perfect tense is used to describe a past event that has present consequences, but in American English, the simple past tense is normally used.

**For example:**

- "Robert feels sick, he has eaten too much" - British English
- "Robert feels sick, he ate too much" - American English
- "I have got to leave now" - British English
- "I have to leave now" - American English
- "I have already seen that movie" - British English
- "I already saw that movie" - American English
- "You've missed Sarah. She's just left." - British English
- "You missed Sarah. She just left" - American English

**Informal Speech**

When the British would say "going to" for example, Americans may say "gonna" and this informal shortened word is becoming more popular with many English speakers.

- "Are you going to come later?" - British English
- "Are you gonna come later?" - American English

### Verbs

Some verbs that are regular in British English are irregular in American English.

#### For example:

- "She wet her hair before washing it" - British English
- "She wetted her hair before washing it" - American English
- "All the shoes fit in to the shelves" - British English
- "All the shoes fitted in to the shelves" - American English

With verbs of perception such as senses are used independently in American English whereas British English speakers will use 'can' or 'could'.

#### For example:

- "I could smell the flowers" - British English
- "I smelled the flowers" - American English
- "I could hear the birds outside" - British English
- "I heard the birds outside" - American English
- "I can see the beach" - British English
- "I see the beach" - American English

In British English, many past simple verbs can end in 'ed' or in 't', but in American English the ending of 'ed' is normally preferred.

#### For example:

- "She learnt to play the piano" - British English
- "She learned to play the piano" - American English
- "He always dreamt of being a footballer" - British English
- "He always dreamed of being a footballer" - American English

### Collective Nouns

When referring to groups of people, collective nouns are treated differently in American and British English.

#### For example:

- "The audience are very quiet" - British English
- "The audience is very quiet" - American English
- "The government are making a decision" - British English
- "The government is making a decision"- American English

The Brits tend to treat collective nouns as plural whereas Americans treat them as singular which is technically correct.

Though it may seem like a lot of differences, they are actually only slight and most of the grammar in British and American English are in agreement. Both variations are generally understood by the whole English-speaking population.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while American and British English share a common linguistic foundation, they exhibit notable differences in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and usage that reflect their unique historical and cultural developments. The evolution of American English, shaped by diverse immigrant influences and distinct social experiences, has led to variations that are increasingly recognized and adopted globally. Despite these differences, both forms of English are generally mutually intelligible, allowing speakers from both sides of the Atlantic to communicate effectively.

Understanding these distinctions is crucial for learners and educators, as the rules governing each variant can differ significantly, particularly in formal contexts. However, it is important to note that these differences often do not impede comprehension in everyday communication. Both American and British English are valid forms of the language, with their own sets of rules and conventions. As global communication continues to evolve, awareness of these variations will enhance linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding, ultimately enriching the experience of English speakers around the world.

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