

BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH: DIFFERENCES

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Annotation: *In this article we will look at the main differences between American and British English and find out how they differ.*

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At the beginning of their journey, students are often faced with a choice: Which of these two language versions is closest to them and which one they would like to study? After all, the difference is not only in pronunciation, but also in spelling and translation of words.


This article uses real-life examples to show the differences between British and American English, and to help you understand which of these two options is right for you.

Despite globalization and interpenetration of cultures, differences between American and British English are still visible to the naked eye. Of course, it is not so huge that the inhabitants of both countries do not understand each other at all, but it still exists. This applies not only to pronunciation, but also to spelling and grammar. To avoid awkward situations when communicating and to choose appropriate phrases according to the native English speaker you are communicating with, you need to know the difference.

For example, in England, an American will receive French fries in a cafe, although, in his opinion, he ordered a plate of chips. And all because in the UK, chips are crisps, and french fries are chips.

Similarly, in a clothing store somewhere in New York, a Briton can ask a sales assistant where pants are sold in their store, and, following his prompts, he will end up in the trousers department and stand there in complete bewilderment. This ridiculous situation happened because in England the word pants means underpants, and in America it means pants, although the British would call them trousers.





And there are many such examples. At the end of the article, there will be provided a complete list of vocabularies that have different meanings in American and British English. But before that, let me explain a bit about how Americans and English speak and why we use different grammatical structures.

Pronunciation difference

Ah, that proud British accent! He is known far beyond the borders of England, and people imitate him to learn exactly what "proper English" is by default British.

For brevity, here are some basic concepts known around the world. British English is abbreviated BrE and American English is abbreviated AmE.

The differences are not only between these options, but also within each country. For example, in the American South, people speak very differently than in New York, and Edinburgh (Scotland) has its own characteristics that are not typical of Londoners, for example.

To better understand pronunciation differences, you need to know and be able to read transcriptions. In this article, i've gone into detail about what the notation symbols mean in the UK version and how to pronounce certain sounds correctly.

One of the most notable differences is that in the UK the [r] sound that comes after a vowel is omitted. For example, words like car, turn, and cover are pronounced without the "r" in the English, but Americans can hear this sound clearly. So the word (*bird*) is written as [bɜːd] in BrE and [bɜːd] in AmE.

Other variations:

Pronunciation of the vowel "u"

The American model of the pronunciation of this letter in phrases is [u:], at the same time as the British one is softer and greater whistling [ju:].

For example:

- duty - BrE ['dʒu:ti] vs. AmE ['du:tɪ]
- new - BrE [nju:] vs. AmE [nu:]
- tune - BrE [tju:n] vs. AmE [tu:n]
- and others.

Pronunciation of the vowel "a"

If a phrase consists of the vowel letter "a" + any consonant after it, then the British pronounce this sound as a deep [ɑ:], rounding their mouth. But Americans regularly pronounce this sound as [æ], which seems like some thing in between "a" and "e".

For example:

- ask - BrE [ɑ:sk] vs. AmE [æsk]



- bath - BrE [bɑ:θ] vs. AmE [bæθ]
- ultimate - BrE [ʌ:st] vs. AmE [læst]
- after - BrE [ˈɑ:ftə] vs. AmE [ˈæftə]

Please word that the ultimate phrase (after) differs now no longer best with inside the first sound "a", however additionally with inside the absence of "r" with inside the British pronunciation.

Words finishing in unstressed "-ile" (missile, fertile, etc.)

In maximum cases, the British will pronounce this finishing greater absolutely as [aɪl], and the American actually as [l].

For example:

- fertile - BrE [ˈfɜ:taɪl] vs. AmE [ˈfɜ:tɪl]

Long phrases finishing in "-ery", "-ary", "-ory"

In British English, this sort of endings is dropped, at the same time as in American English they're one syllable longer.

For example:

- secretary - BrE [ˈsekɹətɹi] vs. AmE [ˈsekɹəˈterɪ]
- monastery - BrE [ˈmɒnəstri] vs. AmE [ˈmɑ:nəsteri]
- inventory - BrE [ˈɪnvəntɹi] vs. AmE [ˈɪnvəntɔ:ri]
- and others

Distinction in accent

As a rule, Americans positioned more strain on phrases which have 2 or greater syllables. This rule is pretty carefully associated with the preceding one, due to the fact in AmE there's one greater syllable. For example, withinside the equal phrase secretary. In the BrE variant, the strain is located best on the primary syllable [ˈsekɹətɹi], at the same time as in AmE an extra strain seems on the second one letter "e":

[ˈsekɹəˈterɪ].

In addition, a few phrases may also have absolutely distinctive strain.

For example:

- ballet - BrE [ˈbæleɪ] vs. AmE [bælˈeɪ]
- debris - BrE [ˈdebri:] vs. AmE [dəˈbri:]

All those variations in pronunciation are in reality seen whilst looking films and TV indicates withinside the authentic language. If you already know precisely which sort of English is toward you, then pick motion pictures primarily based totally on which choice they use: BrE or AmE.



Spelling Differences

American and British English: Differences in spelling of some words can confuse beginners and make them think they have made a mistake, but this is not always the case. It is enough to remember when words with certain letter combinations and endings are spelled differently. None of these spellings are correct and mutually exclusive. It's just that each country uses its own established rules for spelling these words.

To understand whether the spelling in front of him is British or American, it is always enough for him to keep one important thought in the back of his mind.

Americans try to simplify everything. So your version has fewer characters than the UK version and is simpler overall.

In most cases, the difference is in the ending "-our" (BrE) and "-or" (AmE). Below is a comparison of the spellings of such words.

- BrE:

centre, litre, theatre, spectre, metre

- AmE:

center, liter, theater, specter, meter

There are also some words where the British end with "-nce" and the American end with "-nse":

- BrE:

pretence, defence, offence

- AmE:

pretense, defense, offense

But this rule does not always work. So, the British will write the verb "practise" with an "s", while the Americans will write both the verb and the noun "practice" with an "c".

Similarly, Americans don't always bother to remove unnecessary characters. Only one consonant "l" is commonly used in the UK, but two consonants are used in the US.

- BrE:

skilful, fulfil, instalment, appal, enrol

- AmE:

skillful, fulfill, installment, appall, enroll

A few more common spelling differences between British and American English:



- aluminium (BrE) — aluminum (AmE)
- analyse (BrE) — analyze (AmE)
- catalogue (BrE) — catalog (AmE)
- cheque (BrE) — check (AmE)
- jewellery (BrE) — jewelry (AmE)
- pyjamas (BrE) — pajamas (AmE)
- programme (BrE) — program (AmE)
- tyre (BrE) — tire (AmE)
- traveller (BrE) — traveler (AmE)
- whisky (BrE) — whiskey (AmE)

As for the spelling of abbreviations and abbreviations, such as limited (limited liability company), doctor (doctor), mister (Mr.) and others, in modern British English they are used without a dot at the end. But the Americans put dots on the letter after the same abbreviations.

For example:

- Limited — Ltd (BrE) vs. Ltd. (AmE)
- Mister — Mr (BrE) vs. Mr. (AmE)
- Doctor — Doc (BrE) vs. Doc. (AmE)

Grammar Differences

In many cases, British and Americans can be distinguished not only by the pronunciation of words, but also by the way sentences are formed. The differences between BrE and AmE grammars are not fictitious, they exist. British grammar is often taught in schools because it is considered more classical and correct.

Let's take a look at the most common differences between these two types of English grammar.

Verbs 'shall/will'

Using the future tense verb 'shall' in the first person subject is a British 'trick' that is slowly disappearing. Today Americans always say "*I will...*" but in England we still hear "*I shall...*".

For example:

- I shall never forget this (BrE) vs. I will never forget this (AmE)

Present Perfect

The British often use the present perfect tense when talking about actions in the past, the result of which is visible in the present. Americans in such situations can use both Present Perfect and Past Simple.

For example:



- I have lost my keys (BrE) vs. I lost my keys (AmE)
- He has gone home (BrE) vs. He went home (AmE)

The verb "have"

The British usually use the verb *"have got"* to express possession of something, while the Americans can simply say *"have"*. This difference is most noticeable in questions.

For example:

- Have you got a car? (BrE) vs. Do you have a car? (AmE)

The Negative Form of the Verb 'need'

There are two negative forms of the verb *"need"* in British English: *"needn't"* and *"don't need to"*. Americans use only the second option (don't need to).

For example:

- You needn't reserve a table (BrE) vs. You don't need to reserve a table (AmE)

Auxiliary verb + do

From the British, much more often than from Americans, you can hear the construction using *"do"* after verbs such as *"have"*, *"may"* and others. Americans often omit it in response. For example, in a formal conversation, when answering the question *"May I borrow your pen?"* the Briton is likely to answer *"You may do"*, but the American - *"You may"*.

As if / like

In American English, the word *"like"* is more commonly used instead of the conjunctions *"as if"* or *"as though"*.

Example:

- She looks as if she won the prize (BrE) vs. She looks like she won the prize (AmE)

In-Sentence Adverbs

If you use an adverb in the middle of a sentence after an auxiliary verb in British English, you can put it before the auxiliary verb in American English.

Example:

- He has probably arrived by now (BrE) vs. He probably has arrived by now (AmE)

Preposition "on"

In American English, prepositions are often omitted before the days of the week. For example, the phrase *«I'm seeing her Sunday morning»* is a variant of



AmE. The British will always say this sentence with the preposition: "...on Sunday morning"

Other Prepositions

There are also differences in the use of other prepositions in established expressions between BrE and AmE.

Examples:

- Different from/to (BrE) vs. Different from/than (AmE)
- Do something again (BrE) vs. Do something over/again (AmE)
- Live in...street (BrE) vs. Live on...street (AmE)
- At the weekend (BrE) vs. On the weekend (AmE)
- and others.

There's nothing wrong with using either of these prepositions, but it's good to know the difference.

Also in the American version, the preposition "in" can be used in place of the classic British "for" when talking about the time period from the past moment to the present moment.

Example:

- I haven't seen her for months (BrE) vs. I haven't seen her in months (AmE)

That's not the only difference in grammar, of course, between American and British English. However, there are some that are the most famous and appear frequently in conversations and correspondence.

Word Meaning Differences

So we come to perhaps the most interesting and extensive section in the difference between BrE and AmE - the differences in the vocabulary of these two languages. So why do the British and Americans sometimes get into awkward situations and how can we, non-native speakers, avoid them? We will talk about all this further.

Once in London and asking the Briton "*Where's the nearest subway station?*" you will most likely be shown the way to the nearest underground passage, and not at all to the metro station, which was implied in the question. And all because in London the subway is called underground or tube, and in America - subway.

Another interesting difference is the designation of the ground floor of the building. That's why British people call the first floor the "*ground floor*" and Americans the "*first floor*". Similarly, the 2nd and 3rd floors are called "*1st floor*" and "*2nd floor*" in BrE and "*2nd floor*" and "*3rd floor*" in AmE.





When renting an apartment or something else (car, bicycle, etc.), British and Americans use different verbs to indicate the lease period. The action "to pay for something" has his two verbs: **"to rent"** and **"to hire"**.

In the UK, the verb *"rent"* denotes a long-term rental (housing, for example), but if you take a car for a short period, then the British in this case will say *"to hire a car"*. Although recently the stable expression *"rent a car"* is increasingly used in the speech of the inhabitants of the UK. For Americans, there is no such difference, for all types of rent the verb *"rent"* is used, but *"hire"* is used in the sense of *"hiring someone to work."*

Many of the differences relate to something as general as food. Remember when I started the article with the example of French fries (AmE) and Chips (BrE)?

- Biscuit (BrE) vs. Cookie (AmE)
- Sweets (BrE) vs. Candy
- Jacket potato (BrE) vs. Baked potato (AmE)
- Aubergine (BrE) vs. Eggplant (AmE)
- Maize (BrE) vs. Corn (AmE)

British and American English also differ in their approach to the designation of time. If you ask on the streets of an English town what time it is, you will hear something like "It's a quarter past five". The Americans do not quite understand why such complex structures are needed and they will rather call this time "Five fifteen".


Below we will compare American and British English and the difference in meaning using examples of specific words in this order: British English - American English - Translation.

- autumn (BrE) - fall (AmE)
- barrister (BrE) - lawyer (AmE)
- bill (BrE) - check (AmE)
- block of flats (BrE) - apartment building (AmE)
- bonnet (BrE) - hood (AmE)
- boot (BrE) - trunk (AmE)
- cooker (BrE) - stove (AmE)
- crossroads (BrE) - intersection (AmE)
- curtains (BrE) - drapes (AmE)
- dialing code (BrE) - area code (AmE)
- engaged (BrE) - busy (AmE)
- engine (BrE) - motor (AmE)



- film (BrE) - movie (AmE)
- flyover (BrE) - overpass (AmE)
- fortnight (BrE) - two weeks (AmE)
- garden (BrE) - yard (AmE)
- gearbox (BrE) - transmission (AmE)
- handbag (BrE) - purse (AmE)
- high street (BrE) - main street (AmE)
- holiday (BrE) - vacation (AmE)
- jug (BrE) - pitcher (AmE)
- lift (BrE) - elevator (AmE)
- lorry (BrE) - truck (AmE)
- mad (BrE) - crazy (AmE)
- motorway (BrE) - highway (AmE)
- nappy (BrE) - diaper (AmE)
- nasty (BrE) - mean (AmE)
- pavement (BrE) - sidewalk (AmE)
- pocket money (BrE) - allowance (AmE)
- post (BrE) - mail (AmE)
- postman (BrE) - mailman (AmE)
- pub (BrE) - bar (AmE)
- public toilet (BrE) - restroom (AmE)
- queue (BrE) - line (AmE)
- railway (BrE) - railroad (AmE)
- return ticket (BrE) - round trip (AmE)
- rubber (BrE) - eraser (AmE)
- rubbish (BrE) - garbage (AmE)
- sellotape (BrE) - scotch tape (AmE)
- shop (BrE) - store (AmE)
- shop assistant (BrE) - store clerk (AmE)
- spanner (BrE) - wrench (AmE)
- timetable (BrE) - schedule (AmE)
- tin (BrE) - can (AmE)
- trainers (BrE) - sneakers (AmE)
- torch (BrE) - flashlight (AmE)
- wardrobe (BrE) - closet (AmE)



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- windscreen (BrE) - windshield (AmE)
 - zed (BrE) - zee (AmE)
 - zip (BrE) - zipper (AmE)

In this article, the most popular and common differences between British and American English. Of course, in real life and when communicating with native speakers, you will surely meet others. If you ever find yourself in such a situation - just ask the meaning of the word that you do not understand from the interlocutor. This is absolutely normal, because English is not your mother tongue (native language), but a second language (second language), and you may not be aware of all the subtleties.

Whether you're learning British or American English, it's important to know the basic differences. This will help not only to avoid awkward situations, but also to be more correct in a conversation with a foreigner.

